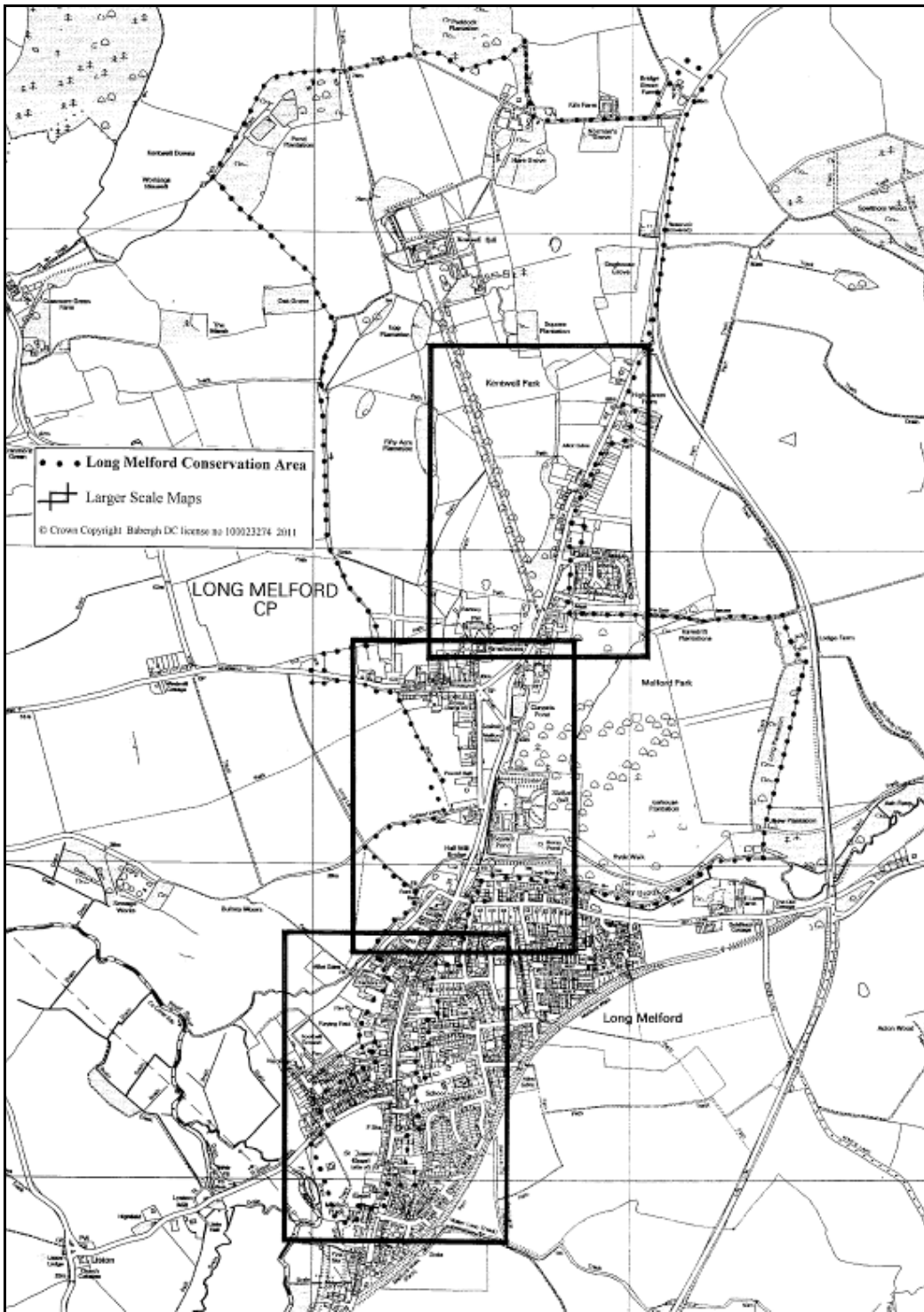




conservation area appraisal



Introduction

The conservation area in Long Melford was originally designated by West Suffolk County Council in 1973, 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 Long Melford under a number of different headings as set out in English Heritage's 'Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals' (2006).

