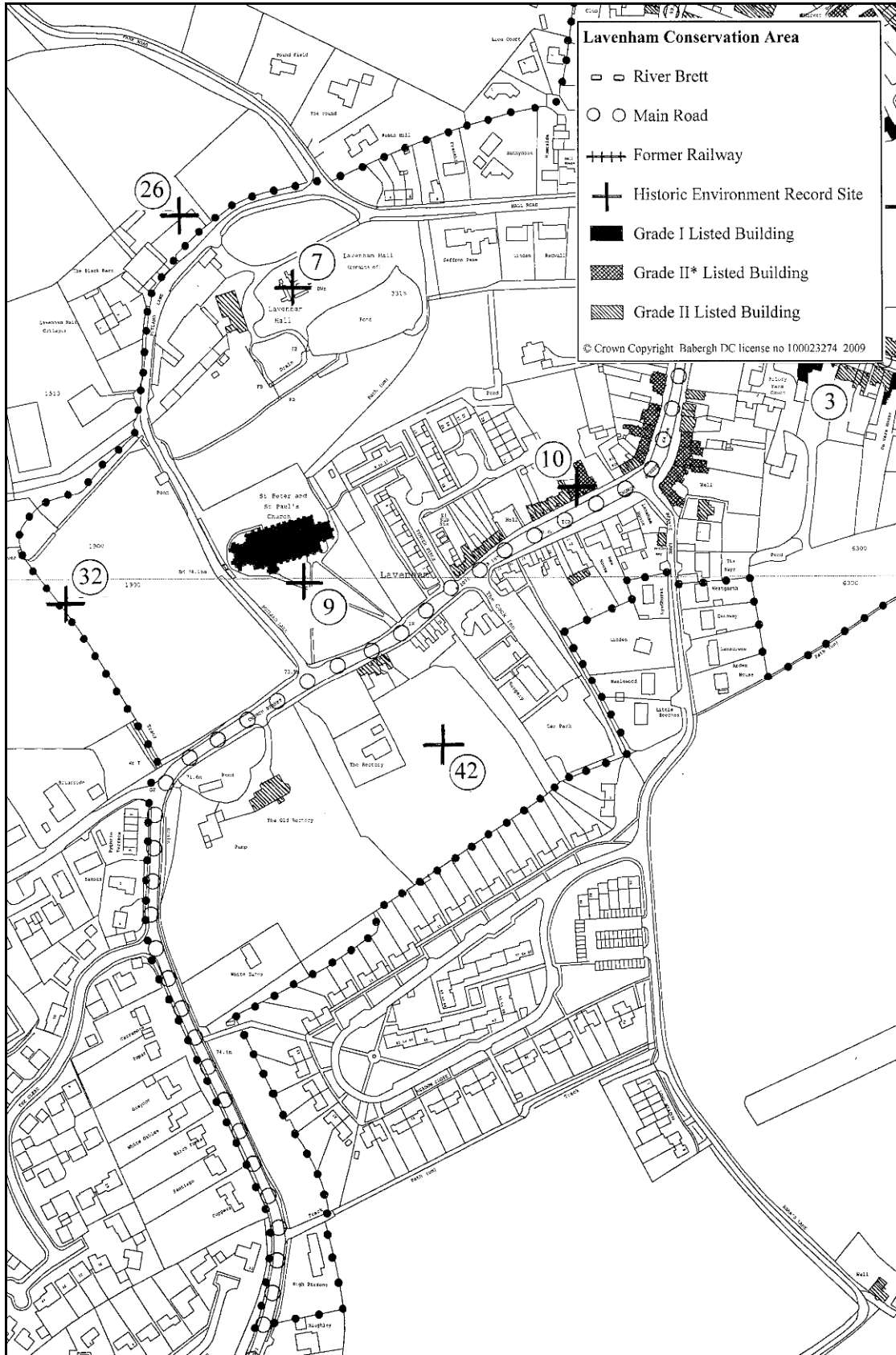




conservation area appraisal



Introduction

The conservation area in Lavenham 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 Lavenham under a number of different headings as set out in English Heritage's 'Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals' (2006).

