

# Looe Conservation Area Appraisal



**A draft version of this appraisal has been through a public consultation process, including an exhibition and questionnaire, and revised in light of comments received.**

**This document was finally approved by Caradon District Council at Full Council on March 19<sup>th</sup> 2009 and as such may be used as a material consideration in determining planning applications.**

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## **1.0 Status and purpose of the Conservation Area Appraisal**

This Conservation Area Appraisal provides an information base to support policies and to manage change, development, design, enhancement and regeneration within the Looe Conservation Area. This will enable the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to both make development plans and to deal with applications for development, alterations to Listed Buildings and advertisements within the conservation area. It will also provide a guide to other statutory undertakers, such as the highway authority and service providers, which carry out works to the public realm that might not need permission, such as paving, signage etc.

The Caradon District Local Plan contains a range of district-wide policies to guide development for the whole of Caradon in conservation areas, for Listed Buildings and for development affecting archaeology and the World Heritage Site (WHS). All have been based on statute and Government guidance and subject to several rounds of consultation. A Conservation Area Management Plan based on this Appraisal will develop this policy guidance, design guidance and proposals for enhancement at a more detailed level than can be provided by the district-wide development plan.

This Appraisal complements the 2002 Cornwall Industrial Settlement Initiative (CISI) report for Looe - text and maps are available for download at:

[www.historic-cornwall.org.uk/cisi/looe/looe.htm](http://www.historic-cornwall.org.uk/cisi/looe/looe.htm)

There is considerable crossover between the documents; but whereas the CISI Report provides a lot of detailed historic information in map form as well as text, the Appraisal aims to emphasise and illustrate the Special Character of Looe in a descriptive and visual way. It provides guidance and inspiration for residents, contractors and anyone involved in works to buildings or land within the town. Design Guidance Notes have been produced to be used alongside this Appraisal and Management Plan; these cover Roofing, Windows and Doors, Shopfronts and Signage.

The Appraisal provides the following information:

- Identifies the most important features and characteristics, buildings, spaces and local distinctiveness for the character or appearance of the Conservation Area which ought to be preserved or enhanced.
- Indicates the special character of sub-areas within the conservation area which have a distinct individual character.
- Evaluates those buildings that are key and which make a positive or neutral/negative contribution.

A draft Management Plan has also been prepared which takes the same character areas and provides:

- Design guidance which can be used by developers, local residents and planning officers particularly in matters of form, use of materials and design.
- Policy guidance for the conservation area to supplement development plan policies and, if necessary, recommend changes to wider policies.
- Identifies where there are opportunities for enhancement of the sub-areas, where particular policies or design guidance should be applied and, if justifiable, changes to its boundary.

## **2.0 History**

### **2.1 Origins**

East and West Looe were rival medieval planned towns; East Looe was created within Pendrym Manor in the parish of St. Martin while West Looe (Porthvean) was created in the manor of Portlooe in Tolland. Both were in existence by 1201. It was common for major landowners to layout planned settlements in locations where it was felt that conditions may be favourable for economic activity and trade. Individual parcels of land, known as burgage plots, were loosely identified and trusted individuals would be granted rights to that land on agreed terms. The tenant would then formally enclose their plot and build a home. In Looe each town had its boundaries and building plots laid out, special borough rights to attract settlers, a corporation able to own property and chapels that remained subject to the mother churches until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. A series of later royal charters (from the 13<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries) confirmed these original grants.

Shutta may be the original site of development on the East Looe side of the estuary; 19<sup>th</sup> century historians thought this likely and its location and layout suggests it too. It had, however, been long superseded by the present East Looe by the time the old bridge cut it off from the sea in 1405-11. It appears, therefore, that Shutta is an example of a planned settlement whose growth was stunted as a result of changed circumstance – there are similar cases elsewhere in the southwest of England.

There is some evidence of other medieval settlement on the outskirts of the towns – the farming hamlet and possible fortification site at The Old Barbican, and the chapel or possible priory and quay at Hannafore facing Looe Island.

The medieval prosperity of the two towns, which seem always to have been regarded by the outside world as a single place, was based on deep-sea

trading to and from the rich agricultural lands of east Cornwall with export of local materials and produce, with the import of luxury goods in return.

The bridge over the estuary, built 1405-1411, with a chapel added 1436, was of regional importance as it carried the more southerly of the principal routes through the county, from Plymouth to Fowey and on to west Cornwall.

