3.0 HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

3.1 The History of Boscaswell

Between the granite moorland of West Penwith and the steep indented cliffs of the coast is a relatively level tract of land; much of this formerly consisted of blocks of open common grazing, heath and moor (in this area known as Boscaswell Lower Downs) separated by sheltered valleys leading down to the sea.

In the valleys and in sheltered spots between the commons and the steep coastal slopes, is a run of ancient settlements (Pendeen, Lower Boscaswell, Trewellard Manor) linked by lanes and tracks running parallel to the later main road (B3306).

Like all these ancient places, Lower Boscaswell retains evidence of its antiquity – an Iron Age courtyard house, a fogou, an early medieval Holy Well (the Hesken Well) and Lower Boscaswell Farm (medieval in origin although the surviving buildings are later). All stand close to the north-east / south-west track following the coast.

*The Iron Age remains at the western end of the Conservation Area are a Scheduled Ancient Monument, and are crucial to the history of the settlement*

This was an ancient farming settlement set in a landscape of scattered farmsteads and hamlets, each with their own small field system, lying amongst the extensive open wastes and commons. By at least the 16th century, these hamlets were partly agricultural, partly
fishing and partly industrial, with tin stream-working in the Boscaswell Downs/ Calartha/ Portherras area, and some coastal extraction. Mineral extraction and processing were, indeed, already creating considerable local wealth when the principal local manor house (Pendeen Manor), was rebuilt in 1670 by John Borlase, newly enriched by the profits on tin.

The numbers involved in tin working were still very small though, and the local settlements were able to absorb whatever pressures the expanding industry put on them for many years.

However, the early 19th century boom in mining changed this and created a need to house a new and substantial industrial population. From the 1820's local mines (at both Lower and Higher Boscaswell) were developed – the main period of working lasted until the late 1850's.

The old agricultural hamlet initially saw much infilling of the existing plots and lanes, creating a tight, overcrowded grain of parallel rows of cottages, barns and outbuildings. Eventually demand for new houses was so great that parts of the adjoining common grazing lands were enclosed – and continued to be so on and off through the 19th century to provide more land for cottages, gardens and smallholdings. New, regular fields were also enclosed from the commons, aligned with the cottage rows and enclosed with thick, high walls made up of clearance stones and mine waste.

*Terraces of cottages were constructed in the 19th century to provide housing for the mine workers. Although these houses have undergone some insensitive alterations in recent decades they still form an important part of the special character of the Conservation Area*
This gave the historical settlement at Lower Boscaswell a direct, intimate relationship with the surrounding landscape, as well as its strangely lop-sided shape – the old nucleus at one end, in the lowest part of the shallow valley, the miners' cottages strung out to the east on the northern edge of the Lower Downs, along the lane leading to the mines.

By the 1850's, Lower Boscaswell was virtually as built up as it would be until the mid 20th century. Only a few more cottages/smallholdings were taken in from the commons in the lane leading north from the village and in the tongue of land south of the cottage rows (Carn Ros farm).

Few of the local mines survived the crash in the tin industry in the 1870's except the late, large, complex at North Levant/Geevor. The industrial population itself remained stable in numbers, even declining slightly, so that only in the mid-20th century was there growth again in Lower Boscaswell. This was partly a result of reinvestment in the Geevor/Treweek's complex, with a need to attract and house a new wave of skilled workers, and Boscaswell Estate in many ways fitted into the traditional development pattern of the village. Only with the creation of large public housing estates at Park-an-Pyth and the Moorland Close Estate (which now dominate the settlement and border the conservation area) was the long continuity in the history, shape, appearance and character of the village broken.

Redundant buildings associated with the Treweeks complex are important industrial elements in the landscape, although today they are seen by some as harmful to the character and appearance of the area.

3.2 Physical Development

Pre-Industrial

The main settlement locally was at Boscaswell, now known as Lower Boscaswell, which still has remains of an Iron Age courtyard house and fogou. There seems also to have been a small, possibly agricultural settlement around the area that later became Wethered Shaft, probably including North Row, and a similar small hamlet at Portherras Cross. These were just a part of the series of farmsteads/hamlets scattered over a wide area.
around the common lands of Boscaswell Lower and Higher Downs. The road up the Portherras valley (the B3318) was already a turnpike by 1809, the St Just-St Ives Road by c.1830/35. Given the evidence of streamworking and mining since at least the 16th century, all these settlements would undoubtedly have had some industrial elements in them. Certainly by the time of the 1809 OS survey drawings, mining was well established - although the main settlements were as outlined above, there are scattered buildings and mine workings shown in the area of Jubilee Place (Wheal Carn); those at Portherras/Portherras Cross, as well as those already noted at Wethered Shaft/North Row, could be either older agricultural or newer industrial hamlets.

**Industrial (1820-1986)**

The earliest expansion of industrial housing occurred in four main areas, all influenced to a greater or lesser degree by the availability of land on the edge of the extensive commons of Boscaswell Lower Downs and Boscaswell Higher Downs. At Lower Boscaswell, individual cottages and rows appeared along the road on the north side of Boscaswell Lower Downs and by the time of the 1841 Tithe Map there had been considerable development of both mining and housing, and there appears to be some correlation between the mines and the apparently randomly scattered early housing developments.

As well as the new rows that had been built on the northern edge of Boscaswell Lower Downs, the old hamlet at Boscaswell was as built up by 1841 as it would be until the mid 20th century. The North Levant/Geevor complex was probably a more important influence here than elsewhere in Pendeen; there is no clear evidence for mining within the immediate environs of the old hamlet despite the presence of some interesting non-residential buildings there. There were minor additions to the settlement along Boscaswell Road through the later 19th century and to the rear of the Parson’s Row (now Peter’s Row) group - one of the interesting later 19th century developments was the provision of front gardens, presumably linked to the enclosure of the commons and loss of some rights attached to the cottages (cottagers renting houses throughout St Just parish generally had sheep grazing rights on the commons).

**Post-Industrial**

Post-Industrial development in Lower Boscaswell should be regarded, at least in part, as industrial in origin, this was partly a result of reinvestment in the Geevor/Treweek’s complex, with a need to attract and house a new wave of skilled workers, and Boscaswell Estate in many ways fitted into the traditional development pattern of the village. Only with the creation of large public housing estates at Park-an-Pyth and the Moorland Close Estate (which now dominate the settlement and border the Conservation Area) was the long continuity in the history, shape, appearance and character of the village broken.
The 20th century housing estate within the settlement, although outside of the Conservation Area, has a significant impact on it.

There is some 20th century housing located within the Conservation Area. Generally they are bland and fail to relate to their historic context, however they are at least set back from the road with stone boundary walls to soften their impact.