

Higham



conservation area appraisal

Introduction

The conservation area in Higham was originally designated by East Suffolk County Council in 1972 and inherited by Babergh District Council at its inception in 1974.

The Council has a duty to review its conservation area designations from time to time, and this appraisal examines Higham under a number of different headings as set out in English Heritage's new 'Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals' (2006).

As such it is a straightforward appraisal of Higham's built environment in conservation terms.



This document is neither prescriptive nor overly descriptive, but more a demonstration of 'quality of place', sufficient for the briefing of the Planning Officer when assessing proposed works in the area. The photographs and maps are thus intended to contribute as much as the text itself.

As the English Heritage guidelines point out, the appraisal is to be read as a general overview, rather than as a comprehensive listing, and the omission of any particular building, feature or space does not imply that it is of no interest in conservation terms.

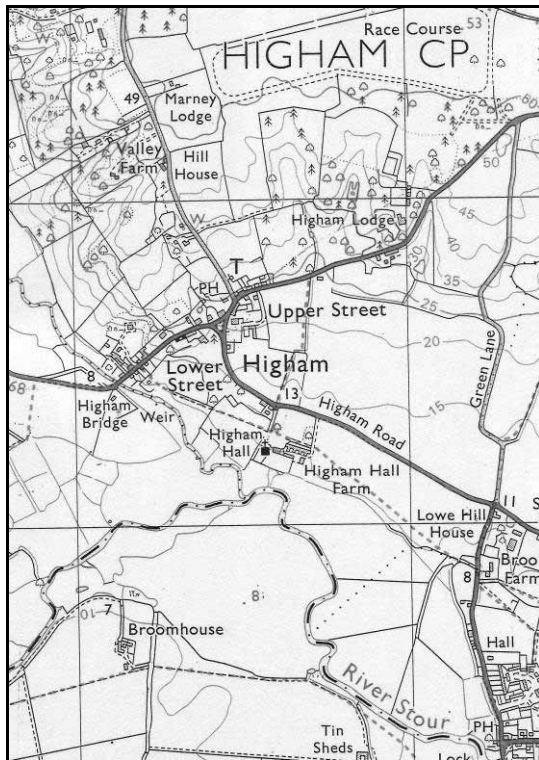
Text, photographs and map overlays by Patrick Taylor, Conservation Architect, Babergh District Council 2009.

Topographical Framework

The village of Higham lies in south Suffolk about four miles south of Hadleigh, further downstream and also on the east bank of the River Brett.

A little further south near the remote Church, the Brett joins the River Stour, which here forms the county boundary with Essex.