## **2.2 1500 – 1700: The Newfoundland Trade**

Changing trading patterns meant that by around 1500 Looe was experiencing decline, but from the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century the Newfoundland trade whereby fish from the Atlantic was taken to Spain and the Mediterranean then luxury goods and foodstuffs imported back to Britain, brought resurgence in the fortunes of the town. East Looe in particular, because it had open land on the riverside to expand onto, became again one of the principal Cornish harbours. West Looe on the other hand remained smaller and dependent largely upon fishing.

Linked to the sea-borne trade were preparation and processing relating to the trade in wool and cloth, fish curing and processing and corn milling; tide mills were already in operation locally by 1602 and that at Polvellan dates from 1614. At this time it appears that Looe was a quite vibrant place with a sound and diverse economic base.

## **2.3 1700 - 1840: Quiet Years**

By the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Newfoundland trade had declined, newly expanded deep water ports like Plymouth and Falmouth were taking the overseas trade and Looe concentrated on fisheries and coastal trade, largely export of corn and import and processing of agricultural lime and fertilisers. As some compensation, the proximity of the expanding towns around Plymouth Sound kept Looe's economy relatively buoyant, through coastal trade and as an attractive residential area for gentry, and especially for naval officers. By 1800 the continental embargoes of the Napoleonic wars had stimulated the development of tourism for just this class of visitor. Like other small towns on the south coast it was war that stimulated development to provide recreation and recuperation for those who could afford to escape from the increasingly foul aired cities. It was also becoming fashionable to take the air and water by the coast and so wealthy provincial families also acquired or constructed a retreat by the sea.

Mariners, fishermen and merchants were major figures in the town, as well as the navy men. There were numbers of specialist luxury shops and professionals, while schools and non-conformism developed relatively early. Baptists and Quakers, Congregationalists and Methodists were all

represented by 1791. Even so, a contemporary visitor described (West) Looe as decayed, small and miserable, full of poverty and discontent.

The early 19<sup>th</sup> century was a period of quiet decay in Looe – trade did not increase after the end of war in 1815, the scaling down of the navy establishment affected the town, the quays were falling down and the two corporations were inactive or at least ineffective. There was little protest locally when in 1832 both towns lost their MPs.

The Looe and Liskeard Canal brought limited economic revival. Built in 1828, it carried vast quantities of imported fertilisers and lime and exported the produce of the rich agricultural area around Liskeard.

From about 1830 onwards, Looe shared in the revival in the Cornish coastal trade and shipbuilding, with small schooners trading in granite and copper ore, and important boat-yards on the beach at Church End.

## **2.4 1841 - 1880: An Industrial Port**

By 1840 the locally prominent Buller family had recognised that changes were required if Looe was to capitalise on the growing industries of east Cornwall. Exploitation of copper at the Caradon mines had begun in the mid 1830s, and a great sequence of local and national engineering schemes stimulated hugely increased work in the granite quarries at the Cheesewring. By 1843, the Liskeard and Caradon Railway had been built to serve mines and quarries, running to the Looe Canal at Moorswater near Liskeard.

A parliamentary inquiry into the state of the towns and harbour at Looe led to the formation of the Harbour Commissioners in 1848. This acted to encourage a fresh injection of investment so that within a few years the riverside quays and adjoining streets were reconstructed and expanded; a new bridge and approach roads were built by 1855.

Looe rapidly became the principal port for the Caradon industrial base. By 1860 the railway was extended down to Looe and passenger services started from 1879. The open quays were covered in ore, granite and coal and large warehouses were built along the quayside for general and grain cargoes. Fishing also remained important, with a revival in the pilchard fishery from about 1870. With all these different activities happening and attracting a diversity of people involved in them Looe was probably at its most lively during these years.

Shops and service trades, hotels and lodging houses and middle class housing on the hillsides above the river increased with the growing numbers of tourists and wealthy residents. The growth was still modest, however – the population in 1856 was 970 in East Looe and 746 in West Looe, and still only 1,200 in East Looe and 800 in West Looe in 1878.

## **2.5 1880 – 1946: A Shrinking Economy**

Copper prices began falling in 1873 and the Caradon mines had closed by the end of the decade, despite large, rich reserves. At the same time, cheap sources of granite from Scandinavia and Scotland were beginning to compete with the Cheesewring quarries. In 1885 the Liskeard-Caradon Railway went bankrupt; the Moorswater to Looe section survived only because of the passenger/tourist trade.