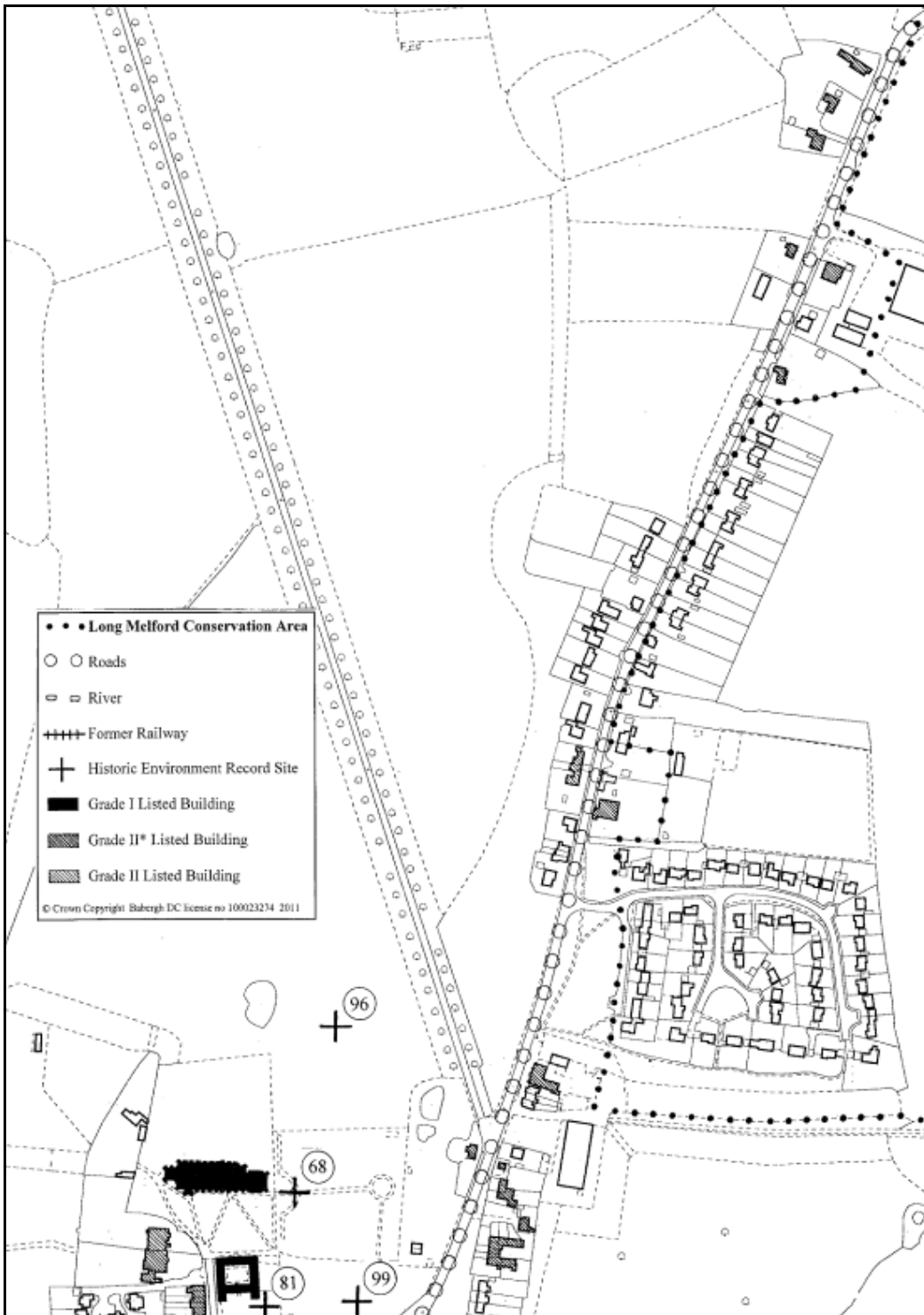
As such it is a straightforward appraisal of Long Melford's built environment in conservation terms.



As a document it 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 2011.

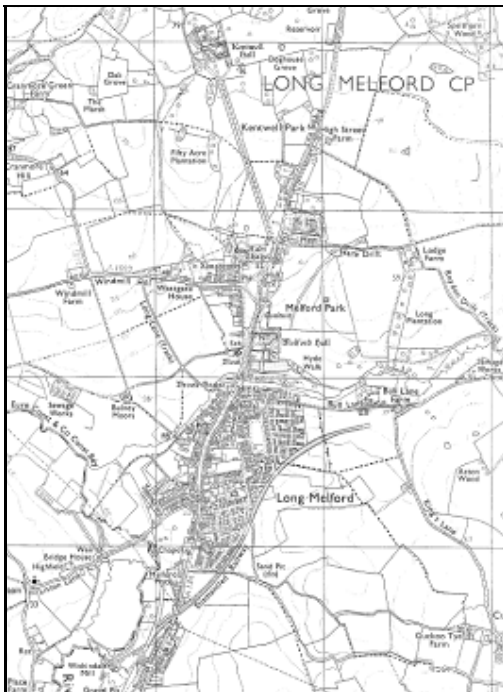


Topographical Framework

Long Melford is a large village in west Suffolk, most of which is strung out along about two kilometres of former main road that follows the valley of the river Stour, here flowing southwards en route for Sudbury and its eventual meeting with the sea at Harwich.