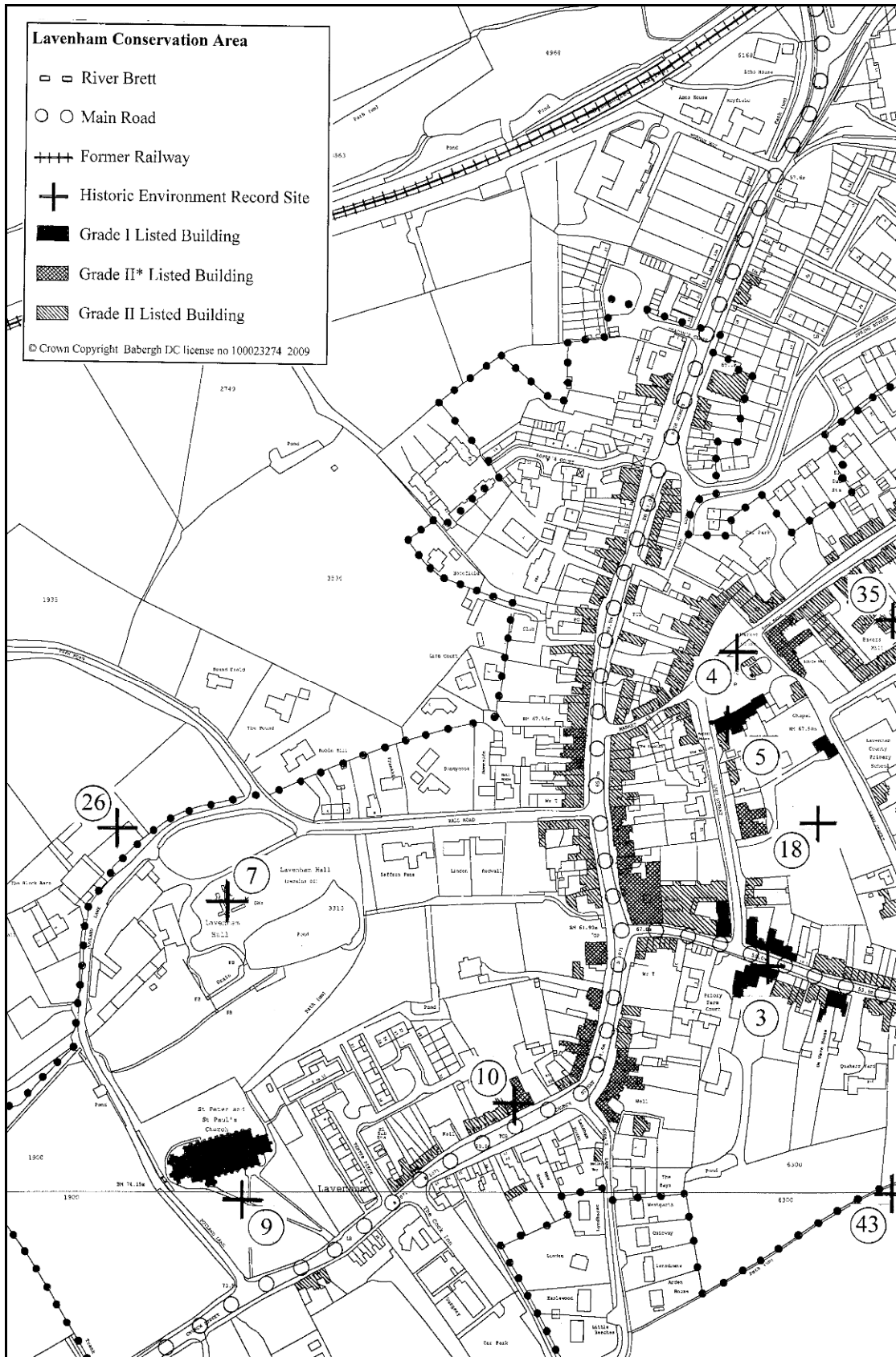
As such it is a straightforward appraisal of Lavenham's built environment in conservation terms.



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 2009.

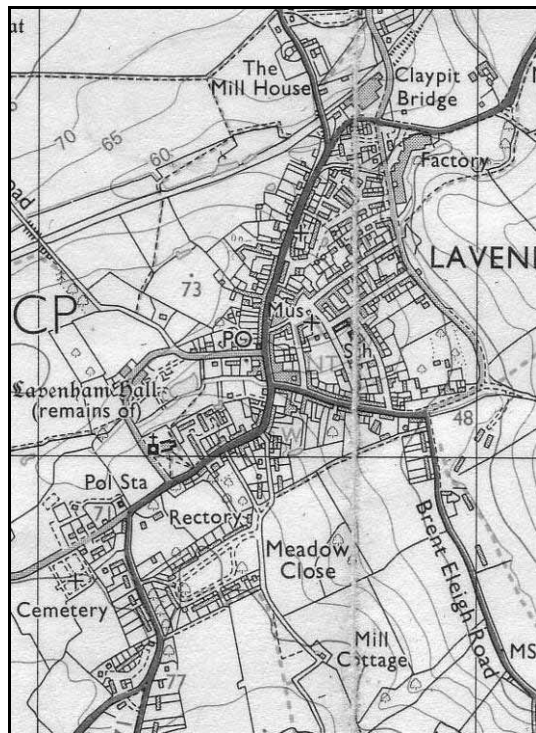


Topographical Framework

The large village of Lavenham is situated in south-west Suffolk, on the western bank of the River Brett that runs south-east from here through Hadleigh to join the Stour at Higham.

The river valley has cut down through the overlying boulder clay of 'High Suffolk' to reveal locally gravels, crags and pockets of older London Clay.