By 1914, little ore was exported from Looe; granite was still shipped out in large quantities, and there was still general trade and some boatbuilding, but fishing, crabbing and fish curing were increasingly important; 1910 saw the last flourish of the pilchard trade. This and the burgeoning tourist industry kept Looe quite prosperous up to the First World War.

After the war, trade in the port continued to decline – in 1919 a large part of Lower Quay collapsed, taking with it some of the quay railway, which was not replaced; a war memorial was erected in the 1920s over the site of the rails on Buller Quay. There was a brief boom in fishing in the 1920s, 600 were employed and large boats built, but it had nearly all gone by 1930, although boatbuilding continued with yards at Polvellan and Polean this was mostly now yachts and leisure craft.

In 1881 Looe had been an active industrial port, East Looe was a thriving commercial centre, the streets lit by gas, with various public buildings, institutes and chapels rebuilt or extended in the 1870s and 1880s. West Looe was described as a residential seaside village, although most of its public buildings were also rebuilt in the 1870s and 1880s, and its population grew much faster than East Looe. But inns and lodging houses were an increasing element in Looe's make-up and most improvements in its services and facilities were due largely to the tourist trade.

The engineer/entrepreneur Joseph Thomas of Looe built the rail link to the main line at Liskeard 1898-1901, ensuring the success of the growing tourist trade. In 1900, 21,000 passengers had reached Looe by rail and, by 1908 the figure had risen to 70,798. Thomas was also responsible for much of the engineering improvements to roads, quays and valley sides, culminating in his speculative housing and resort development at Hannaford Point from 1893.

## **2.6 Post 1946**

With stocks recovering because of the War, fishing enjoyed a boost in Looe in terms of value and tonnage, but employing 80% fewer people compared to pre-war days. The fishing industry has taken over more of the port throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century with Looe now being the second largest fishing port in Cornwall after Newlyn. The ore quays are now given over to fishing and the fish market stands on the site of granite processing yards. The

great warehouses at the quay head are now converted to shops, flats and the public library. There is now no appreciable export or import trade or deep sea port handling in Looe.

By 1965, with a population of about 4,000, tourism was unchallenged as the main industry, but there were still 280 boats registered with recreational fishing in particular becoming big business.

The dependence on tourism is symbolised by the filling-in of the Polvellan millpond and its conversion to car parking. Some of the old established industrial and manufacturing uses here have ended (milling, gasworks), while others continue (boatbuilding, builders' merchants) but are increasingly marginalised in both use and townscape terms as tourist-related uses have developed.

Looe is extremely fortunate in that its enduring character has been appreciated by tourists for many years; a love of the town and the surrounding area has been passed down through generations of families from all corners of the country. Many have re-located here and contributed to the diversity of the place.

There is a sense, however, that a degree of complacency is evident in Looe. Poor use (or misuse?) of key spaces; traffic congestion and some untidiness are symptoms. Ill-judged, clumsy and sometimes plainly bad alterations are continuing to be made to buildings and spaces. When these outweigh positive actions, as they do at present, then the impact is progressively negative and there is an evident and tangible impact on the character and appearance of the town.

### **3.0 Looe in the Wider Landscape**

Looe is much favoured by its natural setting. Even in the heart of the town, the tidal estuary provides a gentle rhythm of ever changing light and reflection in an enclosed space. There are glimpses out to the open sea, which is felt as much as a threat against which the town turns its back, with the robust sea defences of the early 1970s in East Looe reinforcing this feeling. Alongside the defences though is the beach which remains a great attraction to visitors.

From the seaward side Looe is seen as a barely perceptible inlet in a wide sweep of low cliffs – the late 20<sup>th</sup> century housing around Plaidy and Millendreath is more prominent in the wider coastal scene, and the role of Mount Ararat separating Looe from this sprawl, is of paramount importance to the landscape setting, as are the remnants of West Looe Downs in containing the spread of West Looe and Hannafore.

The fantastic views of the sea from higher land on both the East and West Looe sides are matched by views up the wooded estuary valleys, within

which are set suggestions of the industrial past at Polean, Trenant Point, the old gasworks site and which are in part defined by the railway line contrasting with the soft edged tidal mud flats. As well as the daily changes brought by the weather and the tides, these views also offer varied attraction with the passing seasons. [photos 1 & 2]



*1: The view from The Wooldown*



*2: A winter view of the estuary and wooded hillsides*

The surrounding countryside is defined by rolling, high plateaus of pasture fields cut through by deep wooded valleys. The wide vistas have few natural or man-made eye-catchers, and are dominated by the great sweeps of simple colour contrast of green land, blue skies and grey seas. Looe itself is scarcely visible in these broad landscapes and that contributes to the sense of arrival and departure, whether by road, rail or sea.