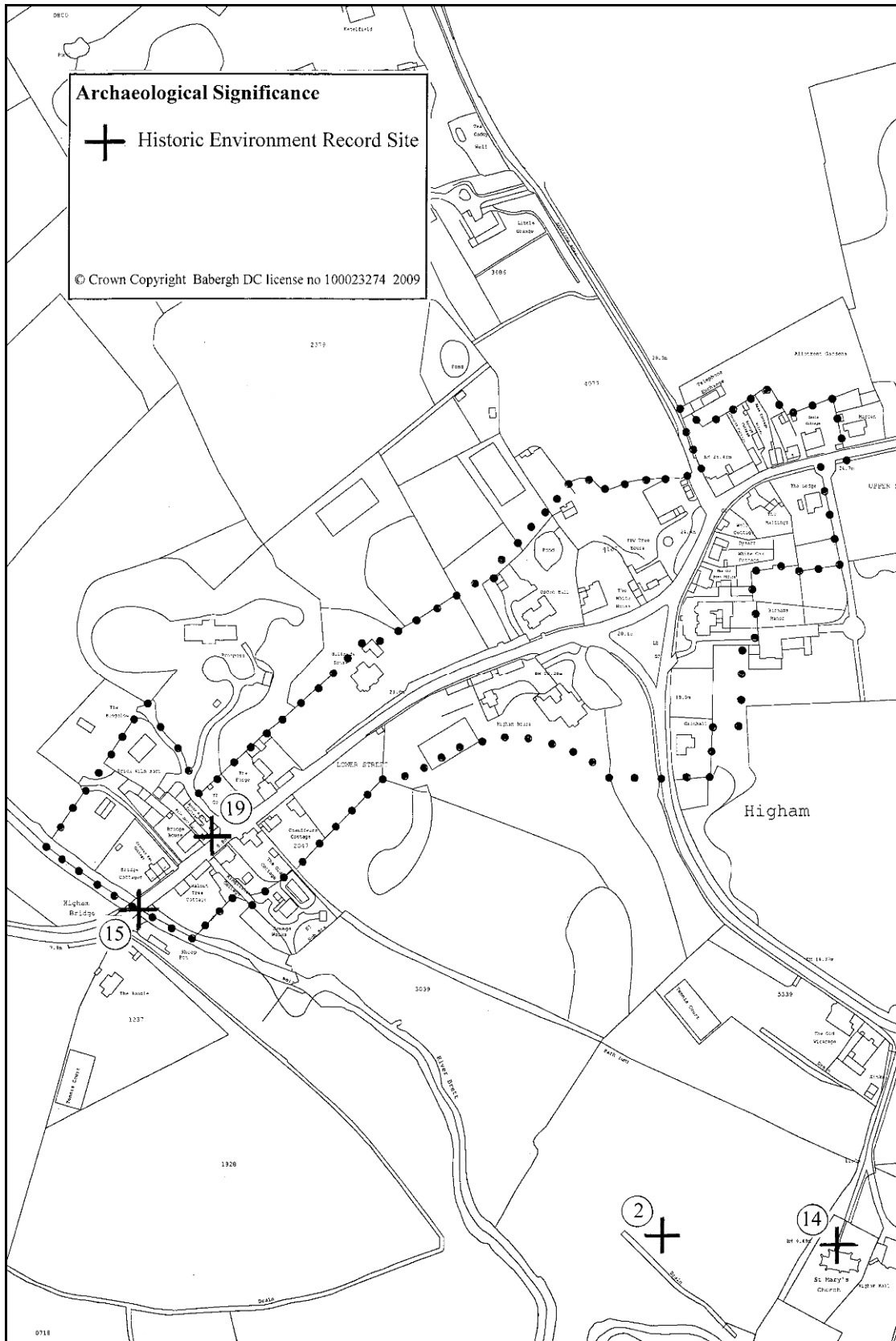
The main river was made navigable in 1709 as the Stour Navigation and took barge traffic from Mistley, at the head of the estuary above Harwich, some 25 miles further upstream to Sudbury, passing Higham en route.



The Ipswich to Stratford Turnpike Trust's road of 1812 passed about a mile south of the village through adjoining Stratford St Mary. The old main road has now been replaced by the dual carriageway of the A12, and this does generate some unwelcome traffic through the village.

The nearest railway station is at Manningtree, upstream from Mistley, on the main Ipswich to London line of 1854.

Higham is for the most part sited on the alluvial deposits laid down by the river since the ice ages. During that time the river itself has cut down through the overlying boulder clay of High Suffolk, and the glacial sands and gravels immediately beneath, into the underlying strata of London clay.



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Archaeological Significance

Higham would seem to be more a place of archaeological potential than of archaeological results. The majority of evidence listed in the Suffolk County Historic Environment Record is from cropmarks, indicating a large number of ring ditches and enclosures, mostly to the east of the village.

Apart from these sites, which are of unknown date, the record also lists the finding of a Palaeolithic handaxe, but nothing else of any age.

There are a couple of finds of pottery and the Churchyard of Medieval date and a Post Medieval bridge.



