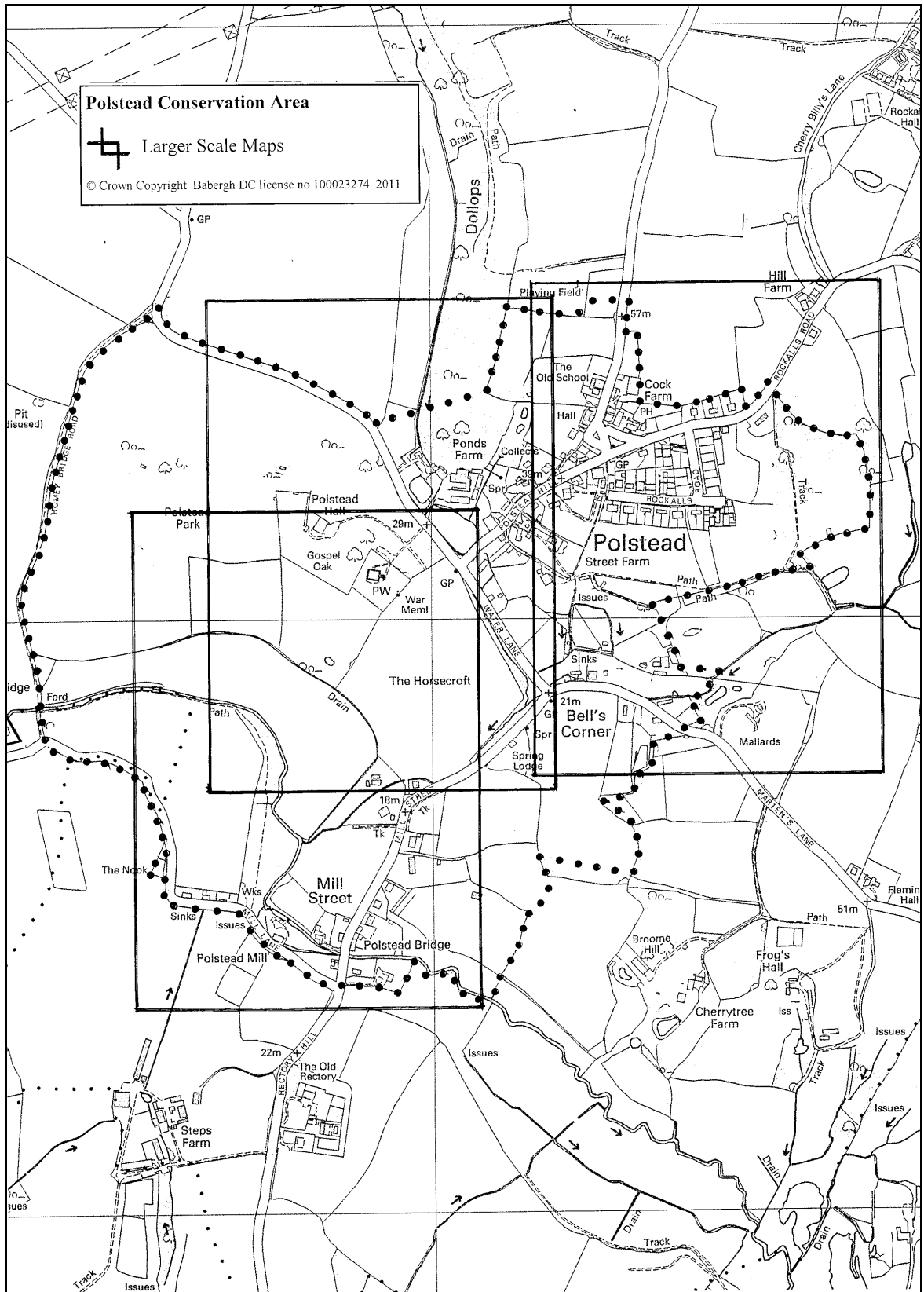




*conservation area appraisal*



**Polstead Conservation Area**  
 Larger Scale Maps  
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# Introduction