The approaches to Looe through this anciently enclosed landscape are all through the deep wooded valleys – for the most part with little habitation and little to suggest the approach to a town. From the north, east and west, the visitor by road or rail suddenly emerges into the widening valley where the two Looe rivers meet, and for almost the first time the town is laid out to view. The change in the quality of light and space is as dramatic as the change from a rural to built environment; but the final twist is kept until one is well inside the built-up area, and only close to the river mouth is the sea itself finally seen.

The slopes of the valley above the town are heavily wooded and for the most part the houses here seem to be set in a green, tree-filled landscape. Some of the later

20<sup>th</sup> century housing is insensitively located on the skyline, poorly designed and inadequately landscaped, so that the setting of historic Looe is harmed. [photo 3]



*3: Modern development has mostly been insensitive to the skyline and setting of the town*

#### **4.0 Settlement Form and Development**

The natural topography has led to a distinctive settlement pattern, with the main estuary providing safe and relatively deep water. Smaller side valleys provided sheltered, secure sites for building homes with access to fresh water; there were natural routes for roads down to the water front and side creeks off the main channel for harbour facilities. [photo 4]



*4: Historic West Looe nestles in a side combe*

West Looe most clearly retains this layout, with evidence of planned burgage plots and successive stages in the expansion of the borough. Shutta has an almost identical layout, as previously stated this may have been the original location of the Borough of East Looe as it was certainly recognised in the 14<sup>th</sup> century as a separate town and local tradition in the 19<sup>th</sup> century suggested this was the original site of East Looe. [photo 5]



*5: Shutta is also sited in a combe*

East Looe itself retains many of the regularly laid-out garden plots owned by the burgesses that lined the main approach roads, which reflects the lack of space in the Rows in the town itself. Medieval burgage plots are less certainly identified, again reflecting the relatively late development of the present site on the old shoreline. It seems likely that the original plan form was pragmatically adapted, extended and infilled in subsequent centuries. Quite how this happened is uncertain, but it is most important to recognise that this is a very special urban plan form that generates tremendous character and visual interest. What is clear is that there are buildings of some quality in the Rows that have seen loss of curtilage and a downward slide in status and perhaps further analysis could unlock clues as to the development of the area.

East Looe was built at the back of the historic beach, protected by a sand and shingle spit running across the mouth of the estuary. Buildings on the shoreline (the Old Guildhall), and on the spit (St Mary's Church – known in the middle ages as St Mary's in the marsh) clearly show a presence here by at least the 14<sup>th</sup> century, if not earlier. The building of the bridge in 1405-11 effectively closed the upper reaches of the main channel to shipping - Shutta would have had no value as a port from then on.

The core of East Looe may not be medieval in origin, except perhaps along Higher Market Street. Most of it is an almost completely 16<sup>th</sup> century

expansion out from the medieval core and as such it is probably unique in Cornwall. The original market space, laid out on the old foreshore, is readily identifiable, now infilled with substantial structures replacing what were originally temporary market stalls.

There is limited evidence of 17<sup>th</sup> century building in West Looe, much less expansion, compared to East Looe, and little sign that the town even filled its medieval bounds.

As a discernible element in the built fabric of the two towns, the years between the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century and 1841 have left less of a mark than the preceding or following periods. The building of the canal down the East Looe River reinforced the predominance of East Looe, but there was little change in the late medieval pattern of quays and slips in either town. There had been minimal expansion in the settled area of either town since the late 17<sup>th</sup> century; both towns were smaller in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century than they had been at the height of their medieval growth phase.

The work of the Harbour Commissioners from 1848 radically altered Looe, producing much of its current character. By 1852 the bridge had been rebuilt; new approach roads constructed; the old quays at East Looe rebuilt on a much grander scale with a series of large warehouses and fish cellars; Buller (or Copper) Quay new-built and connected by tramways to the railway yards at Shutta; a new breakwater had been built at Church End by 1856 and the river bed cleared of a shingle bank. In West Looe the old inlet was infilled and new quays constructed.

The new roads (Buller Quay, Polperro Road and Station Road) also opened up new building land. This was only lightly exploited in West Looe (particularly because access to the quays and the old core area was not improved when Polperro Road was made), but virtually the whole of Fore Street by Buller Quay was rebuilt at this time, with villa properties being built along the new Station Road to the north.