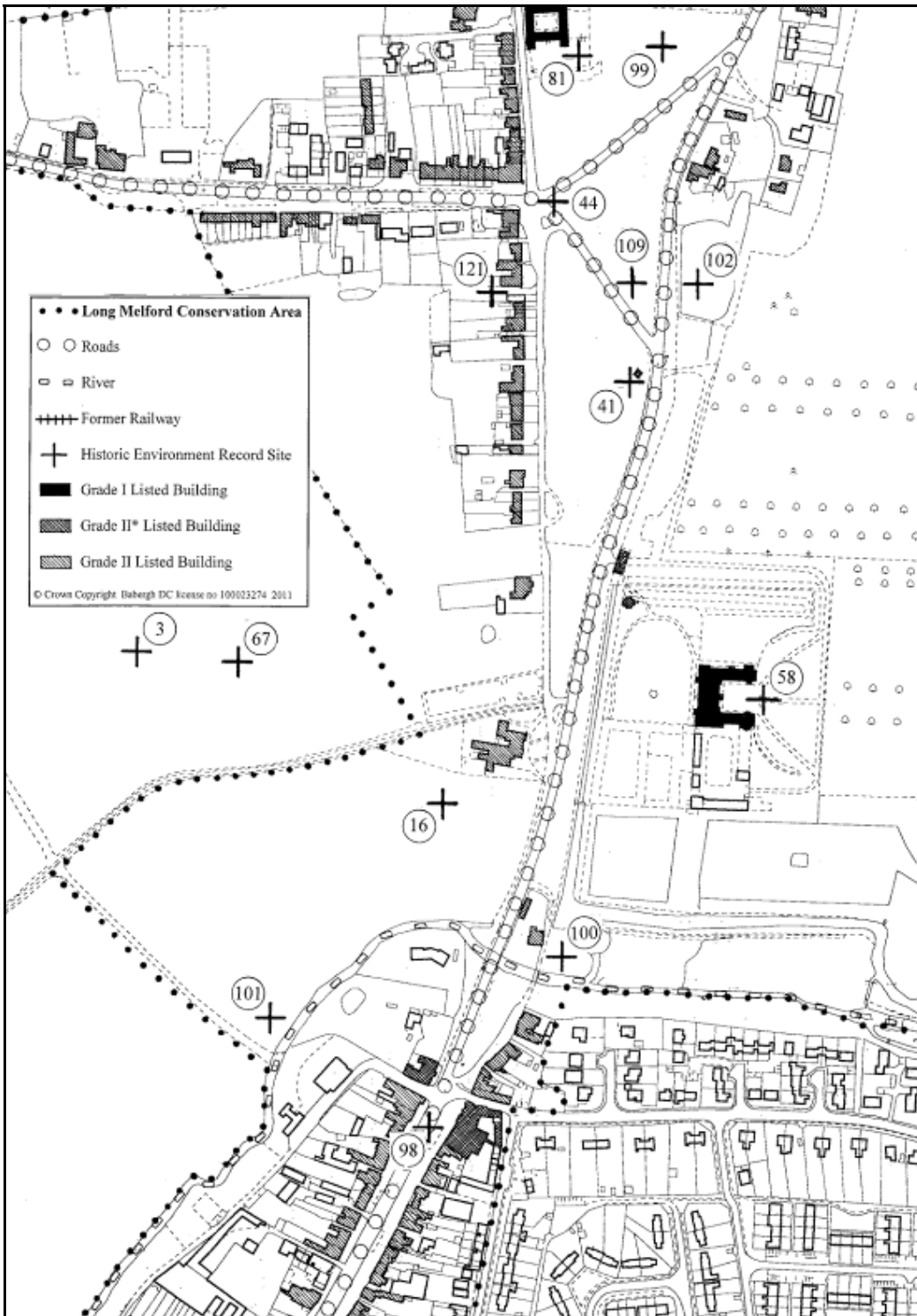
In 1706 the river was canalized as the Stour Navigation below Sudbury, allowing barge traffic to and from the sea port at Mistley.

Now by-passed by the main road, the route through the village was originally part of the Bury St Edmunds to Sudbury Turnpike Trust's roads, there having been a toll-house and turnpike gate south of the village at Rodbridge Corner.



Historically the river valleys had been the main routes of communication and later the Stour valley also carried the railway line from Sudbury heading northwards to Lavenham and on to Bury St Edmunds, with a branch line off westwards towards Clare.

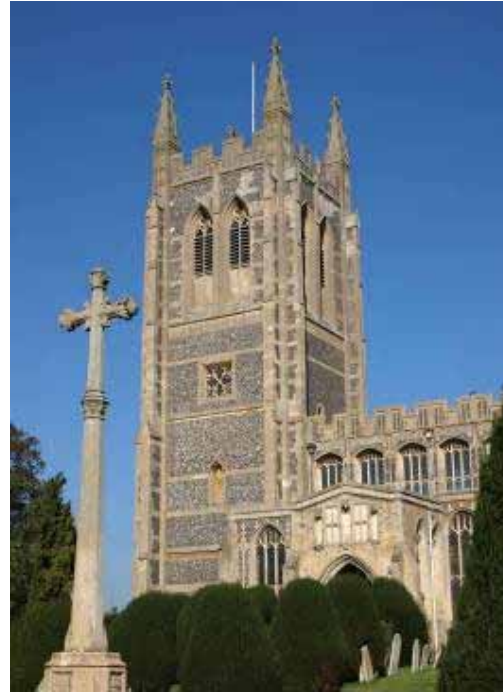
The local geology is mostly boulder clay overlying sands and gravels and then chalk at depth, but here the river has cut down through and then redeposited alluvial material in the valley.



Archaeological Significance

Long Melford parish is relatively rich in archaeological remains, with at least 150 sites listed in Suffolk County's Historic Environment Record for the parish. The earliest is a scatter of Palaeolithic finds and there are a dozen or more oval enclosures or ring ditches apparent as cropmarks, undated but most likely attributable as long or round barrows from the Neolithic or Bronze Age.