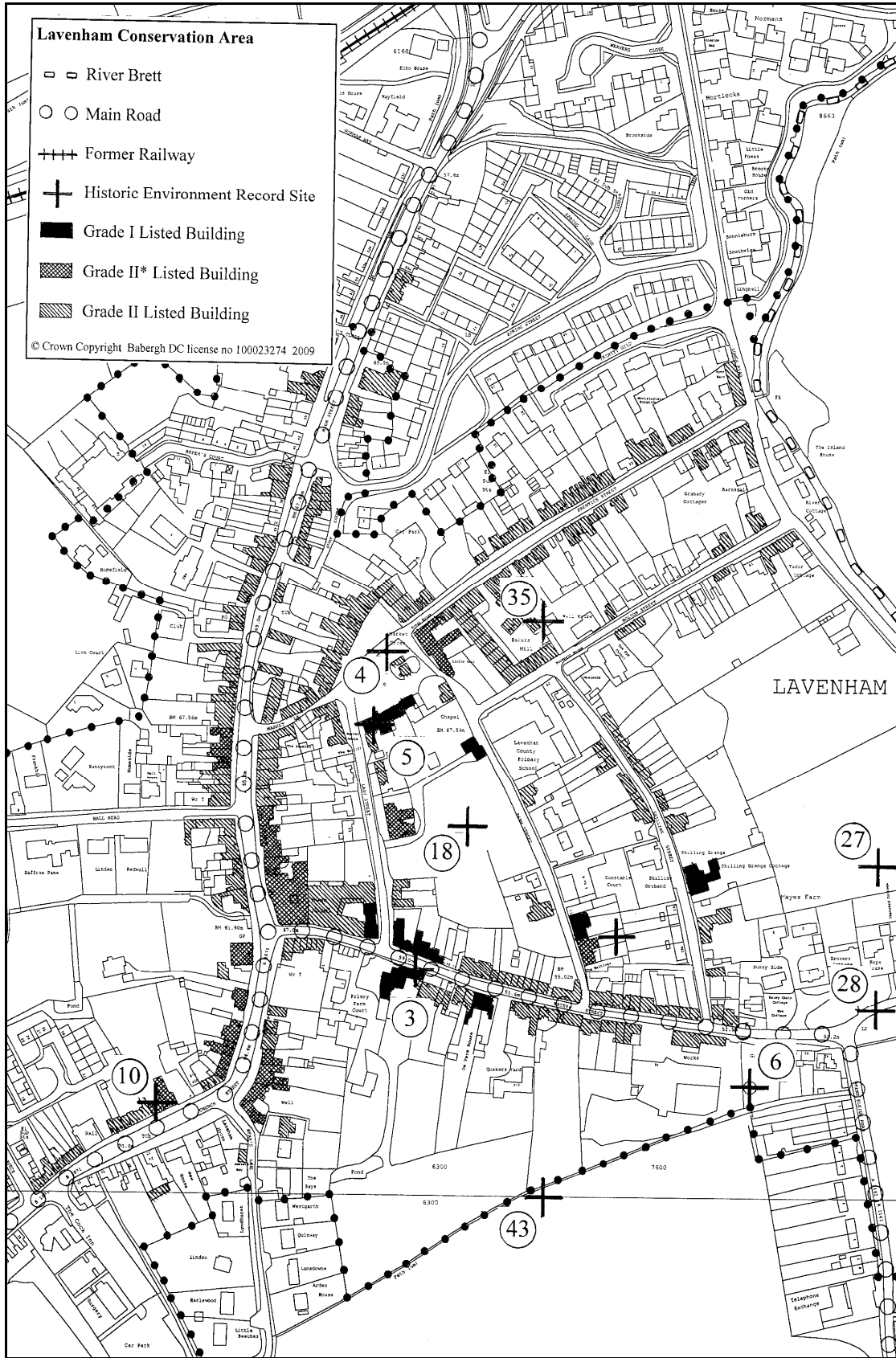
The lower parts of the village sit on the alluvial floodplain adjacent to the river from where Water Street leads westwards up a tributary valley to a T-junction with Church Street and High Street running north to south about 400 metres to the west.



The village today consists of an historic core running north-eastwards from the Church down Church Street and then a wider area between Water Street and High Street with roads running uphill to a central Market Place.

Further north, High Street becomes Bury Road, originally a branch of the Sudbury to Bury St Edmunds turnpike road. Lavenham was also at one time served by a branch railway line that ran between these same towns.

Approaching Lavenham from most directions, the 43 metre high church tower is visible from some distance.



Archaeological Significance

The Suffolk County Historic Environment Record lists about 50 archaeological features in the parish.

The earliest of these is a Bronze Age arrowhead, whilst a number of ring ditches and enclosures known from crop-marks are probably also of this age.

Representing the Iron Age there is but one 'stray find', however the Romans have left us more with a pavement, two coins and a metalwork scatter.

Medieval remains are a little more tangible in the form of the Parish Church, the culvert below Water Street, a moated site to the north-west, a well and the site of a Deer Park along with some pottery and floor tiles.