Most of the new building in the mid-late 19<sup>th</sup> century was contained within the old borough boundaries. With the re-development of the quays around what is now West Looe Square, most of the properties around the old core of the town were substantially rebuilt or significantly altered, as was Church End and much of the old core of East Looe.

Nineteenth century rebuilding within the historic core of the town was mainly confined to the infilling of back plots and the old garden closes; a desire to obtain an elevated position and good views led to the development of the upper roads over-looking the river. At riverside level there was rebuilding of older properties, especially of public buildings such as the Guildhall (1877), the chapels (Quay Road and Chapel Ground, West Looe), or the Coastguard Station (1892). [photo 6]



*6: Buller Quay with the new Guildhall beyond*

In addition, edge-of-centre development was associated with the great engineering works from about 1850 onwards – the bridge and quays and those works associated with the engineer/entrepreneur Joseph Thomas. He built the rail link to the main line at Liskeard 1898-1901; upgraded Station Road, making it the main road to Plymouth; created the new road, villa and hotel estate at Hannafore from 1893 (partly on the site of his own Looe Brickworks); and created the access ramp from the bridge down to an improved riverside road and extended quays in West Looe.

Development on the hillsides above the river began in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century in Barbican Road, Shutta Road and Shutta, still within the ancient borough boundaries. This was mostly middle class housing, most workers' housing being built in the old streets, or re-using the older buildings as they declined in status.

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the greatest extent of expansion on both sides of the valley, both into the long abandoned medieval plots on the upper slopes and along the river sides and out of the old medieval limits of both boroughs, with serious encroachment for the first time onto the ancient common downs in both East and West Looe. The Hannafore estate was scarcely further developed in 1925 than it had been in 1908, but by 1946

the estate was extended and infilled by building tightly packed suburban detached houses rather than the large elegant villas and hotels originally envisaged. Although the architectural quality of the area is limited, the vision of the development is of local historic interest.

While most of this development was of middle class and holiday homes and, increasingly, chalets or bungalows, a growing number of small estates of workers' cottages and council housing were also being provided. Barbican still remained untouched by housing until after the Second World War.

Looe has greatly expanded in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Surrounding the old cores, and forming the setting of the conservation area, large housing estates spread up onto the crest of the river valleys, a mix of public housing and private estates - the latter especially along the coastal slope east of the town towards Millendreath. Their physical and visual connection with the conservation area can seem at times remote - in particular the large Sunrising Estate between East Looe and St Martin is in many respects a distinct planned settlement quite apart from the old town. This area is accessed by a separate road link to the principal roads, with its own schools, shops and community facilities, and with pedestrian and vehicle links to the old town limited by narrow roads, restricted access and steep hills.

## **5.0 Gardens and Green Spaces**

The gardens of many of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century developments up the river valley side form an important element in the local character. These private spaces are particularly important given the lack of public open areas or formal garden space within the town. Such areas of open space, especially those containing trees, are a foil to the mass of buildings and an important feature of the overall landscape.

Equally important is the feeling of an open, almost rural backdrop, especially in West Looe. In the broader sense, the remnant downs behind each of the two towns are now incredibly important not only as a setting to the urban landscape, but in terms of their amenity and as a foil to the bare, weakly landscaped mass of late 20<sup>th</sup> century housing on the hilltops.

More than this, however, there is a tradition of designed landscape and gardening within Looe. The Downs and Mount Ararat are managed ornamental spaces as much as wild areas - with great potential for enhancing the ornamental and scenic walks at the latter. The open spaces associated with the Hannafore estate, although outside the conservation area at present, continue the theme of the managed, semi-natural landscaping of the coastline and surroundings of Looe - they are an extension of the castellated walkway along the cliff below Hannafore Road and are a well used and appreciated resource.

The wooded setting of the valley itself, currently undergoing management and enhancement, is as much the result of careful landscaping as natural regeneration; the presence of the Trenant estate and deer park being responsible for much of it. There are landscaped grounds of outstanding importance at Polvellan and Klymiarven which should be protected, enhanced and perhaps made more accessible to the general public. Lesser examples at Boscarn House, Common Wood House, Trehaven, Darloe, Havenford and various houses at Hannafore might also benefit from similar attention. [photo 7]



*7: The landscaped garden of Trehaven is a prominent feature*

## **6.0 Built Environment**

### **6.1 Building types**

The surviving buildings from the medieval period include some of the oldest recorded and best surviving examples of their type in Cornwall. Further detailed investigation is urgently required to date them and to identify uses and histories, especially in relation to the trading and fishing history of the town. There is probably a lot more medieval fabric behind some fairly anonymous facades in both East and West Looe.