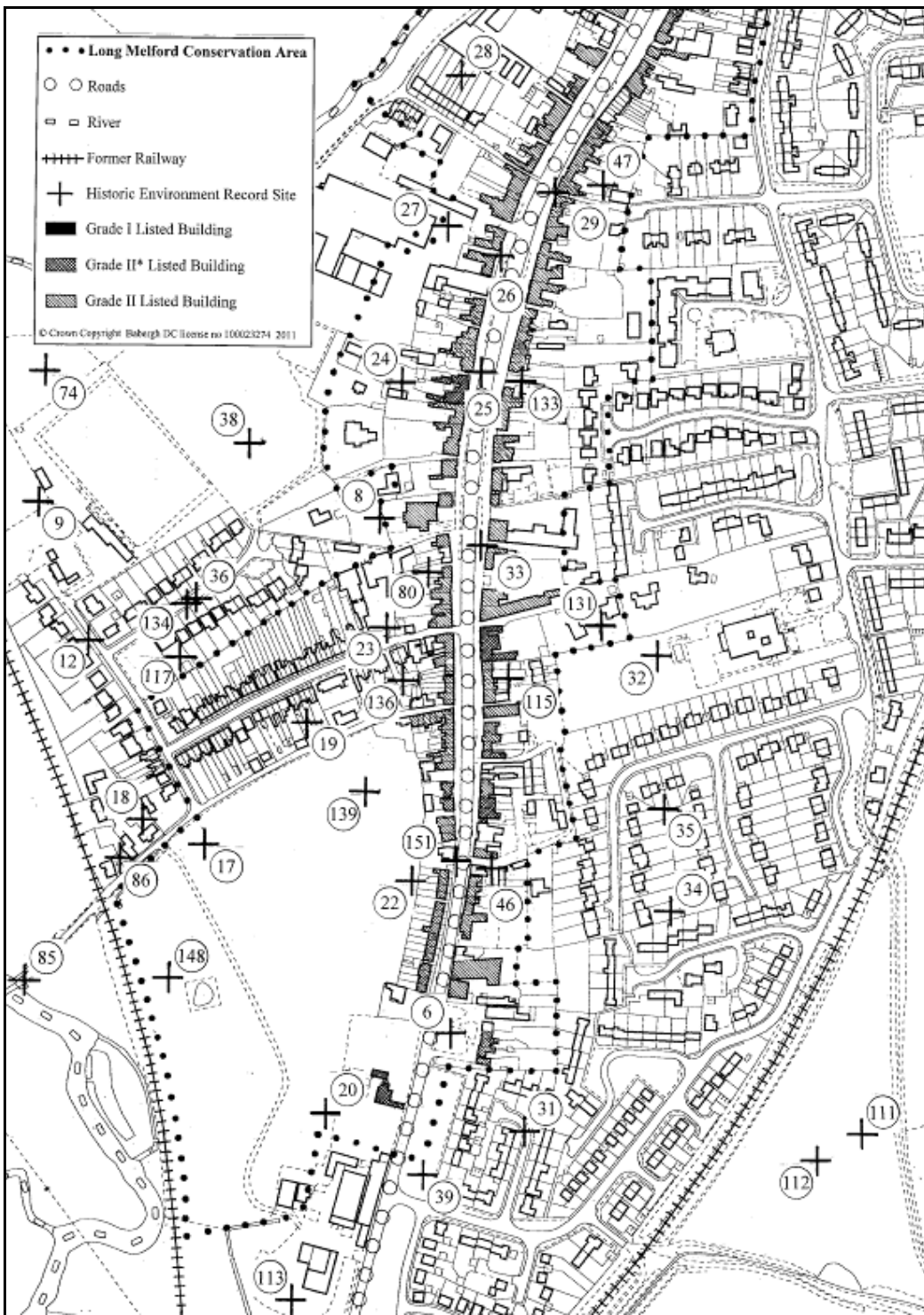
The later Iron Age has left us here a cremation burial and several finds of coins around the parish, whilst the Romans have left many similar finds plus other artefacts such as a mirror, a knife and pottery plus the remains of many buildings and sections of road. Two Roman villas are amongst the village's three Scheduled Monuments.



Compared with the Romans, the Anglo Saxons seem to have left relatively little with just a few pottery scatters whilst Medieval remains comprise the Church and Churchyard, two moats, remains of a Deer Park and a Market Cross site.

There are also several remnants of ancient woodland, undated but most likely from this period. Amongst the Post Medieval sites listed, there are several buildings such as the Water Conduit on Melford Green (the third Scheduled Monument), two watermill sites and three pill boxes from World War II.

Long Melford was included in the Domesday survey of 1086, the quite substantial manor being held by the Abbey of St Edmunds and including 50 acres of meadow, woodland for 60 pigs, two mills and a church.



Intrinsic Quality of Buildings

Listed buildings line most of both sides of the long street comprising Long Melford. The majority are grade II listed houses and former commercial premises, mostly timber-framed and rendered, although a good many were refronted with brick in Georgian and Victorian times, but still retain their frames internally.