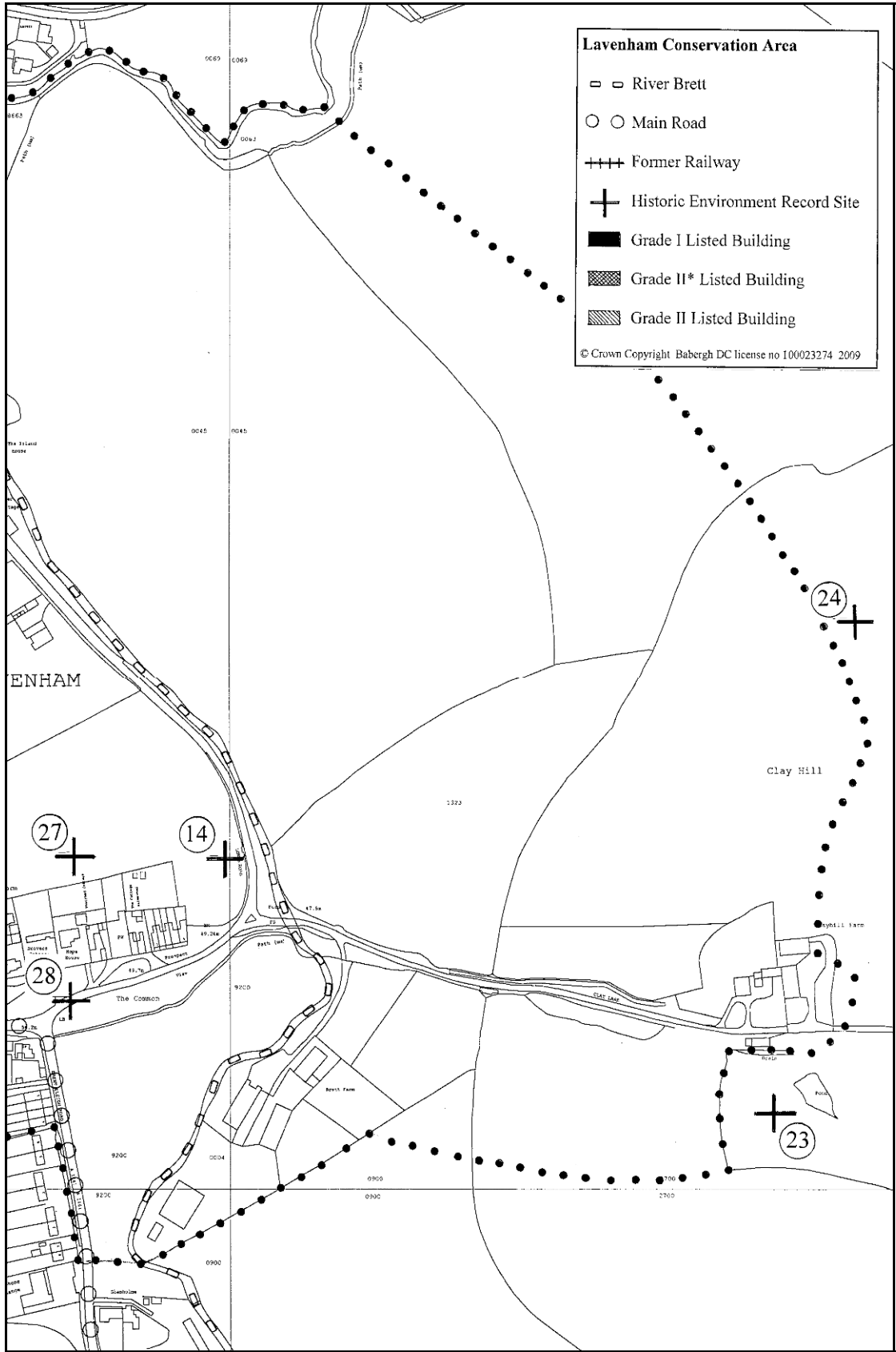
The village has two Scheduled Monuments: the Medieval Market Cross on Market Place and in the field of industrial archaeology an iron gas-holder off Water Street.

Other Post-Medieval interest is provided by the sites of a windmill, brickworks and a kiln along with a bridge and two milestones.

Lavenham was listed in the Domesday survey of 1086 as held then by Aubrey De Vere, having formerly belonged to Wulfwin a thane of King Edward's. It had a manor with a mill and woodland for 100 pigs and appears to be a land of relative plenty with two dozen cattle, 200 sheep, beehives and an 'arpent' of vines.

Lavenham ten Vlwinus teina . reg. e . p man . vi . car . terrae .
 cu fara & foca . Te & p xi . uilt . modo vii . Te & p xxiiii . bord . modo
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 ix . car hom . modo vii . & . x . ac pti . Silu . de . c . porc . Te . v . eq . in halla
 modo . i . Te xxiiii . an . modo xxv . Te c . ix . porc . modo ix . v . Te &
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 & . v . bord . Semp . ii . car . modo . i . mol . & . iii . ac pti . Te 7 p totu
 uaf x . lib . s . xv . ht . i . leg in longo . & dim in lato . & de gelto . vii . d & obol .

Wulfwin, a thane of King Edward's, held LAVENHAM as a manor;
 6 carucates of land, with full jurisdiction.
 Then and later 11 villagers, now 7; then and later 24 smallholders,
 now 38; always 6 slaves.
 Always 4 ploughs in lordship. Then and later 9 men's ploughs,
 now 7.
 Meadow, 10 acres; woodland at 100 pigs. Then 5 horses at the
 hall, now 1; then 24 cattle, now 25; then 160 pigs, now 65;
 then and always 200 sheep; then 60 goats, now 80; then 5
 beehives, now 6. 1 *arpent* of vines.
 1 Freeman who could not grant or sell, with 1 carucate of land.
 5 smallholders.
 Always 2 ploughs.
 Now 1 mill. Meadow, 3 acres.
 Value of the whole then and later £10; now [£] 15.
 It has 1 league in length and a ½ in width; 7½d in tax.



Intrinsic Quality of Buildings

Before the decline of the south Suffolk woollen cloth industry at the end of the 16th Century, Lavenham was amongst the largest cloth producers in England, the wealth of that wool trade being reflected in the abundance of timber-framed listed buildings that have survived to this day.

That survival was effected by the long economic decline that followed this boom, so that Lavenham was basically left alone and not much 'Georgianised', nor even later 'Victorianised', with the usual new brick frontages seen in many other Suffolk towns.

The quality of Lavenham's buildings is reflected in the majority of the High Street, Water Street and Market Place areas being listed grade II or II.*



Domestic, commercial and older industrial buildings all blend well with the unique historic core centred on the Market Square.

Here the timber-framed Guildhall is early 16th Century and listed grade I. Lavenham's other grade I listings are relatively numerous and include eleven other high quality timber-framed buildings along with the Church of St Peter & St Paul.



This last also reflects Lavenham's former wealth, being mainly 15th and 16th Century Perpendicular in style, with parts of the chancel 14th Century Decorated. Pevsner says of it "Lavenham church makes a perfect picture, away from the houses Its W tower is as mighty as its nave is noble".