Although there may be some 15<sup>th</sup> century building fragments, very little is identifiably older than the 16<sup>th</sup> century in either town; even the antiquity of the two church towers is debatable given the frequent recorded rebuilding and restorations. Within East Looe, and to a lesser extent West Looe, it is the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries that have left the most distinctive body of surviving buildings before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. [photo 8]



8: A 17<sup>th</sup> century oriel window with decorative brackets.  
It would have had leaded casements originally.

There are perhaps more recognisably 'old' buildings in West Looe than East Looe, though most have been remodelled, sometimes extensively. [photo 9]



9: Old cottages in West Looe

There are more 18<sup>th</sup> century structures in evidence here, perhaps a reflection of the early change to a quieter and more residential character that attracted genteel occupants. Public buildings in West Looe tend to be smaller in scale than in East Looe, for example - the Market House of 1853;

the 1880 Congregationalist Chapel (compared with the former Methodist Chapel in East Looe); and the Harbour Commissioners' warehouse, compared with those on the opposite side of the river.

Little of consequence was rebuilt in the town or added in the 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, apart from the two or three surviving villas still standing in the remnants of their ornamental grounds (Polvellan, Waterloo Villa – now called Klymiarven – and Havenford). These symbolise the attraction of Looe as a desirable place of residence and resort in the years around 1800; gardens and landscapes were seen as integral to the overall design and must be appreciated as such when faced with development pressure. [photo 10]



*10: Polvellan Manor – Regency style gothic  
in landscaped gardens*

The mid-late 19<sup>th</sup> century is as essential to Looe's special character as the medieval legacy, with many of the principal structures and townscape components dating from after the great schemes of rebuilding and expansion in the 1850s. Even the town churches are largely 19<sup>th</sup> century in their current form. Moreover, the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings in Looe are mostly good in themselves; the equal of many of the more overtly industrial towns in the county.

Apart from the scenic qualities and sheer scale of the bridge, quays, warehouses and Hannaford Road, which frame the whole harbour and estuary mouth, the warehouses are historically and architecturally significant as a group, there being nowhere else in Cornwall with such a good group as this. The engineering heritage of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century is also very evident in the impact of the huge retaining walls that everywhere mark the passage of roads along the hillsides of both East Looe (Shutta Road/Barbican Hill) and West Looe (North Road, Polperro Road) and are such an important part of its physical, visual and historic character. [photo 11]



*11: Retaining walls are a feature throughout Looe*

Even West Looe, which was by and large a much quieter place architecturally as well as economically, has good quayside warehouse buildings, and attractive groups of ecclesiastical and domestic buildings showing strong family likenesses that contribute to its distinct identity. The terrace of Coastguard Cottages are an attractive feature on the hillside, even though the harmony of the main elevation is being somewhat undermined by poorly detailed alterations. [photo 12]



*12: Coastguard Cottages are seen from many locations*

The contribution of Joseph Thomas to the special character and appearance of Looe is of considerable significance. Not only was he responsible for creating the Hannafore estate, but also the scenic Hannafore Road, the present line and extent of the quayside in West Looe (as far south as St Nicholas' church), the present form of the Banjo Pier and other prominent aspects of the character of the town are directly attributable to him. [photo 13] He is commemorated on a plaque on the riverside at Church End.



*13: The picturesque engineering solution at Hannafore Road*

Whilst these major projects transformed the appearance of the town and its economic base, there was a lot of residential building as well, especially in the higher areas on the periphery of the town centres. Neat terraces grace the hillsides and some of the detailing adds distinctive interest. [photo 14]



*14: Attractive details on a late Victorian terrace*

The harmony of detailing of these groups is part of their special character that is easily diluted by ill-considered alterations. There are also occasional individual gems such as the Victorian gothic pattern book lodge on Farmers Hill and a house in Shutta, but for the most part developments of this period are in pairs or terraces.

Commercial properties in the town, and especially shopfronts, have not fared well in recent years. This is doubly unfortunate given the often quoted passage in Wilkie Collins' 'Rambles Beyond Railways' which celebrates shops and shop keeping in Looe. This is not to say that there are not good shopfronts to be found in Looe – some simple, elegant late 19<sup>th</sup> century timber shopfronts along Buller Street in particular make a good group – indeed the tightness and enclosure of the central streets of Looe have probably saved many shops from the sort of thoughtless makeovers that the more accessible shops opposite Buller Quay have endured. Some of the best surviving examples are in West Looe, where the pressures of late 20<sup>th</sup> century tourism and commerce have had less impact. [photo 15]



*15: Historic shopfronts add to a sense of place  
but poor signage can easily spoil them*

A guidance note on shopfronts has been produced to accompany this Appraisal.

