ST.MARYCHURCH, BABBACOMBE, PLAINMOOR and MAIDENCOMBE
District Community Partnership
Protect and Preserve

Brief History

St Marychurch is one of the oldest settlements in South Devon, with records dating from around 1050 AD. Its name is derived from the church of St Mary, which was founded in Anglo-Saxon times. St Marychurch Parish Church with its high tower and Saxon font dates from around 1110 AD.

St Marychurch photo

The Ward is a former English urban district which was abolished in 1900 when it was incorporated into the neighbouring borough of Torquay. The former town stretches from Plainmoor to Maidencombe and is known for its scenery, shopping precinct and neighbouring churches.

The early 19th century architecture of villas and terraced buildings fall within a conservation area and contain a number of listed buildings and many others of significant interest such as is the former Town Hall built in 1883. The conservation area largely defines the historic development of what is now *a significant suburb of Torquay*.

Town Hall photo

Character of area

- **There are 3 significant local (or 'secondary') retail areas** – Reddenhill/Babbacombe Rd (Babbacombe), Fore St (St Marychurch) and St Marychurch Road (Plainmoor). Many local retailers and service businesses are small family owned and independent.
- **We have a significant number of financial institutions** (4 Banks, 1 Building Society and large Post Office). These areas enjoy a greater 'occupancy rate' than the average.
- **There are 2 major secondary and 5 primary schools, 1 independent primary school and 3 nursery schools** in the Ward making the area attractive for families to live in.
- **The economy of this area is generated mainly through 3 sectors** – Retail and Financial Services, Care Services and Tourism.
- **The area** of 'Babbacombe Bay' **has now become a Business Improvement District** formed from over 300 of the local businesses with the aim to improve the trading environment and shopping experience.
- **The area has 4 major tourist attractions, 3 excellent beaches, significant areas of 'green' spaces and good amenities** all adding to the value of the area as a tourist destination. Much of the space along our coastline is 'protected' by either local schedules and/or SSSI and the SW Coast Path runs through the length of the Ward. Torquay United FC has their ground in Plainmoor and that brings significant numbers of local and travelling fans. We have Torquay Golf Club and some excellent playing fields in this area.
- We have a considerable number of well recruited, active and effective voluntary organisations including Local History Society, Residents Associations, Rotary and Lions Clubs and many others.

Tourism

Babbacombe Downs with its fine views across Lyme Bay, is an area of natural beauty appreciated year round by both residents and visitors alike. This area supports a substantial number of local businesses of large and small hotels and B&Bs that cater to visitors all year round. Attractions include: sea diving from Oddicombe beach, the luxury Cary Arms hotel on Babbacombe beach, Babbacombe Cliff Railway, Bygones Victorian Museum and the Model Village at Babbacombe.

Oddicombe Beach and Lyme Bay from Babbacombe Downs.

In the summer months, **Maidencombe** plays host to tourists from Torbay and those staying in the locality. The village Thatched Tavern pub and beach cafe provide visitors with food and drink and the Orestone Manor House Hotel provides luxury accommodation for tourists and visitors alike. The sheltered cove can be reached by winding steps and has an attractive cascade waterfall fed by watercourses gravitating down the combe. A steady flow of hikers and ramblers filter through the combe all the year round via the network of cliff paths and permissive routes across fields.

Geopark: The Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust has emphasised the importance of Maidencombe as a vital component of the Bay's global Geopark status to attract visitors and residents alike to the area. To this end, a proposed cycleway would facilitate pollution-free access.

A local volunteer group, St Marychurch & District Action group maintain numerous garden areas throughout the Ward for the benefit of local residents and visitors alike, namely: Watcombe Picnic area at Great Rock, Cora's Corner, Millennium Copse, Abbey School Corner flower bed, the Rose Garden, Babbacombe Downs Road , Glen Sannox gardens on Babbacombe Downs and Haytor Park.

Retail business

The main shopping street (Fore Street) consists of a small market area and has four public houses, a post office, a fishmonger, butcher, baker, greengrocer, bookshop, pet shop, four banks, two supermarkets and a health food shop, as well as a number of cafés, estate agents and hairdressers.

St Marychurch Precinct photo

The Precinct's uniqueness of is due to it predominately being made up of independent traders offer an 'alternative style of shopping experience' and is a tourist attraction in its own right.

Plainmoor shopping area photo

Other major shopping areas include Plainmoor, which serves local residents with a range of independent traders and businesses.