Traditional Building Materials

The majority of buildings in the central area are of traditional construction. This is the Suffolk timber-framed vernacular of steep plaintiled roofs and gables, some with jetties, some rendered, many here with exposed straight framing designed to be seen. Timber-framing is better preserved concealed behind colour-washed render, often with pargetting features, but here much was stripped off to expose the framing as became fashionable in the 19th Century.

Whilst picturesque, this practice has consequences for the long term survival of these buildings and at some future time Lavenham is going to have to decide between conserving the fabric of its buildings or continuing the visual effect they produce with exposed framing.

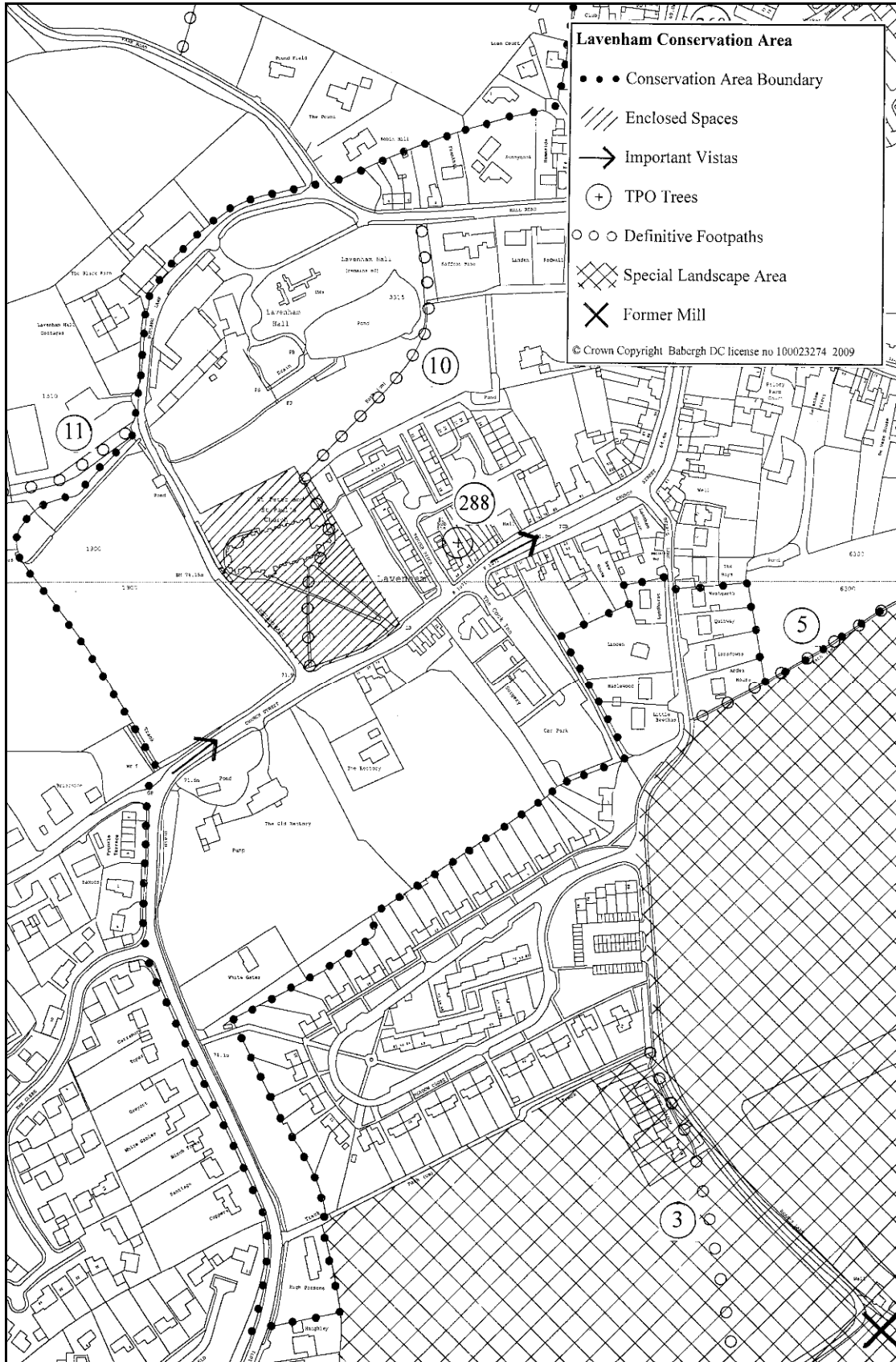


The few newer buildings are mostly local brick Victorian terraced cottages for mill workers, variously Suffolk soft reds or whites, often rendered and painted to blend in with the colour-washed local vernacular.

Other materials from Suffolk's traditional palette can be found such as traditional weather-boarding and pantiles on outbuildings and flintwork as infill paneling on brick buildings. The Church is also constructed of flint with stone dressings and has a lead roof.



Roof finishes correlate well with wall constructions, following a similar distribution. The majority of roofs are plaintiles, mostly on the older timber-framed buildings, the rest generally slated, usually on the more recent brick buildings.



Hierarchy of Spaces

The main commercial area of High Street is essentially linear in form, running southwards downhill to its junction with Water Street, into which it extends a little eastwards. The commercial area also continues southwards across the junction into Church Street, which then winds back up the other side of the valley turning westwards past the Church, before turning back south at a junction where Bridge Street Road continues westwards.

Water Street itself runs gently eastwards down the tributary valley towards the main river that runs from north to south. At a junction before the riverbank, Lower Road goes off northwards upstream, whilst the main road turns south becoming Brent Eleigh Road.