Just as there are many late 19<sup>th</sup> century domestic buildings of note in Looe, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century has also left some important buildings showing a sensitivity of materials and detailing of a good standard. Examples include the Arts and Crafts influenced Trelawney Terrace above Polvellan; some of the well detailed large houses on both flanks of the estuary - especially 'Jax' - and much of the good workers' housing around Polperro Road. A pair of houses near the bridge demonstrates how replacement windows can have an impact on character that is wider than just one building. [photo 16]



*16: Insensitive alterations compared  
to authentic character*

Despite some losses and alterations, even the dominating presence of Hannaford Road with its hotels and villas is still redolent of this age, particularly Rond Anneth and its neighbours. The only example of art deco influenced seaside architecture in the town, Nailzee House, has also lost its crispness of character through window replacement. [photo 17]



*17: Loss of character affects buildings of all ages*

## **6.2 Local materials and details**

Looe is predominantly a stone-built town, particularly using the grey (local slate and other metamorphic) country stone, granite being used only sparingly (for instance as quayside capstones). There are a number of interesting buildings with exposed, or only lightly painted (historically limewashed) stone; usually laid fairly flat to course in earlier buildings, roughly squared and coursed in late buildings. [photo 18]



*18: Painted rubble stone on an historic cottage*

The most dominant buildings in the town are of exposed stonework (the churches, warehouses, Guildhall), though only the Victorian buildings were designed to have an exposed finish.

The predominant appearance of Looe now, though, is of paint or render. Both timber framed construction and the rough, little worked quality of the local stone tend to favour its use, though it is not always appropriately applied. Although there are good examples of robust ornamented stucco on the terraces and Victorian villas, many cottages of Looe have had rippled render applied. [photo 19]



*19: Modern affectation or 'character'?*

This trend is perhaps a reflection of heavily mortared and limewashed slate hanging occasionally seen on ancient fisherman's cottages. Regardless of the aesthetic merits, it is a matter of fact that many people probably now see this as a distinctive local feature. Unfortunately it is also true that this render is always applied as hard cement and is, therefore, technically wrong and will cause harm over time by trapping moisture.

There is, however, a wide variety of materials and details to be seen – less so perhaps in West Looe where the stone-built vernacular buildings predominate. But in East

Looe are stone buildings, late medieval timber framed and jettied buildings, a great deal of later timber framing (17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century) and much slate-hanging (some rag), most of it now painted. [photo 20]



*20: Jettied timber framed buildings are an important historic survival*

The timber framed buildings are often quoted as being the earliest in Looe, and built because of the poor sand foundations. In fact, the earliest buildings seem to be of stone, most of the framed buildings are 16<sup>th</sup> century, and particularly 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century, and on the edge of the late-colonised Market area, a time associated with the wealth of the Newfoundland trade. Timber framing was a late-medieval and

post-medieval urban style that was not a vernacular tradition in the Cornish countryside. Its presence in East Looe is a reflection of the wealth and cosmopolitan outlook of the port; timber framing is notably absent from its historically poorer and less cosmopolitan neighbour, West Looe.

Brick is used sparingly, although there are some late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century examples of brick and terracotta detailing, and there are one or two striking brick buildings – along East Cliff for instance, which add a varied note of colour amid the greying white render. Many individual bricks can be found all over the town bearing the stamped mark 'Looe' – substantial brickworks once operated at Hannaford. The use of cast iron ornament on late 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings helps give local character, especially in West Looe. [photo 21]



*21: Cast iron work on bay windows – Art Nouveau style in this case*

Because of its valley location, the roofscapes of Looe are among the most varied and interesting of any Cornish town, but the stock of traditionally slated roofs is rapidly diminishing. [photo 22]



*22: The topography means the roofscape is key*

Alterations to materials and the addition of rooflights or badly designed dormers can have a detrimental impact to many views. A guidance note on roofing has been produced to accompany this Appraisal.

The enclosed nature of the town centres, and the steep valley sides, also mean that very few properties have truly private rear elevations and some are equally prominent in the streetscene. As a consequence the usual servicing clutter of pipes, bins, flues, sheds etc is a very visible element in the built character of Looe. [photo 23]



*23: One of the town's oldest buildings is disfigured by clutter*

Some residents succeed in reducing the impact by introducing attractive planting in the summer months and this can be a strong positive character feature.