Hecham . tenuit Aſſemañ . lib hō . cōmīdat Robto filio Wi -
marce . p mañ . i . car̄ terrae . femp . i . uilt . & Tē . i . i . bord . p̄ 7 m̄
. i . i . Tē . i . car̄ in dñio . P̄ nichil . m̄ . i . car̄ . Tē . i . car̄ hom̄ . P̄ 7 m̄
dim̄ . v . i . ac̄ p̄ti . filua . x . porē . femp . i . molim̄ . Pars æclie . de .
. i . i . ac̄ . m̄ . i . i . ac̄ . 7 v . i . i . porē . 7 v . i . oīs . 7 v . i . i . cap̄ . 7 tē uat
xxx . fol . modo . xx . fy fuit ad firmā p̄ xxx . fol . ht . v . i . i . qf̄
in longo . & . v . i . ia lat̄ . 7 x . i . i . d . de gelto . Alii ibi tenēt . Socā in
bcolt .

In echam tenuit Godricus lib homo
. i . car̄ terrae . p mañ . t . r . e . femp . i . i . uilt . & . i . i . bord . & . i . car̄ in dñio .
& . v . i . ac̄ p̄ti . Eccle . i . i . i . ac̄ . Tē uat . xx . fol . modo . xx . v . Osbnus
teñ . Ex his oibz libis hominibz nichil habuit . t . r . e . Phin . Ante .
ceffor Ricardi p̄i de uno folo . cōmīd tanū . Socā de toto
in bercolt . Et eos tenēt . Ricardus ad honorē phin .

Aescman, a free man under the patronage of Robert son of Wymarc, held HIGHAM before 1066; 1 carucate of land as a manor.
Always 1 villager. Then 3 smallholders, later and now 2.
Then 2 ploughs in lordship, later nothing, now 1 plough; then 1 men's plough, later and now ½.
Meadow, 7 acres; woodland, 10 pigs; always 1 mill.
Part of a church, with 2 acres.
Now 3 cattle, 8 pigs, 6 sheep, 8 goats.
Value then 30s; now 20[s]; but it was at a revenue for 30s.
It has 8 furlongs in length and 6 in width; 12d in tax. Others hold there.
The jurisdiction (is) in (East) Bergholt.

In HIGHAM Godric, a free man, held 1 carucate of land as a manor before 1066.
Always 1 villager; 2 smallholders;
1 plough in lordship. Meadow, 6 acres.
A church, 4 acres.
Value then 20s; now 25[s].
Osbern holds (this).

From all these free men, Finn, Richard's predecessor, had nothing before 1066 except for patronage only over one alone. The jurisdiction of the whole (is) in (East) Bergholt. Richard holds them as of Finn's Honour.

The Domesday survey of 1086 lists four separate holdings for Higham, indicating four different manors belonging to four different noblemen.

Amongst these holdings there are listed a church and several parts of a church, so it is likely there were two churches, along with a mill, which at that time would have been a watermill.

Intrinsic Quality of Buildings

Higham's eighteen listed buildings consist mainly of grade II houses and cottages, mostly timber-framed and rendered with plaintile roofs, although three are thatched and one slated. Ten listed buildings are to be found within the conservation area.

Only the Church of St Mary is considered of better quality and given grade II status and this is situated outside the conservation area. It is mostly 14th and 15th Century, of flint with stone dressings and has a plaintile roof.*

Apart from the 13th Century tower Pevsner describes it as "Otherwise Early Perp[pendicular] and not of great interest". The church was restored in 1888 and has a porch dating from 1893.



Some of the timber-framed buildings are not rendered all over in the usual Suffolk manner and have exposed framing. Olden Hall (grade II listed as 16th Century 'Tudor House') is one of these and still has its open hall between the two crosswings. It has rendered panels between the framing members with brick nogging to the ground floor.

In contrast next door early 19th Century White House is all rendered with decorative drip moulds and quoins and has a slate roof.

Other contemporary buildings, such as grade II listed Higham Hall and Higham Lodge and unlisted Higham House, are in the more usual Suffolk White brick with slate roofs.



Traditional Building Materials

Higham's older buildings are for the most part rendered timber frames with plaintile roofs or Suffolk White brick with slate roofs.

Brick is however also to be found on many Victorian buildings with slate roofs. These are predominantly in local soft 'Suffolk Red' brick, although many examples have now been painted over or rendered.

Other wall materials include decorative tile hanging and weatherboarding, which can be found in both the white and black varieties.