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

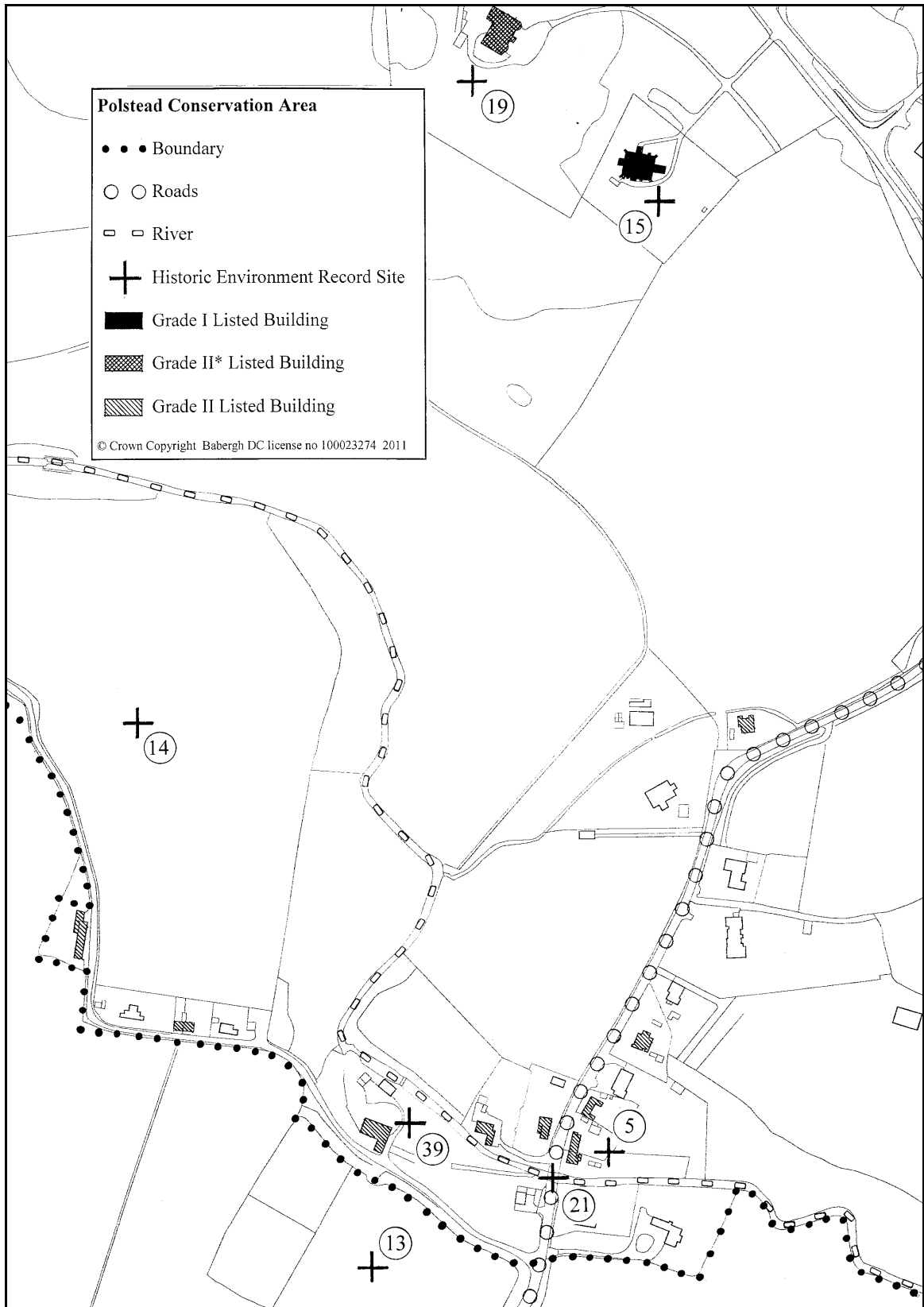
*As such it is a straightforward appraisal of Polstead's built environment in conservation terms.*



*As a document it is neither prescriptive nor overly descriptive, but more a demonstration of 'quality of place', sufficient to inform those considering changes 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.*



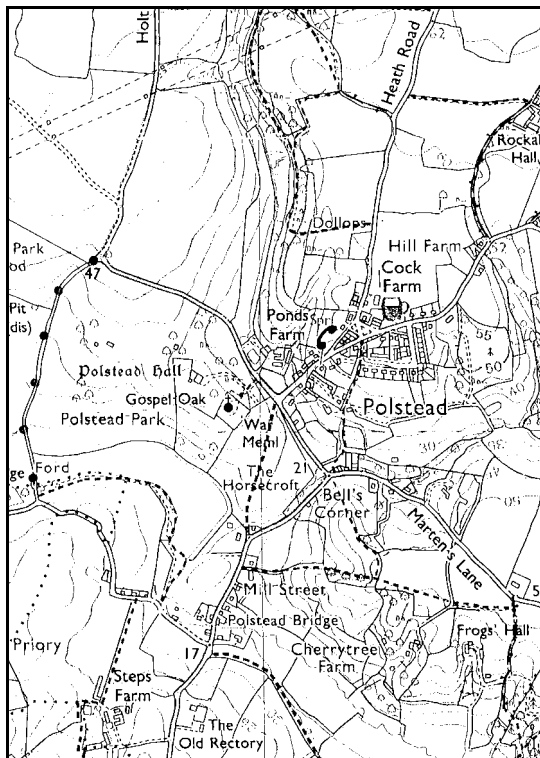
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# Topographical Framework

*The village of Polstead lies in south Suffolk about four miles south-west of the market town of Hadleigh. The settlement runs from around a rectangular green on a hilltop above the eastern bank of the River Box down into the adjoining valley and across the river itself at Mill Street.*

*Mill Lane forms the south-western boundary of the conservation area and at its western end approaching Homey Bridge, a small area south of the river is actually in Stoke by Nayland parish.*