Scattered amongst these are a few listed buildings of the higher grade II, however the real gems in Long Melford are concentrated at the northern end of the village around Melford Green. The four grade I buildings comprise the Church of Holy Trinity, the adjoining Trinity Hospital plus two houses with large estates, Kentwell Hall north of the Church and Melford Hall to the south nearer the rest of the village.*



The church was largely rebuilt in the late 15th Century and is a very fine example of late Perpendicular architecture, indicative of the area's wool wealth.



The other three grade I buildings come about a century later in Elizabethan times, each of the large houses being built of brick with stone dressings around 3 sides of a courtyard within a moat. The Trinity Hospital was built by the owner of Melford Hall as almshouses to house the poor on a site immediately south of the Church. In very similar style it surrounds all four sides of its quadrangle.

Several ancillary buildings nearby the two houses are graded at II, such as the Dovecote outside Kentwell Hall and the Water Conduit, lodges, gates, walls and Summer House adjoining Melford Hall.*



Traditional Building Materials

Long Melford is fairly typical of south Suffolk in terms of the building materials employed there. Many of the older buildings, the majority of those listed, are rendered timber frames, some of the finer ones with exposed studwork, not otherwise much seen in Suffolk. The infill on these is usually render panels but occasionally brick nogging is used.

Many timber-framed buildings however are not immediately apparent as such, as they have been refronted in Georgian or Victorian times with brick. This is usually the local soft red variety and occasionally the harder white brick. Both these bricks also appear in their own right on new buildings of these periods, sometimes with one colour providing the detail work to the other.

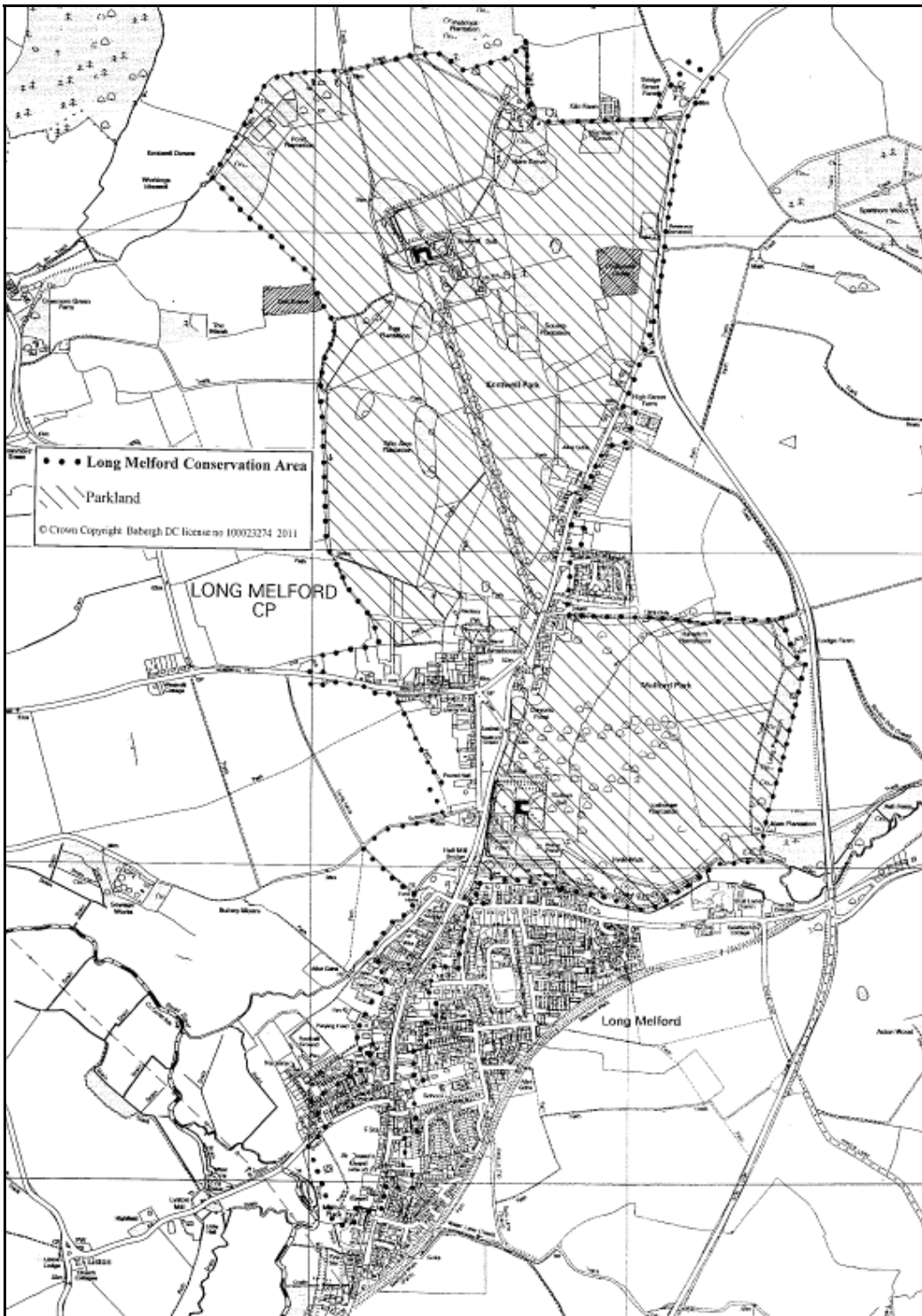


Many of these brick buildings have now been rendered or painted, so that the true local vernacular is further hidden.