Also Babbacombe Road and Reddenhill Road shopping area, based in the midst of our hotel and B&B district and also serves a large residential area.

Babbacombe Road shopping area photo

Situated at the northernmost part of the Ward is Maidencombe.

Consisting of approximately 408 acres of predominantly agricultural land. Much of the area remains in a natural state and is particularly valued by visitors and walkers along the coastal path. The entire coastal strip has been designated a Countryside Zone and Coastal Preservation Area and an Area of Great Landscape Value.

Old Maidencombe photo

Brief History:

The historic hamlet of 'Medenecombe'is recorded in the Domesday survey of 1086 as a tiny manor with a population of about twenty. Nestling in a hollow surrounded by dramatic coastal scenery, it was originally orchard groves which over time evolved into a small number of farmsteads. At a later time Maidencombe consisted of five farmhouses and a handful of thatched cottages, and within the conservation area of the combe are five Grade II listed buildings and six buildings of significant architectural importance. The earliest existing building is the Grade II listed Court House, parts of which date back to the 14th century. The survival of these early buildings gives the undoubted historic feel to the village as it stands today.

Character of area

Maidencombe has a particularly rich biodiversity which depends on the survival of its extensive farmland environment and the traditional practices employed in its permanent pasture management and upkeep of hedgerows, hedgerow trees, cider orchard and lower-rich meadows.

The field systems of Maidencombe have survived since medieval times and early boundary walls are in evidence today. A natural order prevails, with houses cut into the hills of the combe blending unobtrusively with the environment. The steep access lanes into the combe serve to emphasise the remoteness of the area. Despite relatively recent additions to the combe of a car park, public house and mid-to-late 20th century infill, the village still manages to project a countryside feel. Set amidst the outstanding natural beauty of a dramatic coastline, Maidencombe is a largely unheralded jewel in Torbay's crown of natural beauty spots.

Maidencombe field plan photo

Fragile Nature:

A Senior Archaeology and Historic Environment Officer for Torbay Council, has voiced concerns over the possibility of destroying the fine balance that exists in the combe with any further development. The presence within the boundaries of Maidencombe of extremely rare UK species, such as the Cirl Bunting and Lesser Horseshoe bat demonstrates the current, albeit delicate, well-being of the environment. The chief threat to Maidencombe is the continual pressure to change farming practices or even to develop the farmland, which, if allowed could dilute attempts to nurture a dynamic and successful Geopark and set in motion the further urbanization of Torbay to the detriment of tourist numbers to the area.

Cirl Bunting Photo

Lesser Horseshoe bat Photo

Particular areas for Protection:

Sladnor Park

photo

Sladnor Park is already earmarked for development as a Retirement/Nursing Home. Although plans have yet to be carried out, the purchasers will have to address a host of environmental and ecological queries before development begins.

However, the combe and the village itself present a very different scenario. **Any further development would need massive new infrastructure improvements** (e.g. mains sewage), this may be achievable perhaps, but at the brutal cost of destroying the fragile balance of the combe.

Conclusions:
Maidencombe is a very special and unique place. Once land is given up for development, it is lost for ever. All the indications are that preservation is more important and of far greater significance than development for present and future generations. Potentially, with the projected change of use of 'Suite Dreams Hotel' to ten flats, the three houses at Maidencombe Farm and the major development pending at Sladnor Park, saturation levels of development within the combe have already been reached. Any additional development might well be detrimental to the equilibrium of the area.

The St Marychurch, Babbacombe, Plainmoor and Maidencombe District Ward area
is considered to be unique in many ways,

Some of the characteristics leading to that view are:

- It is seen as a very attractive place for people to live and particularly to retire into and as a result there is a larger than average proportion of older residents and a considerable number of homes offering care for the elderly.
- The property values, particularly areas of Maidencombe, Babbacombe and St Marychurch are higher than average and it is a 'sought after' area in which to live.
- However, there are some small pockets of 'deprivation' in parts of the Ward and over 35% of residents in the Ward reliant on some form of State benefit.