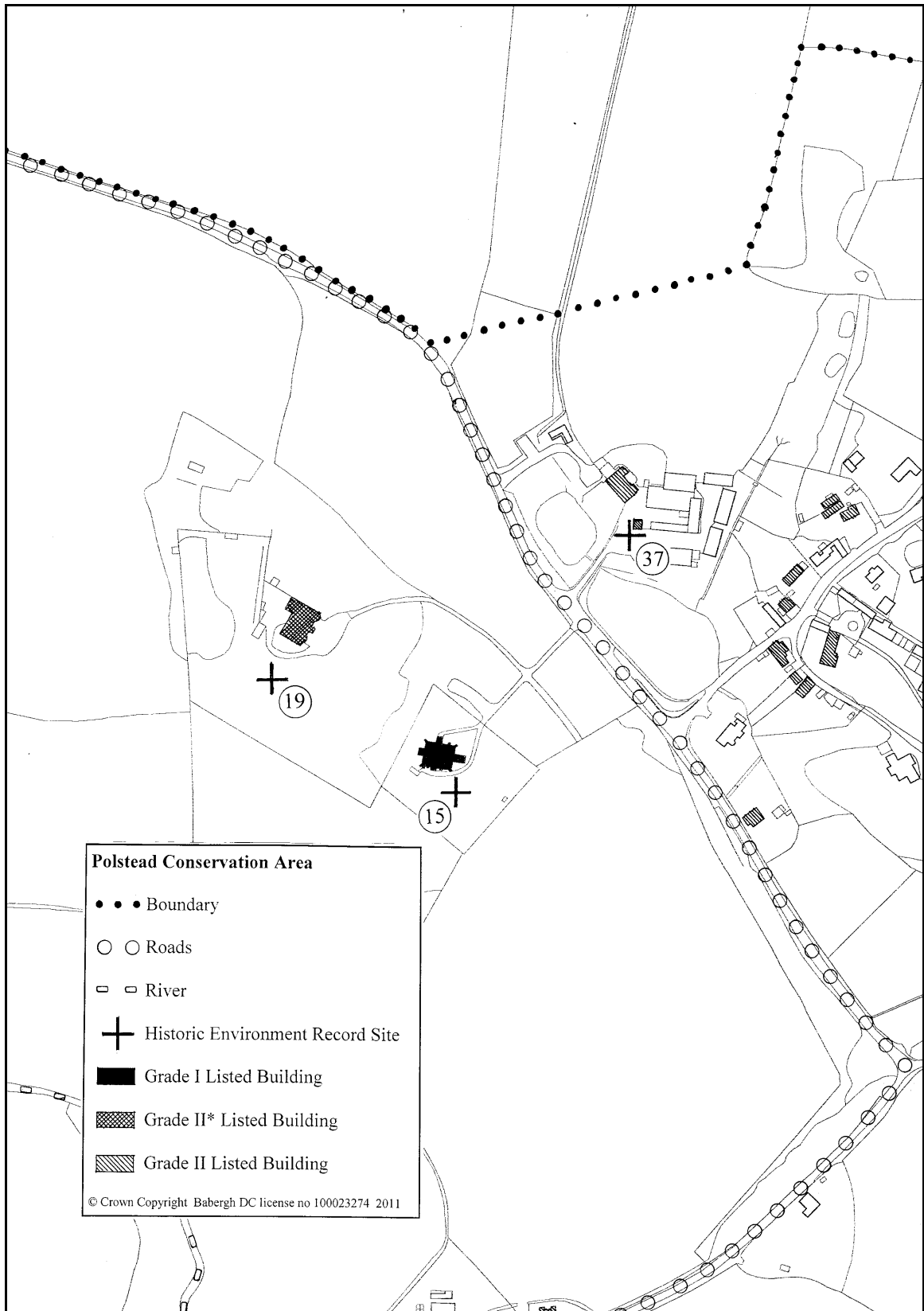
*The hilltop at 55 metres above Ordnance Datum, is some 40 metres above the river level. The River Box continues from here south-eastwards to its conjunction with the River Stour some three miles downstream.*



*Polstead is not served by any main roads, being some five miles distant from the main A12 Ipswich to Colchester route and two miles south of the A1071 Ipswich to Sudbury road.*

*The nearest railway stations are at Colchester and Manningtree, at the head of the River Stour's estuary, both on the main Ipswich to London line of 1846.*

*Polstead is for the most part sited on the overlying boulder clays of High Suffolk, but the river has cut down through this and the glacial sands and gravels of the Crag deposits immediately beneath and into the underlying strata of London Clay. Like the rest of Suffolk, all of this is ultimately underlain by a great thickness of Chalk.*



# Archaeological Significance

*Polstead has forty or so entries for the parish in Suffolk's County Historic Environment Record. The oldest of these is a Palaeolithic hand axe and also included are five different sites which have yielded seven Neolithic flint or stone axes.*

*Probably either Neolithic or Bronze Age, but shown as undated, there are also a number of ring ditches and unexplained cropmarks or enclosures. Evidence of some Bronze Age settlement was discovered in the recent dig where the Churchyard was to be extended.*

*The Iron Age has left a number of equally mysterious 'black patches' and a Belgic cemetery, followed in turn by some Roman and Saxon metalwork finds and a coin hoard.*