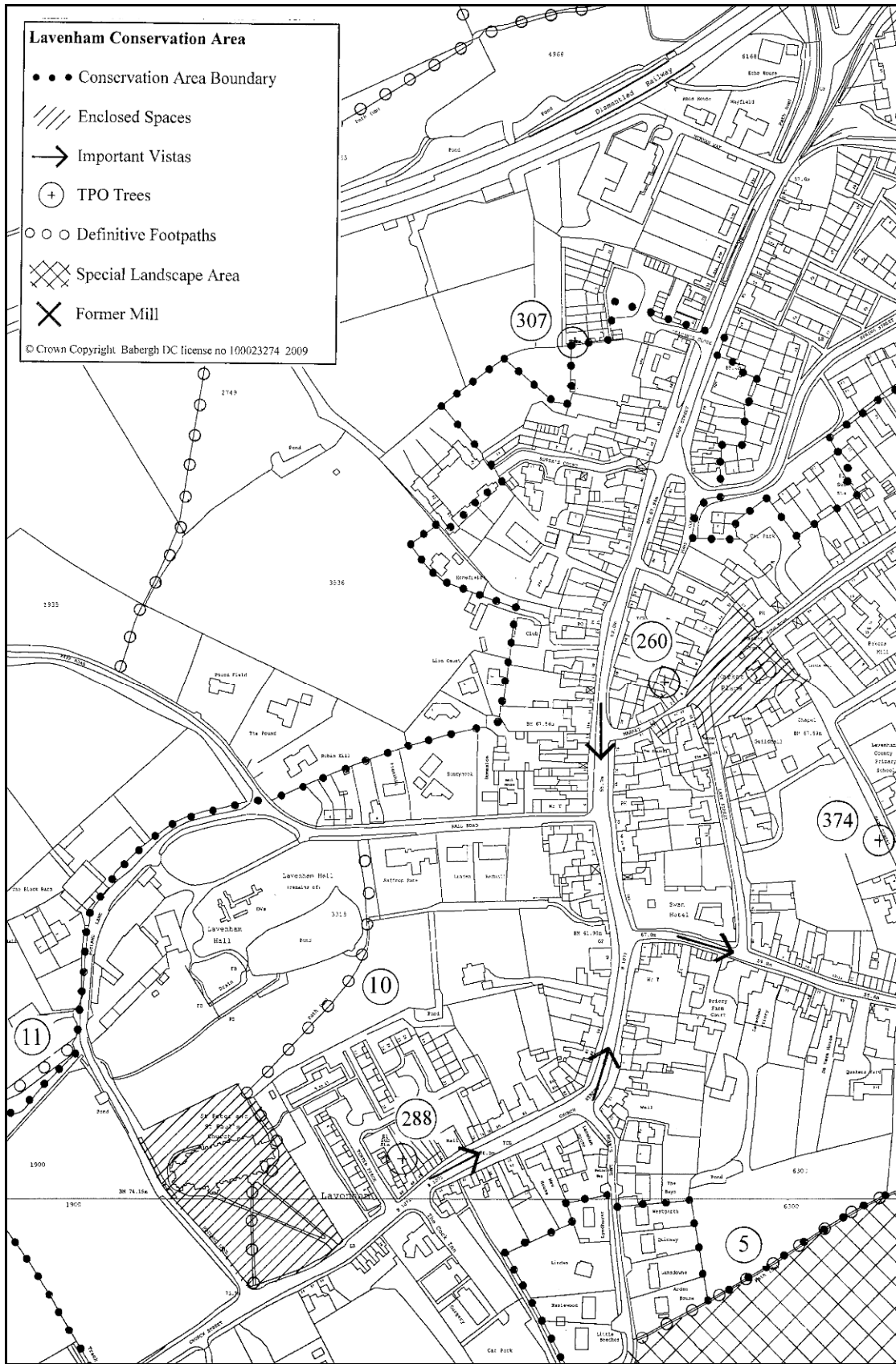
This essentially H-shaped road pattern has little development to the south, but contains the historic core of Market Place to the north. This hilltop site is reached by Lady, Barn and Shilling Streets northwards off Water Street and Bolton and Prentice Streets westwards off Lower Road.

Market Place can also be reached from High Street via Market Lane, although its existence tucked away behind is by no means obvious when in the High Street. It differs from the other more linear streets, with their houses tumbling downhill both sides, by being a large open area on the level surrounded by buildings.

Lavenham Conservation Area

- ● ● Conservation Area Boundary
- /// Enclosed Spaces
- Important Vistas
- ⊕ TPO Trees
- ○ ○ Definitive Footpaths
- ▨ Special Landscape Area
- ✕ Former Mill

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Trees & Planting

The major accessible green space within the village is the churchyard, consisting essentially of gravestones, some striking topiary bushes and grass. It has a large Deodar Cedar to the north and a few small trees on the perimeters: mainly Oak and Willow to the east and Limes to the south.

There are many other trees dotted around the village, however, mostly within and along the boundaries of private gardens. Many of these have been thought at risk in the past and are now the subjects of several Tree Preservation Orders. The earliest of these (TPO 41) was made by the former West Suffolk County Council, in 1965 well before the conservation area was designated.



This covered 135 trees spread far and wide around the village, mostly Lime, Ash, Oak, Walnut, Horse Chestnut and Elm, many of which have subsequently been removed or replaced over the years as necessary works have been allowed.