In addition to plaintile, slate and thatch, pantile roofs also make an appearance, mostly on extensions and outbuildings.

Overall virtually the full palette of Suffolk's vernacular building materials can be found around the village, displayed in a great variety of combinations.

Traditional windows feature widely around the village, and where they occur on unlisted buildings, they must be considered under threat from the attentions of uPVC salesmen.

Hierarchy of Spaces

The village has grown up spread as a typical Suffolk 'street' along the road that runs inland parallel to the River Stour.

East of Higham Bridge over the River Brett, the road climbs up Lower Street with development both sides before dropping away to reveal a triangular green where the road forks.

Here Upper Street continues eastwards, through a double bend, again with development both sides. On the second bend Hadleigh Road goes off to the north climbing the hill away from the river.



The triangular green with its large Copper Beech is very much the main focus of the village and is accordingly registered as a Village Green. With the increasing size and shading of the Copper Beech the viability of the grass there may well become questionable in the future.

From the green, Higham Road drops away to the south, heading towards Stratford St Mary. Here the development stops abruptly, as does the conservation area, the road being lined with hedges and trees until a small cluster of historic buildings is encountered based around the Church. This historically separate development should remain apart.

Trees & Planting

North of the village behind Hill House to the west of Hadleigh Road and further east around Higham Lodge there are extensive areas of trees on the higher ground.

Nearer the village the trees are restricted to hedgerows and gardens and include the Copper Beech on the green and a fine Wellingtonia just to the north in the grounds of White House.

From the green southwards there is a tree belt along the eastern boundary of Higham House that stretches down to the Old Vicarage.



In the wet areas adjoining the river there are the usual wetland trees, Willow, Alder and Poplar, lining the riverbanks and drainage ditches.

A few trees in the village have been felt sufficiently at risk to warrant protection by a Tree Preservation Order. TPO 45 was made in 1963 by East Suffolk County Council to protect a Beech, a Lime and a group of ten Oak outside the conservation area, just west of Higham Lodge.

Relationship to Open Countryside

Higham is situated in the heart of the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

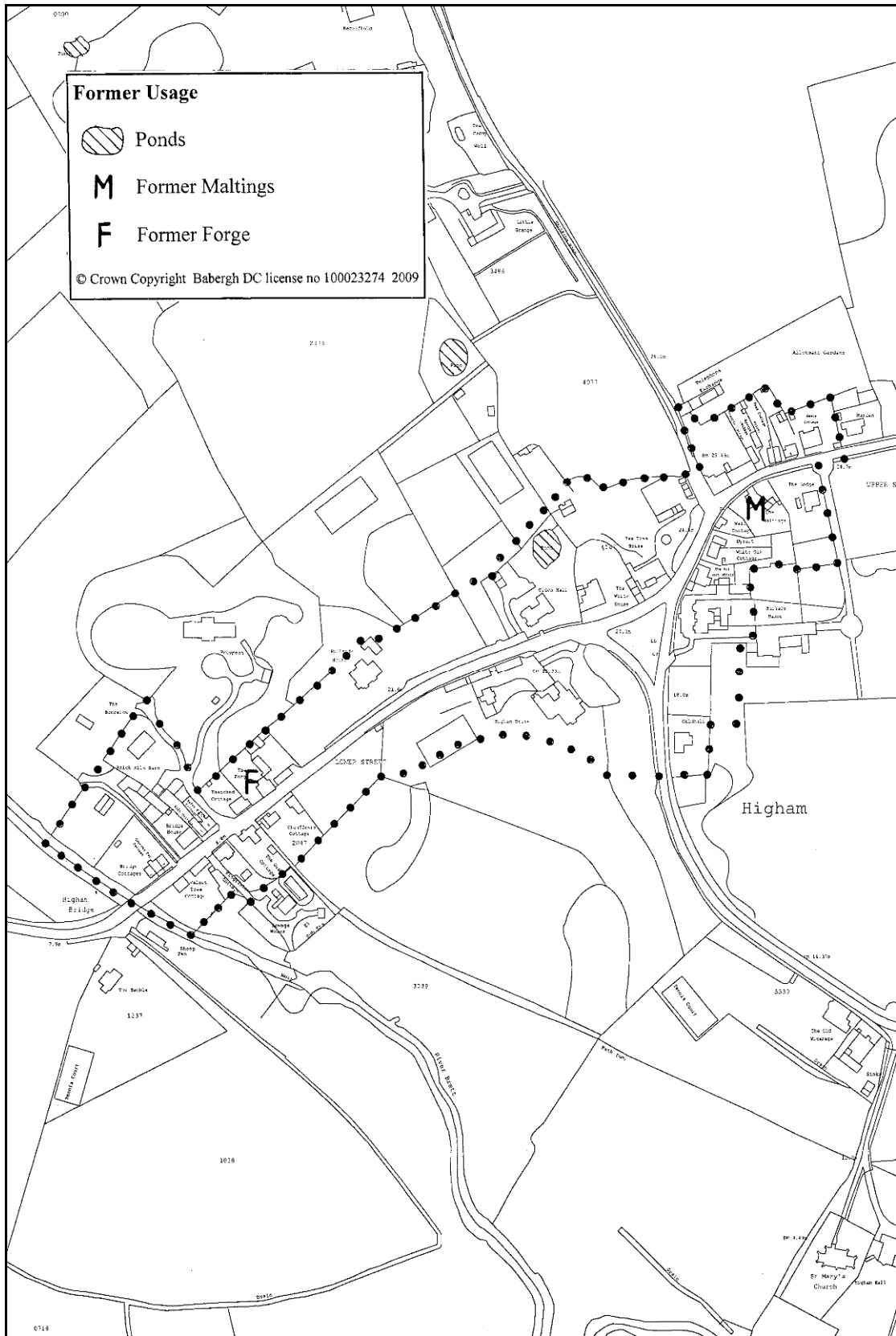
The majority of development there is but one plot deep, so that the countryside is immediately to hand at the rear of most properties.