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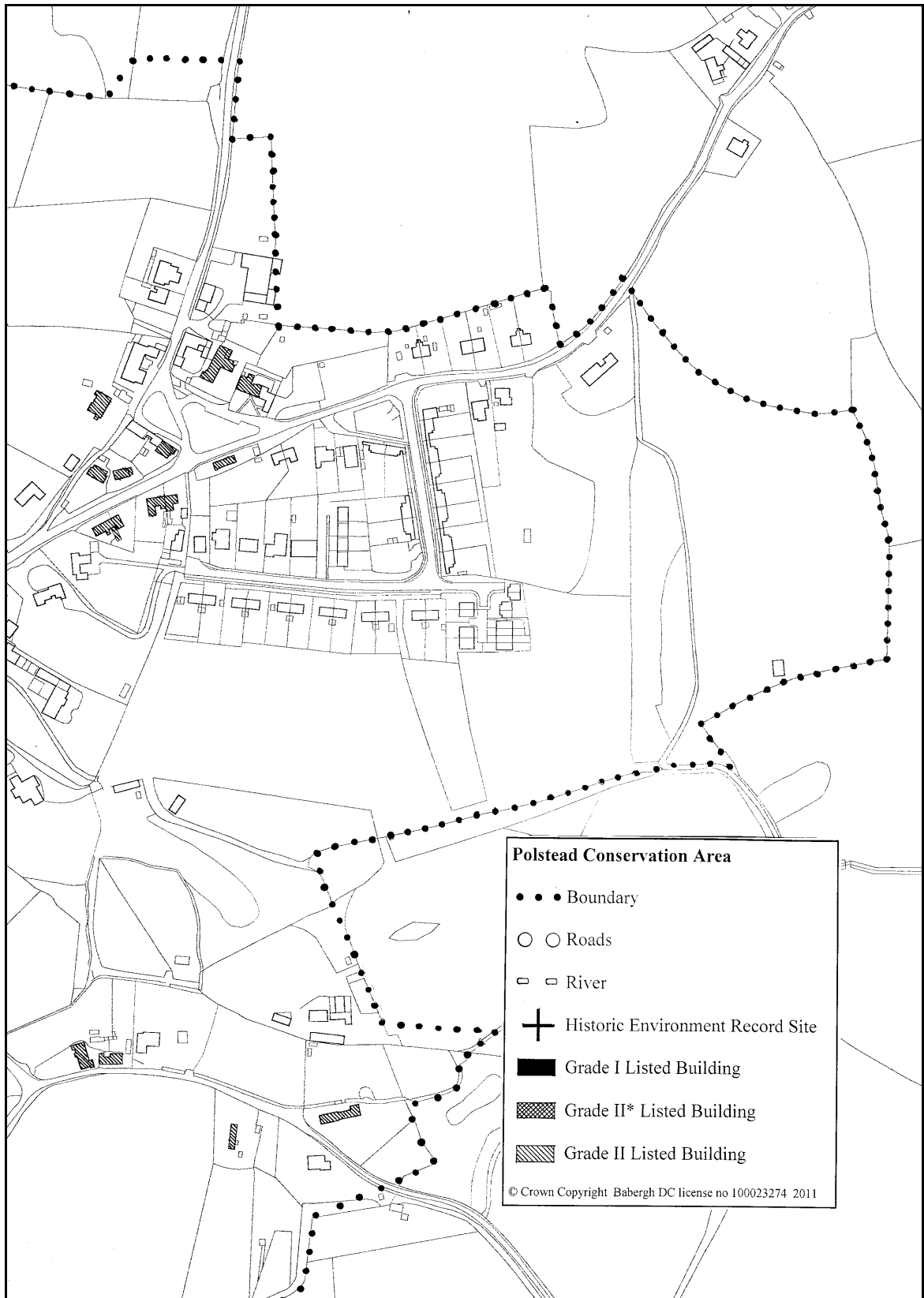
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Robert, Swein's father, also held POLSTEAD before 1066 as a manor;  
4 carucates of land, with the jurisdiction.  
Then 26 villagers, now 21; then 36 smallholders, now 30; always  
1 slave.  
Then and always 2 ploughs in lordship; then 15 men's ploughs,  
now 9.  
Always 1 mill. Woodland, 80 pigs; meadow, 31 acres. Now 8  
horses at the hall; now 28 cattle; now 40 pigs; now 150 sheep.  
Value then £10, now £12.  
It has 8 furlongs in length and 4 in width; 20d in tax, whoever  
holds there.

*There are some scatter finds, a couple of moated sites and the Church and graveyard all listed as of Medieval date. Undated but probably contemporary there are several remnant patches of ancient woodland.*

*Later entries of Post Medieval date include Polstead Hall and Park, a metalwork scatter, the dovecote at Polstead Ponds, the watermill and a pair of bridges.*

*The Domesday survey of 1086 lists Polstead as held by Swein of Essex, whose father Robert had held the manor prior to 1066. The holding included woodland for 80 pigs, indicative of a wood pasture economy, a meadow of 31 acres and a mill, which at that time would have been water powered.*





# *Intrinsic Quality of Buildings*

*Situated within Polstead Park, west of the main settlement, the Church of St Mary is the only grade I listed building. Dating back to the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, much of it is 14<sup>th</sup> Century of flint with stone dressings and a lead roof. Internally there is some tufa blockwork and Norman brickwork, said by Pevsner to probably be the 'earliest surviving English bricks'. Whilst forty five 'superstitious pictures' are said to have been destroyed there in 1643 by William Dowsing's puritanical vandals, a small fragment of wall painting of a bishop survives on the north wall of the nave..*

*Nearby and listed at grade II\* is Polstead Hall, with a 16<sup>th</sup> Century core and wall paintings. This was extensively remodelled in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries in white brick, now rendered, with a slate roof.*



*Listed at grade II, and now converted to residential use, Polstead Mill was formerly timber-framed and rendered, but has a 19<sup>th</sup> Century casing of red brick with black weather-boarding to the gable with its lucam and a mansard roof in plaintiles.*

*Another non-domestic grade II listed building is the dovecote adjoining Polstead Ponds farmhouse, in red brick with a pyramidal plaintiled roof.*

*Polstead's other listed buildings consist mainly of grade II houses and cottages, mostly timber-framed and rendered with roofs of thatch or plaintile.*



# *Traditional Building Materials*

*Polstead's older buildings are for the most part of timber-framed construction with render covering the frame in the usual Suffolk manner rather than exposed as was usually reserved for higher status buildings. Occasionally buildings of lower status have been stripped back to show off less good framing.*

*A number of timber-framed buildings identifiable by their steep roofs have been re-fronted in brick, both the local soft 'Suffolk Red' and the harder 'Suffolk White', the latter probably sourced from Sudbury.*

