

10.22 SETTLEMENT INSETS – WITHYCOMBE

Policy Profile

Settlement Classification:	Small Village (SP/1)
Landscape Conservation:	Exmoor National Park Periphery (LC/1)
Landscape Character Area:	Central West Somerset (LC/3)

Location and Character

10.22.1 Withycombe is a relatively small village, located in a combe to the east of Withycombe Hill. A mill-stream runs northwards through the village. Williton lies 4 miles to its east and Minehead 4.5 miles to the west. The centre of the village has grown around St. Nicholas's Church and extends along the three radial routes of West Street, Lower Street and Higher Rodhuish Road. The older buildings in the core of the village consist mainly of small cottages while a majority of the modern development takes the form of detached and semi-detached dwellings. The A39 is approximately half a mile north of Withycombe and both West Street and Lower Street are linked to this. The village is within the Central West Somerset Landscape Character Area,¹ and is surrounded by agricultural land of varying quality. To its north there is high quality Grade 2 agricultural land, poorer quality Grades 3 and 4 to the east and south, and poor quality Grade 4 to the west.² Part of the village is within the Exmoor National Park³ and the development limits have been drawn to include land only within the Plan area.

Settlement Policy

10.22.2 The character and facilities within the village indicate that Withycombe is possibly an appropriate location for limited development. However, because of the overall need for a modest amount of development, the village boundary has been drawn to provide opportunity for infilling, conversion and redevelopment only. In defining the boundary, regard has been had to the proximity of Carhampton which has a wider range of facilities and is expected to offer greater scope for development. Outside the village's development limits and in open countryside policies will apply (see Policy SP/5), except that which is within the Exmoor National Park where their Local Plan policies⁴ will apply.

¹ WS Atkins South West; West Somerset Landscape Character Assessment; West Somerset District Council; 1999

² Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales; Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food; 1988

³ H.M. Government; National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949; HMSO; 1949

⁴ Exmoor National Park Authority; Exmoor National Park Local Plan 2001 – 2011 (Adopted 2005); Exmoor National Park Authority; 2006

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Population and Housing

10.22.3 The Parish of Withycombe had a total of 299 residents at the time of 2001 Census⁵ compared to 276 in 1991.⁶ This small rise reflects a decade of considerable development in the village. 'Christophers' is a small, well designed development of three buildings off Lower Street which was constructed in the early 1980s. Beside the Old Post Office on West Street there is another sensitively sited and designed mid-1980s development, however the newest buildings are clustered around the ford and Rattle Row. These are a good example of attempts to reflect the old while updating their design for the 1990s.

Employment

10.22.4 Local employment is heavily dependent upon agriculture but there is a garage repairs service behind Brook Cottage on Lower Street. Most employed people commute to their workplace.

Shops and Services

10.22.5 The limited range of facilities available in Withycombe includes St. Nicholas's Church, a Village Hall which was erected in 1924 and plays host to regular events, and the mobile library service (fortnightly). Since the demise of the local post office/general stores, residents have come to rely more heavily on Carhampton, Minehead and Williton as local service centres.

Environment and Conservation

10.22.6 The village reflects the importance of agriculture to the area, particularly in Lower Street where the agricultural buildings of Withycombe Farm and Court Place Farms dominate the street scene. St. Nicholas's Church,⁷ dating back to the thirteenth Century, is located in the heart of the village. The Church's exterior is relatively unattractive, inside, however, it is as good an example of West Somerset medieval design as any to be found in the Plan area.⁸

10.22.7 The charm of the village is to be found in the varying styles of buildings and the fact that much of the recent development has reflected their design, thus lessening their impact. The mill-stream is a feature throughout the village running alongside Higher Rodhuish Road, over the road at Rattle Row, through the back gardens of properties on the eastern side of The Causeway and on along Lower

⁵ Office for National Statistics; 2001 Census: Neighbourhood Statistics – West Somerset; ONS; 2004 (data-set) (*The Census does not usually disaggregate data below Ward and/or Parish level, therefore the population data available refers to whole of Withycombe Parish*).

⁶ Office of Population Censuses and Surveys; 1991 Census County Report: Somerset (Part 2); H.M.S.O.; 1993; ISBN 0 11 691489 0 (*The Census does not usually disaggregate data below Ward and/or Parish level, therefore the population data available refers to the whole of Withycombe parish*).

⁷ Somerset County Council; Somerset Historic Environment Record: Record 34273 – Church of St. Nicholas and Churchyard, Withycombe; Somerset County Council; 1984.

⁸ Department of the Environment; List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest: District of West Somerset, Somerset (Parishes of Carhampton, Cutcombe, Dunster, Luccombe, Luxborough, Minehead Without, Timbersombe, Treborough, Withycombe and Wootton Courtney) (as amended); Department of the Environment; 1985.

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Street. Quaint bridges have been built over the stream at various points along its route to enable access to the properties beyond. The most important tree group which influences the settlement is the ancient woodland to its east. This is a County Wildlife Site and subject to Policy NC/2.

Playground

10.22.8 Within Withycombe there is no play area for children. Planning permission has been granted for such a play area adjoining a new village hall car park. However, it is considered to be prudent to allocate that land as a playground in this Plan in order to provide long-term protection in the event of the current permission not being implemented.

POLICY WIT/1: Playground

Land in Withycombe, as shown on the Inset Map, is allocated as playground.