Weather-boarding also appears as a wall facing material, both in the white painted variety more common to the south in Essex and the black stained version more prevalent on Suffolk barns and outbuildings at the rear of properties.

Roofs are variously plaintiled on the older buildings, with slate on the more recent brick buildings, along with a scattering of clay pantiles on some outbuildings.

A number of cast iron bollards and grave markers around the village originate from the former local Iron Foundry.



Hierarchy of Spaces

Long Melford village is essentially linear in its historic form, punctuated at its northern end by Melford Green.

At the southern end, entry to the village is by a standard width road, with a generous green area along the eastern side. Next comes the more built up urban section of Little St. Mary's, with older buildings tight on the pavement edge to the east and a Victorian terrace with small front gardens to the west.

Beyond here the long street widens out into gently curving Hall Street, which has a generous width, allowing space for trees within the street scene along with ample parking provision on both sides for much of its length. It is this street that makes Long Melford long.

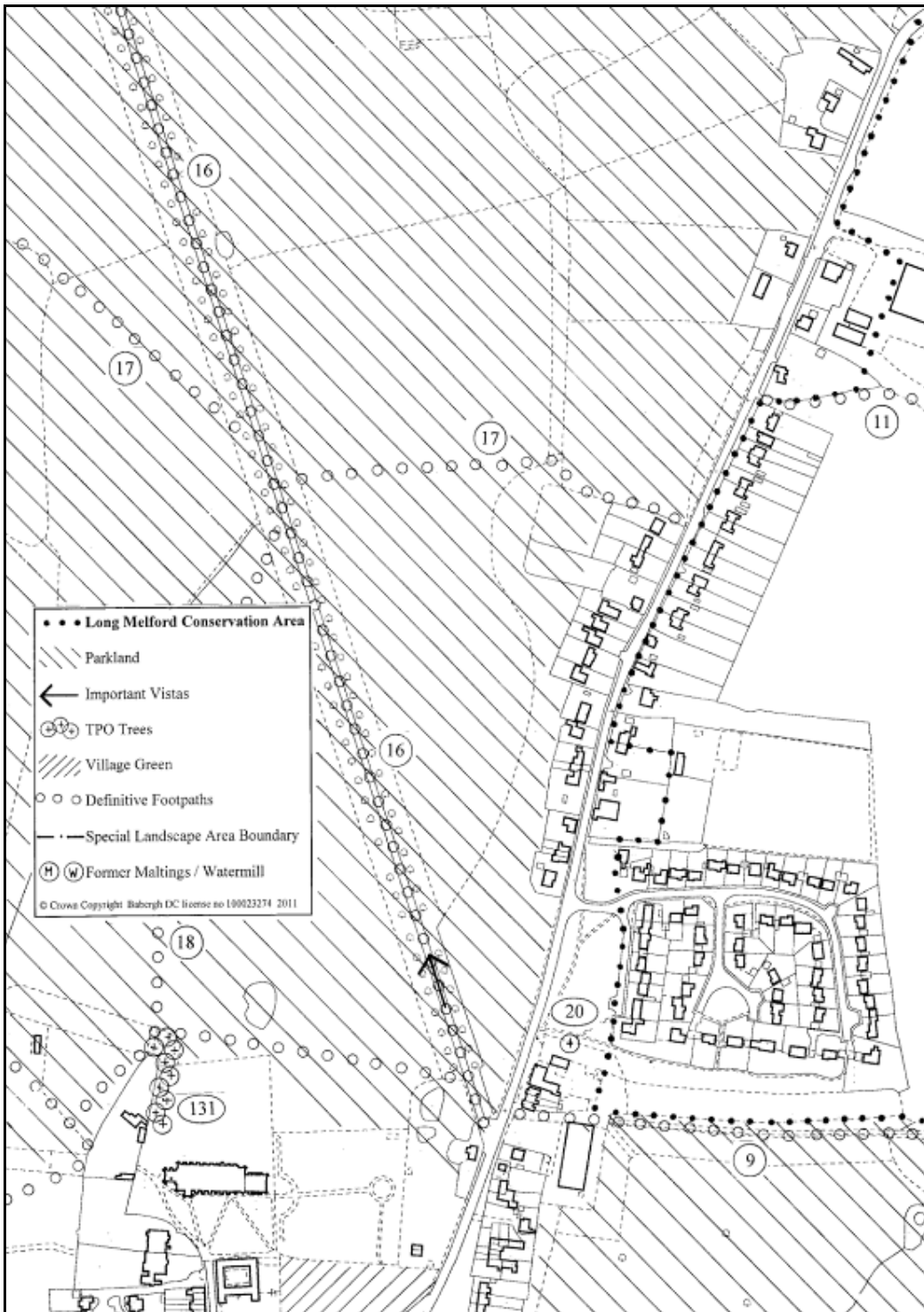


At the northern end of Hall Street there is a pinch point where the river is bridged, with only room for a pavement on one side.