Principle Issues & Environment

- **PROTECT the amenity that is provided by PLAINMOOR SWIMMING POOL and PLAY PARK** and have those areas improved for community use. Ensuring that any development of the Football Ground is tied to the improvement of this and other amenities in the immediate area. Plainmoor swimming pool is the only public swimming pool in Torquay and is where many local children, past and present, have learned to swim.
- **RE-FURBISHMENT of shopping and retail areas** and standardisation of street furniture and street signs.
- **REDEVELOP existing suitable properties for housing.**
- **DEVELOPMENT OF PROPERTIES FOR SENIOR RESIDENTS** to enable independent living for as long as possible. Because the area has a large number of senior residents there is a need to have properties to develop to cater for those who can manage on their own (i.e. warden controlled) and also develop properties that cater for those who can't (i.e. dementia sufferers) Nursing/Care homes and re-furbish existing ones.
- **DEVELOPMENT of Sladner Park, Maidencombe**.
- **RETENTION of bus routes from Plainmoor, St. Marychurch to Torbay Hospital all day**.
- **OBTAIN COVENANT PROTECTION from Torbay Council for BABBACOMBE DOWNS and MAIDENCOMBE Village Green** from future development/building.
- **PROTECT GREEN OPEN SPACES and COASTLINE** from Walls Hill to Maidencombe, to include Babbacombe Downs and the beach areas, Tessier Gardens, Cary Park, Haytor Park and King George V playing fields and there is a need to increase the maintenance of all areas, including pathways, for public use and safety ensuring they are fit for purpose. Refurbish Petitor Downs and Great Rock area to bring them back into public use. **Secure a long term commitment from the Local Authorities to preserve all protection plans (including covenants) and ensure SSSIs are respected.**
- **PROTECTION AND PRESERVATION OF COASTAL FOOTPATHS, identify and record public rights of way**; green lanes, alleyways and established paths in and around the area and **increase maintenance for public use and safety.**
- **PROTECT AND IDENTIFY PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY** throughout the Ward (especially in Maidencombe) and increase maintenance for public use and safety.
- **Existing Public Conveniences re-opened**, re-furbished and maintained to remain open all year. (eg Cary Park area and Babbacombe Downs) The toilets on Babbacombe Downs are only open during the summer, Residents and visitors alike need these facilities to be available all year round.

Housing

Because the area attracts Senior Residents there is a need to have sufficient places to cater for supported independent living and also, as demand increases, more places that cater for those who are no longer able to be independent, for example: dementia sufferers. We need to ensure that there are sufficient Nursing/Care home facilities by a combination of new development, adaption of existing buildings and re-furbishing existing homes.

- **DEVELOP** existing suitable properties in appropriate style and scale for housing as long as they are not likely to have an adverse impact on neighbours the immediate environment or the area as a whole.
- **IDENTIFYING AND SECURE** appropriate sites for good quality and affordable housing to meet the projected demographic needs for this Ward. NOT allowing development of housing on any Greenfield site without a proven need to accommodate people in the area for employment – or to provide short term employment for building workers.
- **DEVELOPMENT** of Sladnor Park Maidencombe in an appropriate way (such as the existing planning permissions to create a 'retirement village' ensuring that access for transport and people on foot along the Teignmouth Road is adequate and suitable.

Community Usage

- **Possible development of the Football Ground** (subject to the Club having a better alternative accommodation), for community use and that appropriate building with sufficient amenity and infrastructure only is considered, that the plans should include the development of swimming, sports and play facilities.
- **Maintain existing Public Conveniences**, re-open those that have been closed in Reddenhill Road and keep them open all year.
- **Retention of key bus routes** serving the area to ensure access to and from the main retail areas of the Ward, Town, Harbour, Hospital and outlying districts.

Additionally there must be an on-going commitment to improvement in the following local amenities – if necessary through partnership working with developers:

*Play and Youth facilities
*Litter and Cleanliness
*Public Toilet provision
*Beaches
*Planting
*Signage
*Schools and opportunities for adult education
*Leisure and facilities/opportunities

Retail Areas

- **Investment in improving the standard of retail areas** and the properties therein and standardisation of street furniture and street signs to continue the unique theme of Black and Silver as on finger posts.
- **Ensuring that any significant development of new homes** in the area (5 or more in one application) is allowed only if a reasonable proportion of new (medium and long term) jobs are made available.
- **Removing unnecessary 'street clutter'** in the form of excess street furniture and signage – where possible 'doubling up' signs to avoid proliferation.
- Making sure that **we maintain plenty of free and unrestricted on-street parking** and secure, easily accessible and affordable off -road parking for visitors, local residents and businesses. This should include identifying spaces that need no longer be restricted. Coach access and parking is available, and improving the 'arrival and departure' experience of drivers and passengers.
- **Tying in any significant development with a financial contribution** to improvement or maintenance of local amenities.