*Red brick is also notably used in a number of boundary walls around the area, to a common design 9" thick with half round copings.*

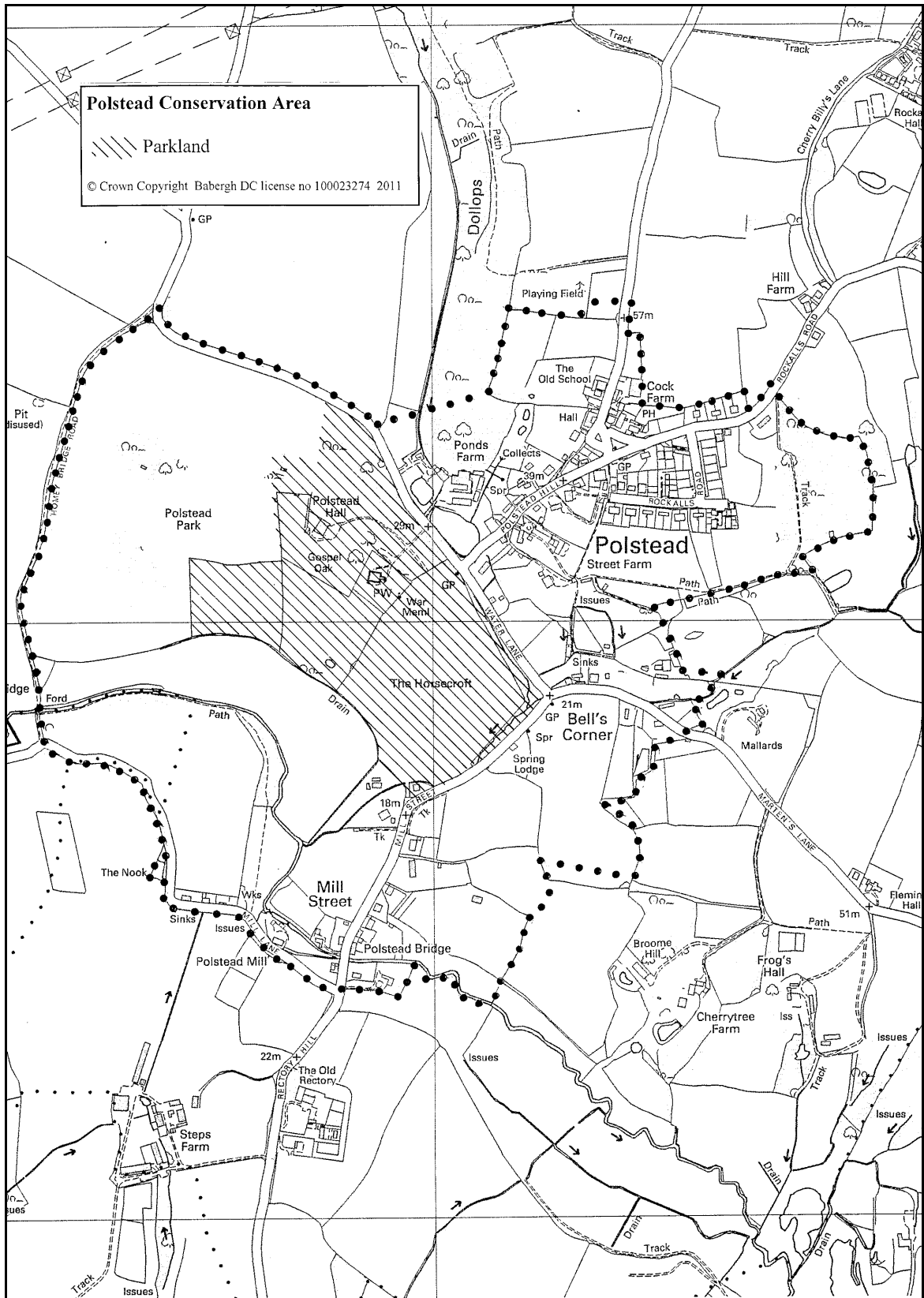


*Other wall materials include weather-boarding, which can be found in both the white and black varieties.*

*Thatched roofs remain common around the village and where replaced it is usually with plaintile or occasionally with pantile or slate.*

*In addition to thatch and plaintile, slate and pantile roofs also make an appearance on more recent buildings, extensions and outbuildings. The Victorian School buildings are one such with a slate roof above local red brick walls with blue brick detailing.*

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



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# Hierarchy of Spaces

*Although there are several outlying hamlets such as Whitestreet Green and Polstead Heath within the greater parish of Polstead, the most dense part of the settlement is that clustered up Polstead Hill east of Polstead Ponds and around the rectangular green on the hilltop, this last a Registered Village Green.*

*For the most part one plot deep, development has been augmented immediately south-east of the green by the more recent estate at Rockalls Road, which fills some of the space just off the summit on the south facing hillside.*

*The foot of Polstead Hill forms a T-junction with Water Lane, with the lower and largest pond filling in the upstream side to the north-west.*