### **6.3 Issues affecting the character and appearance of buildings**

Each decision made by an individual property owner, business, statutory authority or service provider can have a negative, neutral or positive impact. In recent years the balance has tended towards the negative in some parts of the town and there is a risk of the trend accelerating. This matters because the special character of Looe is the sum of many parts; if the good is diluted too much then there will be harm to the local economy, property values and it will not be such a good place to live or spend time. It is quite alarming when some of the worst examples of poor management and maintenance are in the most visible locations; the impact of these is much greater than it would be in a backstreet. [photo 24]

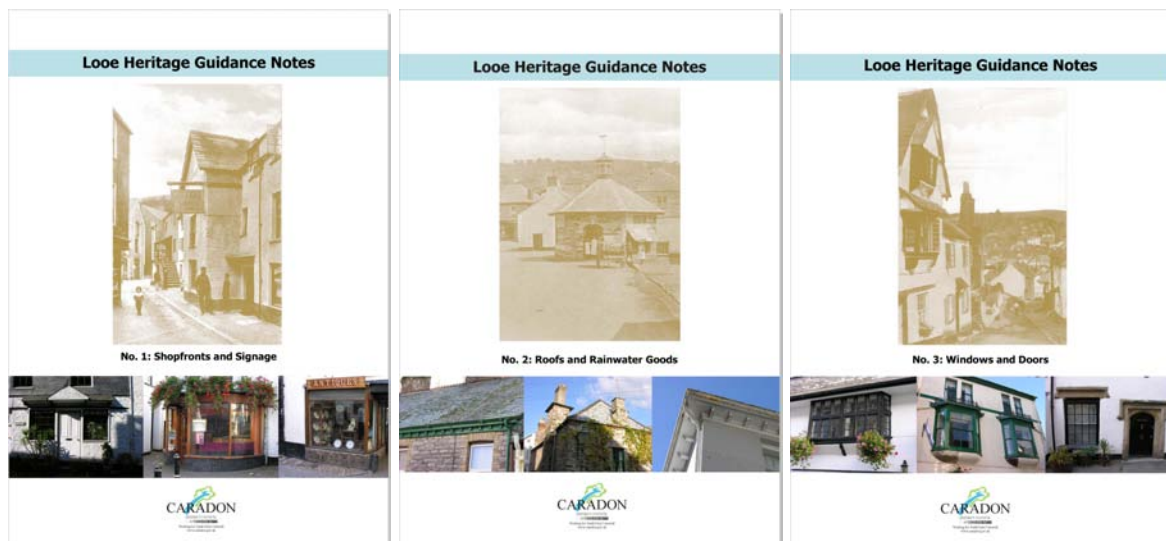


24: This group does nothing for the image of Looe

### 6.3.1 Guidance notes

Publications have been produced to accompany this Appraisal covering:-

1. Shopfronts and Signage
2. Roofs and Rainwater Goods
3. Windows and Doors



These are key issues and if the advice contained within these notes is followed by the majority of property owners and contractors there will be a positive result for the character and appearance of Looe.

### 6.3.2 Pointing, render and paint

There has been too much cement used in Looe for some time now; this traps moisture in old fabric, accelerates or causes decay and is storing up trouble for future generations. Damp walls also cost more to heat and make for a less healthy living environment. Lime mortars, renders and finishes are by far the most appropriate for any old building, whatever the material of construction. The surface finish of both pointing and render has often been inappropriate and without historic precedent. [photo 25]



*25: Bad cement pointing is ugly and harmful*

Masonry paint has been almost universally adopted in place of limewash and this has also tended to trap moisture. Historically plain white limewash would have been the norm (though this would not have been a 'brilliant white') for all cottages, stores and some working buildings. Only from the later 18<sup>th</sup> century would colour have been adopted on some more polite buildings. In more recent times a more haphazard approach has been adopted and some people may consider the introduction of 'a bit of colour' to be a positive step. There is a need for a debate on the subject and if the use of colour is favoured then the choices could be more informed. Historically rich colours like blues and greens were prohibitively expensive so some colours invariably look out of place on cottages and other humble buildings. Locations such as West Looe Hill certainly benefit from a consistent use of white with little variation and this absence of colour is worth protecting. Where pinks or blues have been introduced it tends to strike a discordant note in the townscape. [photo 26]



*26: On West Looe Hill white cottages prevail*