Beyond this to the north the large long triangle of Melford Green provides a focus of a more rural and relaxed settlement pattern. To the east is the estate of Melford Hall behind a high brick wall, whilst to the west houses line the edge of the green, slowly ascending a gentle slope up to the Church at its northern extremity.



The triangular green widens out as it goes northwards, its third boundary comprising the Trinity Hospital almshouses near the Church and the churchyard itself behind, stretching to the east.



Trees & Planting

The Historic Environment Record lists eight remnant patches of ancient woodland within Long Melford parish. Only Doghouse Grove, just east of Kentwell Hall, is within the conservation area. The others are Spelthorn and Lineage Woods further east of the hall, Oak Grove, adjoining the area just west of the hall, plus Kiln, Herbage, Cold and Ashen Groves away to the north.

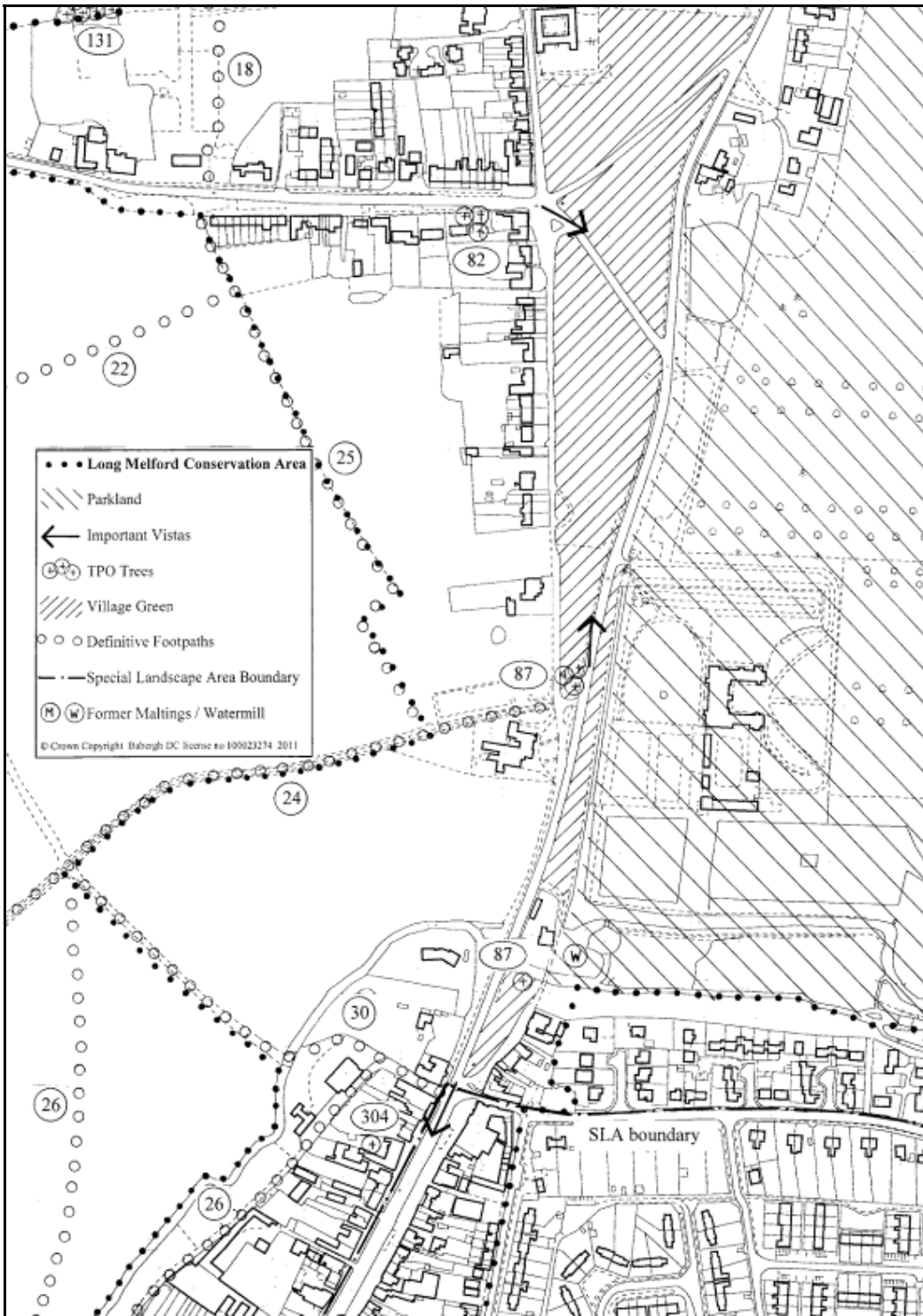
Within Long Melford's generous wide street there is room for trees, one fine Plane tree outside The Gables on Hall Street is exemplary. Other smaller trees in the street will in time make their own contributions. Further north at the south end of the green there are again trees and outside the Old School some fine conifers include a Wellingtonia.