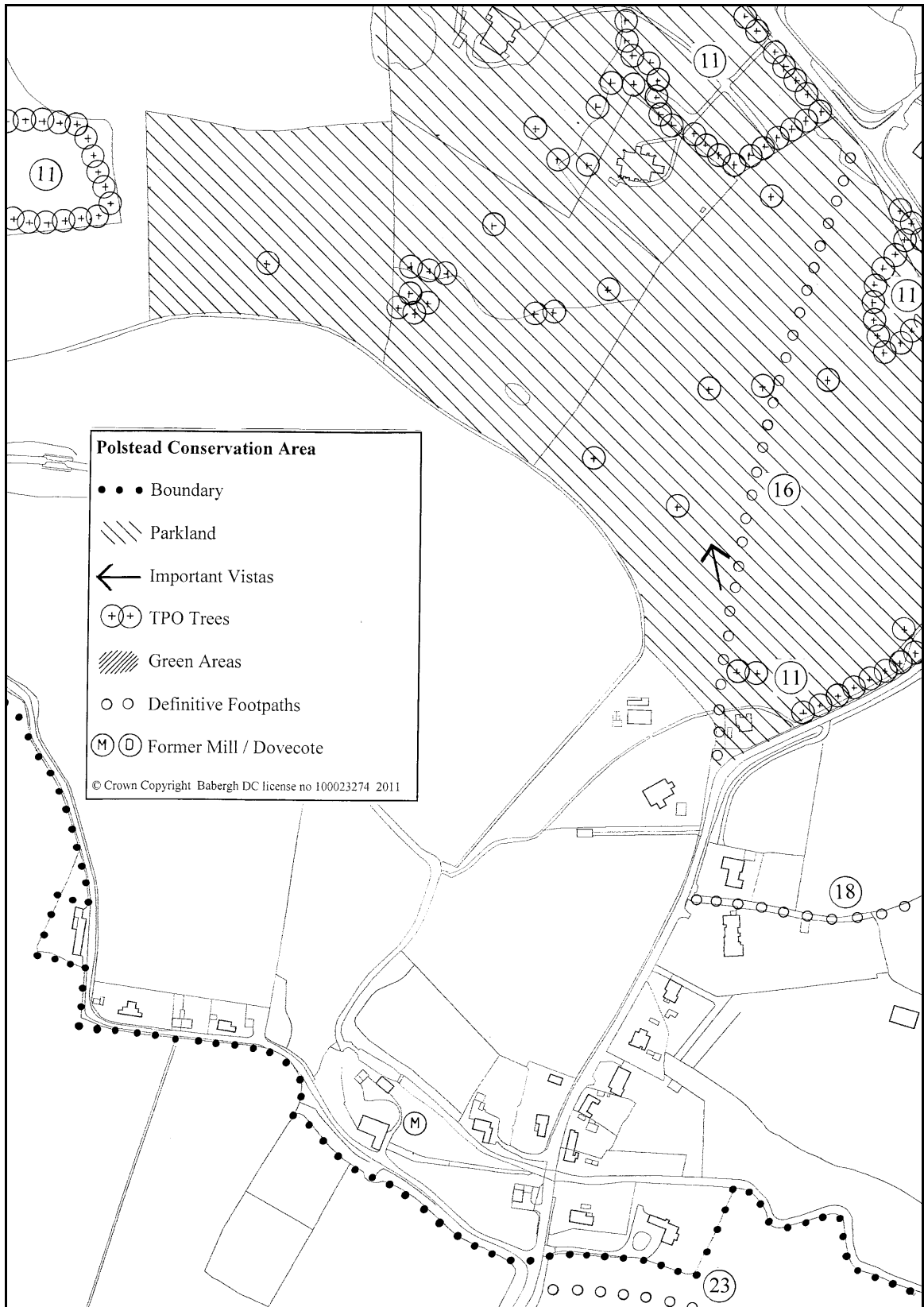


*Water Lane itself continues to the south-east to Bell's Corner, from where Marten's Lane with a few scattered houses, heads east up the valley below the Rockalls Road estate.*

*South-west from Bell's Corner is Mill Street, the far end of which around Polstead Bridge is more built up again, albeit only one plot deep, and could be considered a separate hamlet.*

*West of Water Lane and north of Mill Street and the River Box, the higher ground is for the most part Polstead Park, containing both the Hall and Church in their parkland settings. The more open parkland south of the Church allows good views of this across the valley from the hilltop south of Mill Street.*





# Trees & Planting

*Polstead's main areas of woodland are either side of the valley to the north of the settlement. On the west side there is extensive tree cover in and particularly around Polstead Hall's parkland whilst on the valley's east bank above Polstead Ponds, Dollops Wood stretches away to the north.*