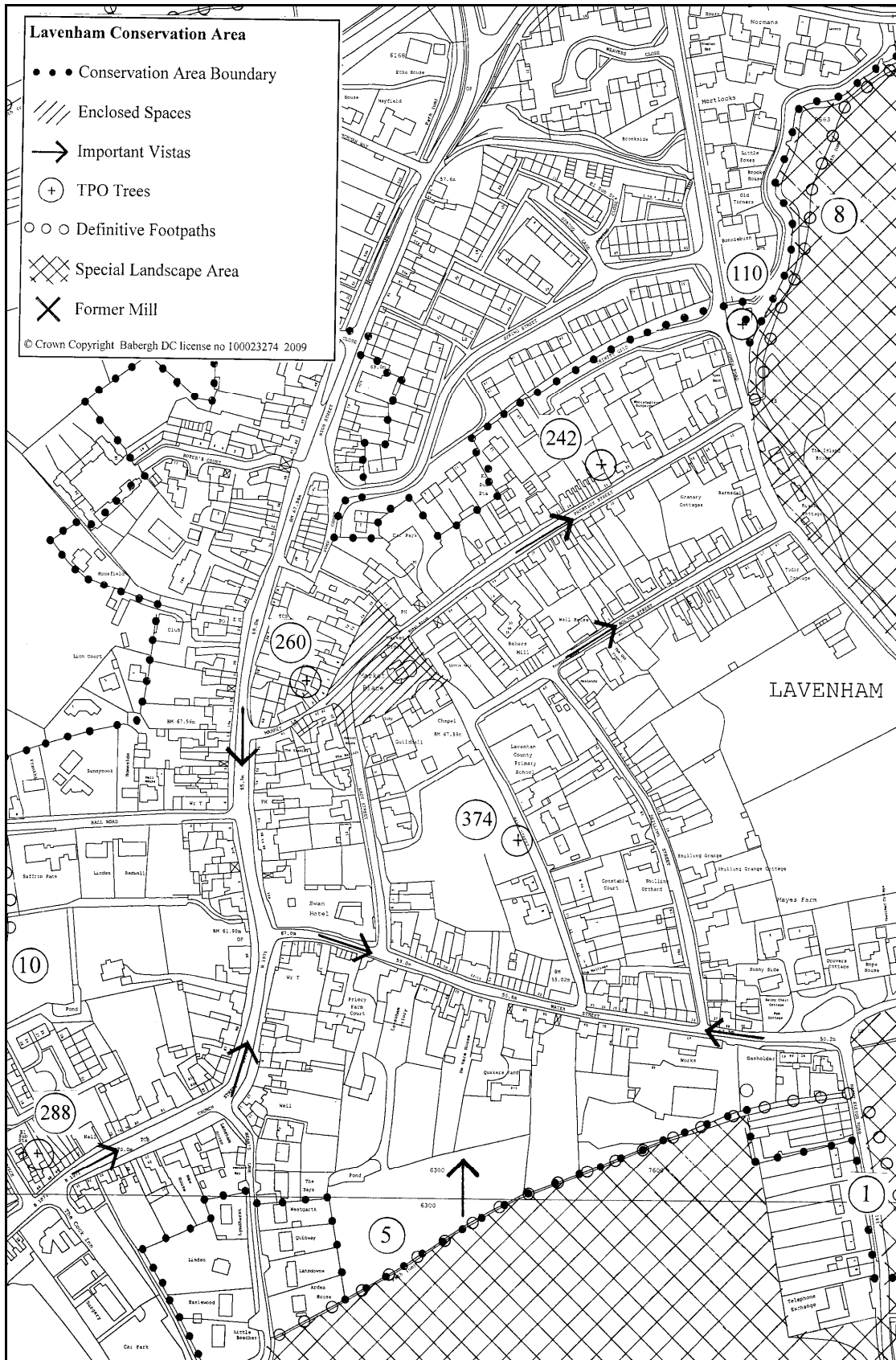
Other more recent TPO's, as shown on the maps, have covered mostly single trees in various back garden situations: Horse Chestnut (110), Scots Pine (242), Birch (260), Oak (288), Ash (307) and Lime (374).

Across the river to the east of the village, the countryside forms part of a Special Landscape Area covering the upper reaches of the River Brett.

Lavenham Conservation Area

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Relationship to Open Countryside

The most striking views of open countryside can be seen very soon after heading eastwards from Market Place via either Prentice Street or Bolton Street. As the land falls away, the fields on the opposite river bank seem almost within reach. Indeed, at the foot of Prentice Street, definitive footpath 8 crosses the river before following the eastern bank upstream.