Within the village a number of individual trees and areas of trees have been felt of sufficient importance to be given the protection of Tree Preservation Orders over the years.

One of the earliest of these, T.P.O. 87, covers the majority of the trees in Hall Street and includes three Limes at the south end of Melford Green, three more Limes and the aforementioned Plane along with a variety of smaller Cherry, Hawthorn and Apple trees along the street.

Apart from the trees the green areas provide important grassed areas and visual amenity both maintaining a rural character and providing the setting for many of the listed buildings.



Relationship to Open Countryside

Limited by the river to the west, most of Long Melford's recent growth has been the housing estates that fill in the area out to the former railway line east of Hall Street and south of Bull Lane. Indeed, this very area is excluded from the Special Landscape Area designated in Babergh's Local Plan covering most of the upper reaches of the Stour valley.

Definitive Footpaths 3 and 4 still link directly off Hall Street to the east through these areas to the farmland the other side of the tracks. Here footpaths 2, 6, 7 and 8 go deeper into countryside. Immediately north of this area Melford Park surrounds Melford Hall, precluding both development and public access. Further north footpath 9 follows the northern edge of Melford Hall's



parkland eastwards from the entrance to Kentwell Hall. To the west there is more open countryside immediately behind one plot deep development. Footpath 27 comes off Hall Street directly opposite footpath 3 heading for the Essex border at the river bank. Similarly footpath 30 starts opposite the end of Bull Lane.

These two are connected together to the west of the properties along the intervening section of Hall Street by footpath 26. Further paths 22, 23, 24 and 25 fill in the space north-westwards to Westgate.

North of Westgate, footpaths 16, 17, 18 and 19 provide access around the southern parts of the parkland to Kentwell Hall, the first of these along the line of the avenue of Lime trees south of the hall.



Prevailing & Former Usage

Long Melford's former glory was during the 16th Century when it was a major centre for Suffolk's woollen cloth industry, which explains the quality of some of its timber-framed buildings and the grandeur of the Church.

Early 17th Century records show 23 yeomen there along with 7 clothiers, 3 tailors, 2 shearmen, 2 weavers and a wool comber, but later that century this was reduced to 17 yeomen, 2 clothiers and one each of the others.

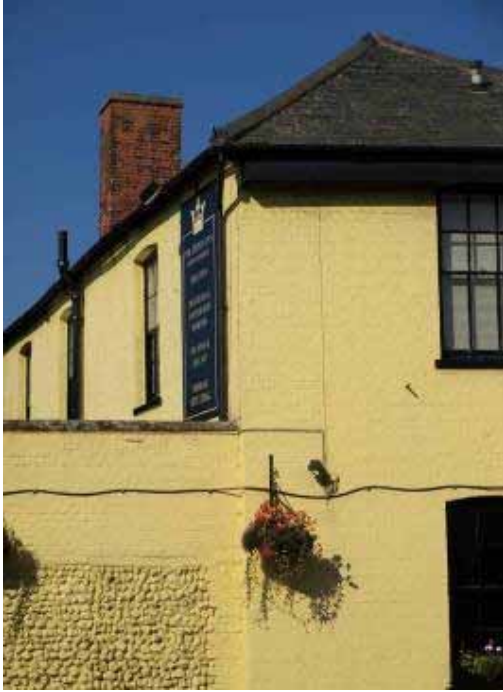
Some of the local weaving expertise was later used in the 19th Century in the production of coconut matting, as witnessed by the remaining 'Cocoanut House' in Hall Street.



In addition to these industries, Long Melford also had its share of the more usual Suffolk village agriculturally based enterprises. Directories from 1844 list 13 farmers, 6 malsters, 3 corn mills, 4 blacksmiths and a foundry.

Although no windmills remain in the parish, there was at least one west of Westgate, at the top of Windmill Hill. With the river to hand there were also watermills, notably one at the southern end of the village on the River Stour and another just south of Melford Hall on a tributary.

A very large maltings complex at the southern end of the village is now converted to flats, but this and other maltings formerly fed large quantities of their produce into the adjacent railway system for distribution.



Loss, Intrusion & Damage

With the majority of its buildings being listed, Long Melford is relatively well protected from modern intrusions.

Brick buildings covered with paint or even creepers can suffer from excessive damp and obscure the original finish to the streetscape, altering one's perception of the local vernacular.

Well meant repairs to brickwork can, if carried out in the wrong materials, such as cement mortar, cause irreparable damage to brickwork.

Boarded up buildings, such as the little ogee windowed Kentwell Lodge, lead to an air of disrepair and can result in damage to fabric if left for any length of time.



There is a risk of some erosion of traditional features on the few unlisted older buildings. Many of the houses can end up with windows not painted white as is traditional or those now used as shops, with modern shopfronts, blinds and signs applied with little regard for their host buildings.

St Catherine's Road suffers from excessive overhead wiring, contrasting with Hall Street where it was removed as part of an enhancement scheme some time ago.

Parking on areas of the green should be discouraged as cars detract from the setting of the Church and are wearing away portions of the grass gaining access.

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Tithe Map & Apportionment 1839 Long Melford Suffolk Records Office

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