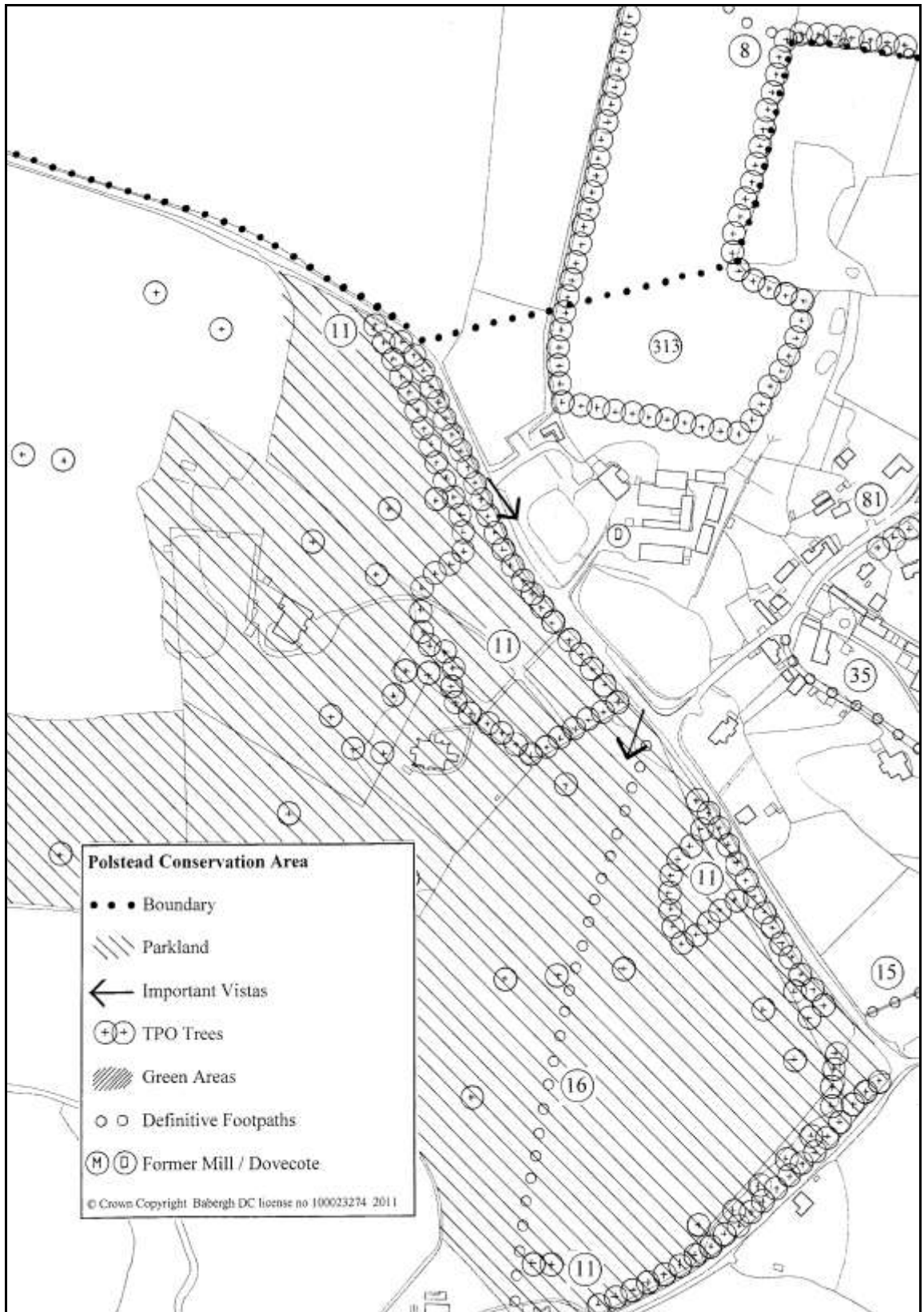
*Parts of the parkland area were made the subject of an early Tree Preservation Order (no.11) by the former West Suffolk County Council. This concentrated on various specimen trees, groups and many of the strips that form the parkland boundary. All of this is now within the conservation area.*



*In 1973 Dollops Wood with its deciduous Beech, Oak and Alder in its wet valley setting was also made the subject of a Tree Preservation Order (no.313) by the same council. Only the southern tip of this extensive area of mature trees is actually within the conservation area.*



*Most other trees in Polstead are along the lines of hedges or roads especially in the valleys, such as the fine Monterey Pine at Bell's Corner. A few of these trees have also needed protection. Babergh District Council's TPO 81 covers a group of young Elm trees adjoining Polstead Hill, but these may have now succumbed to disease. Other protected trees are mainly in the outlying hamlets of Polstead Heath or Hadleigh Heath to the north.*



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# *Relationship to Open Countryside*

*Polstead and its adjoining valley of the River Box form here the northern edge of the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.*