North of Upper and Lower Streets, the only access to this countryside is via Hadleigh Road, a narrow lane that climbs away from the village through fields and woodland, with scattered development along the way.



To the south however, Higham Road performs a similar function, but complemented by two footpaths.

Footpath 12 links Upper Street down to Higham Road across fields at the eastern end of the village. Footpath 11 similarly links Lower Street down to the Church and Higham Hall, continuing south-eastwards parallel to Higham Road to Stratford St Mary.



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Prevailing & Former Usage

Whilst Higham played a small part in Suffolk's woollen cloth industry of the 15th to 17th Centuries, as testified to by the scatter of timber-framed buildings of that age, the village was mainly an outlier to the more important local centre at East Bergholt.

Records from the early 17th Century indicate one each of yeoman, husbandman, thatcher, clothier, clothmaker and weaver as living there.

By the later 17th Century this had changed to three yeomen and one each of tanner, blacksmith, clerk, potmaker and tailor.

In the 19th Century directories show a more general agricultural basis to the village economy.



There were then four farmers, a blacksmith, a malster, a seed crusher / oil miller, a brickmaker and a joiner along with a number of shopkeepers.

The Domesday watermill was probably near present day Old Mill House to the north of the village further up the River Brett and there was a windmill at one time on the higher ground near Valley Farm on Hadleigh Road.

Today the village serves more as a dormitory and commuter outpost, being near both Ipswich and Colchester, with their easy links to London. Only building names now give a clue to former activities such as The Forge, The Maltings and the probably erroneous Gildhall.



Losses & Possible Gains

Higham has suffered relatively little from intrusive modern development and the use of non-traditional forms and materials. The telephone exchange off Hadleigh Road could be better screened.

There are a few uPVC windows on some of the unlisted properties and whilst there is scope for some infill along the upper part of Lower Street, this should be done with great care if at all, and in such a way as to preserve views of the countryside from the conservation area.

Any future review could perhaps consider an extension to the conservation area to the south along Higham Road, to include the other historic nucleus of the settlement around the Church, Hall and Old Vicarage.



References & Further Reading

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