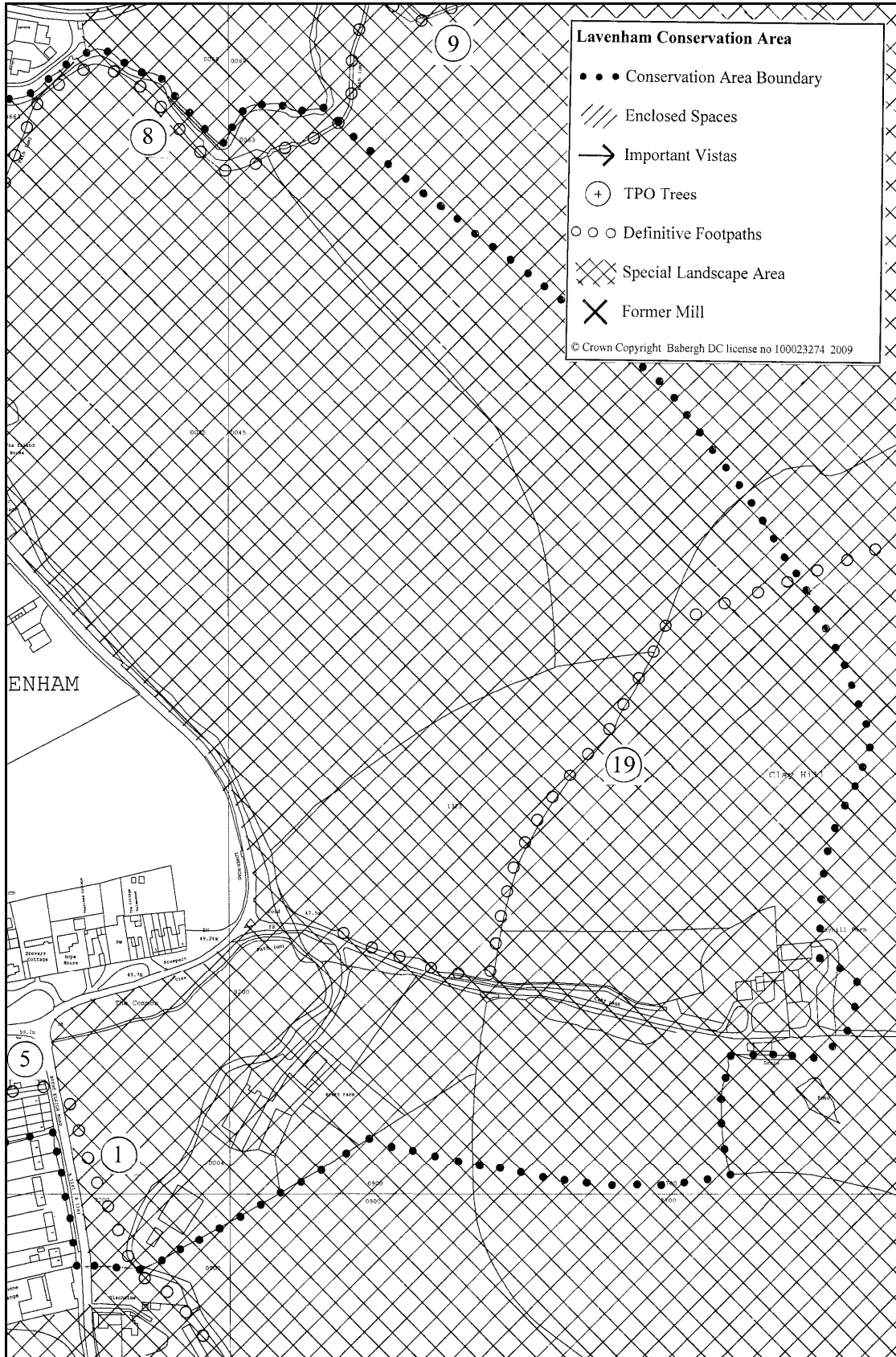
Elsewhere around Lavenham there is a much more town-like urban atmosphere, with buildings mostly built right up to the back of footpath. The closely spaced parallel streets leading up to the Market Place mean that most plots there have more development at their rears.



However High Street to its west and Water Street to its south both have countryside at the rear of properties. Access to this countryside west of High Street can easily be gained by footpath 12 running from Bury Road south-westwards to Park Road and by footpath 10 from Hall Road south to the Churchyard.

Similarly south of Water Street footpath 5 links Bear's Lane eastwards to Brent Eleigh Road. This last path in particular gives good views back into the medieval heart of the village, with the rears of the many listed buildings on Water Street visible against a backdrop of the rising ground of Lady, Barn and Shilling Streets to the north.

Further out a number of other footpaths run radially away from Lavenham in various directions.



Prevailing & Former Usage

16th Century timber-framed houses, built mostly for those in the wool trade, are to be found not only in High Street, but continuing into Church Street and down Water Street as well.

In the years of decline that followed, these have in many cases been adapted to commercial use whilst in Prentice Street and Shilling Street the houses remain essentially domestic in character to this day.

The decline, however, was not a total disaster and the 18th and 19th Centuries brought with them some expansion of industrial areas mainly down Water Street with the gasworks and around the railway station to the north.



The tithe apportionment of 1842 confirms that life went on and indicates a wool warehouse, windmill sites, a water mill, areas for hop growing and ozier beds, maltings and a kiln, very much the usual agriculturally based industries found around many a small Suffolk town.

Two windmill sites have left their mark: Mill House on Bury Road, just north of the railway, where the original post mill was replaced by a brick tower in 1830, demolished in 1921, and Mill Cottage in Bear's Lane south of the village where another post mill stood that was demolished before 1883.



Losses & Possible Gains

Lavenham's slow decline from thriving market town and important industrial and manufacturing centre has in fact been its salvation, making it the gem in Suffolk's crown of surviving relics of the wool trade. Had things been better economically, so much more would have been lost forever.

There are a few modern buildings in Lavenham, mostly on infill sites, some of which are slightly incongruous. A group of infill houses on Bolton Street are not really up to the standards now expected.

The sheltered housing bungalows at Tenter's Piece are not suitably traditional in their style, detailing or materials for such a visible site so near the Church.



Otherwise intrusions and damage are mostly of a minor nature. There are a few uPVC windows and some unsuitable render and paint finishes on some of the unlisted buildings. There is also some questionable use of colour on both these and some of the timber-framed buildings.

Away from the High Street, there remain extensive areas of visually intrusive overhead wiring, which should be put underground when resources permit.

There are also problems with large lorries squeezing through the narrow streets perilously near the jetties of overhanging listed buildings. These present a threat to the listed buildings, cause congestion and adversely impact on the character and appearance of the area.

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Committee 14 January 2010*