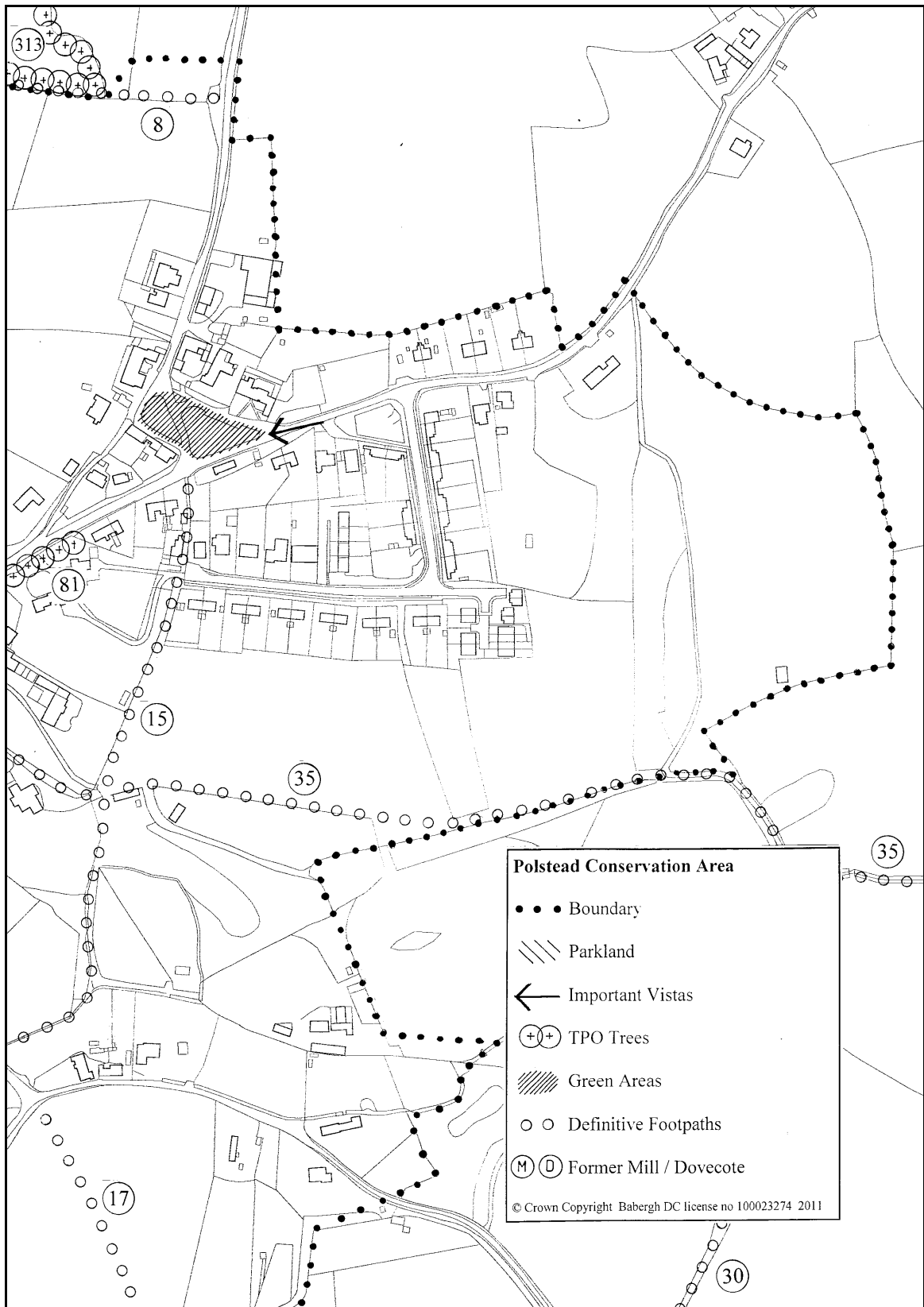
*The majority of development there is but one plot deep, so that except for the southern side of the green and parts of Rockalls Road behind, the countryside is immediately to hand at the rear of most properties.*

*Away from the more built up part, the countryside dominates with fields and parkland containing a scattering of buildings mostly set within the valleys.*



*Routes out from the central green are for the most part radial in nature with Rockalls Road to the east, Heath Road to the north and Polstead Hill dropping down to the south-west. Where the latter meets Water Lane, one can continue in the same direction on definitive footpath 16 across the parkland south of the Church to Mill Street.*

*South of the green, footpath 15 drops down the hill to Bell's Corner, crossing footpath 35 hugging the contours halfway down. From Bell's Corner this route proceeds up the hill opposite as footpath 17, which further south meets footpath 18 at a T-junction. To the west this last drops back into the valley at Mill Street.*



**Polstead Conservation Area**

- Boundary
- /// Parkland
- ← Important Vistas
- ⊕⊕ TPO Trees
- /// Green Areas
- ○ Definitive Footpaths
- (M) (D) Former Mill / Dovecote

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# Prevailing & Former Usage

*Polstead played a small part in Suffolk's woollen cloth industry of the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries, as testified to by records from the early 17<sup>th</sup> Century indicating 12 yeomen, 5 husbandmen and one each of miller, blacksmith, basketmaker, clothier and tailor amongst those living there.*

*By the later 17<sup>th</sup> Century this had changed to 12 yeomen, 3 husbandmen and one each of miller, carpenter, clerk, clothier, say weaver and weaver.*

*In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, directories show a more general agricultural basis to the village economy. There were then 18 farmers, 2 joiner/wheelwrights, a blacksmith, a miller and 6 shoemakers along with a number of shopkeepers.*



*The tithe map of 1842 paints a very similar picture, confirming the former existence of the cloth industry with an entry for 'Winding Field'.*

*'Osier Swards Plantation', 'Dove House Meadow', 'Mill Meadow' and 'Hop Ground Meadow' give clues to other agriculturally based undertakings, whilst 'Gravel Pit Field', 'Marble Pit', 'Clay Pits' and 'Kiln Field' show the diversity of the various extractive industries.*

*There is still a dovecote at Polstead Ponds Farm and the watermill building off Mill Street at one time had a windmill on higher ground just to the north.*

*Whilst farming still continues, the village nowadays is more of a dormitory with a pub, village hall and small shop.*





# Losses & Possible Gains

*Polstead does suffer from some intrusive modern development, which includes the use of non-traditional forms and materials such as uPVC windows, concrete roof tiles or brown stained timber, inappropriate in a conservation area.*

*The houses on Rockalls Road appear to have been built with a cheap and rather variably coloured brick, as if they were to have been rendered. Finishing the job and then painting, or even just painting, would render them a little more in keeping with the local vernacular.*

*The reverse is true for some period buildings where good local brickwork has been overpainted, perhaps unwisely as this can lead to potential damp problems.*



*There are also places where the requirements of the motor car have led to unsightly garages or rather wide driveways that locally erode any sense of enclosure.*

*Overhead wiring, providing both power and telephones to homes, is intrusive particularly around Polstead Hill leading up to the green. The pole-mounted transformer there should be placed out of sight and the wiring put underground if the opportunity arises.*



# References & Further Reading

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*This Appraisal adopted as  
Supplementary Planning Guidance by  
Babergh District Council Strategy  
Committee 14 June 2012*