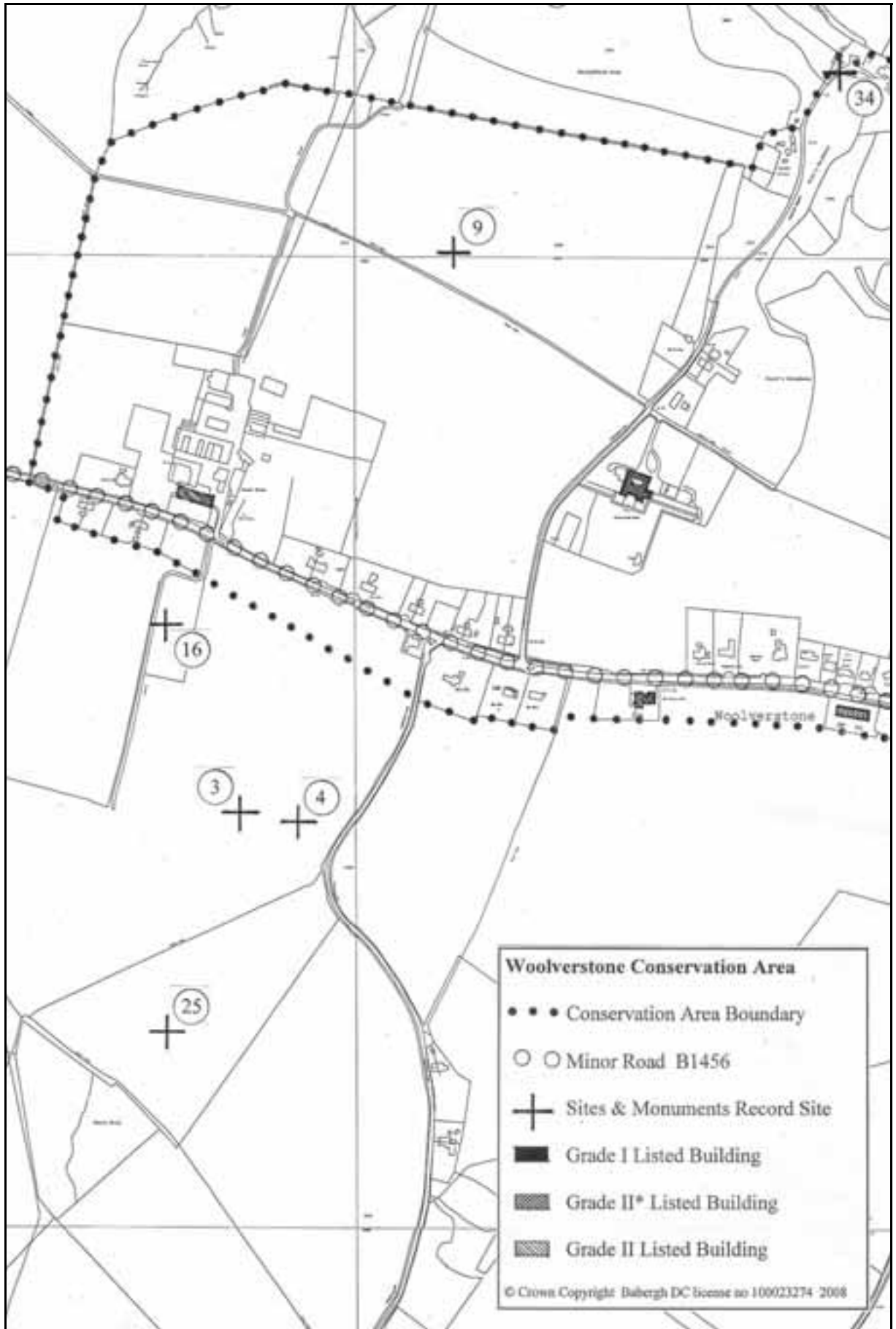


Woolverstone

conservation area appraisal



Woolverstone Conservation Area

- • • Conservation Area Boundary
- ○ Minor Road B1456
- ⊕ Sites & Monuments Record Site
- Grade I Listed Building
- ▨ Grade II* Listed Building
- ▩ Grade II Listed Building

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Introduction

The conservation area in Woolverstone was designated by Babergh District Council in 1989.

The Council has a duty to review its conservation area designations from time to time, however this appraisal has been commissioned by Woolverstone Parish Council to expedite the review.

This appraisal examines Woolverstone under a number of different headings as set out in English Heritage's new 'Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals' (2006).

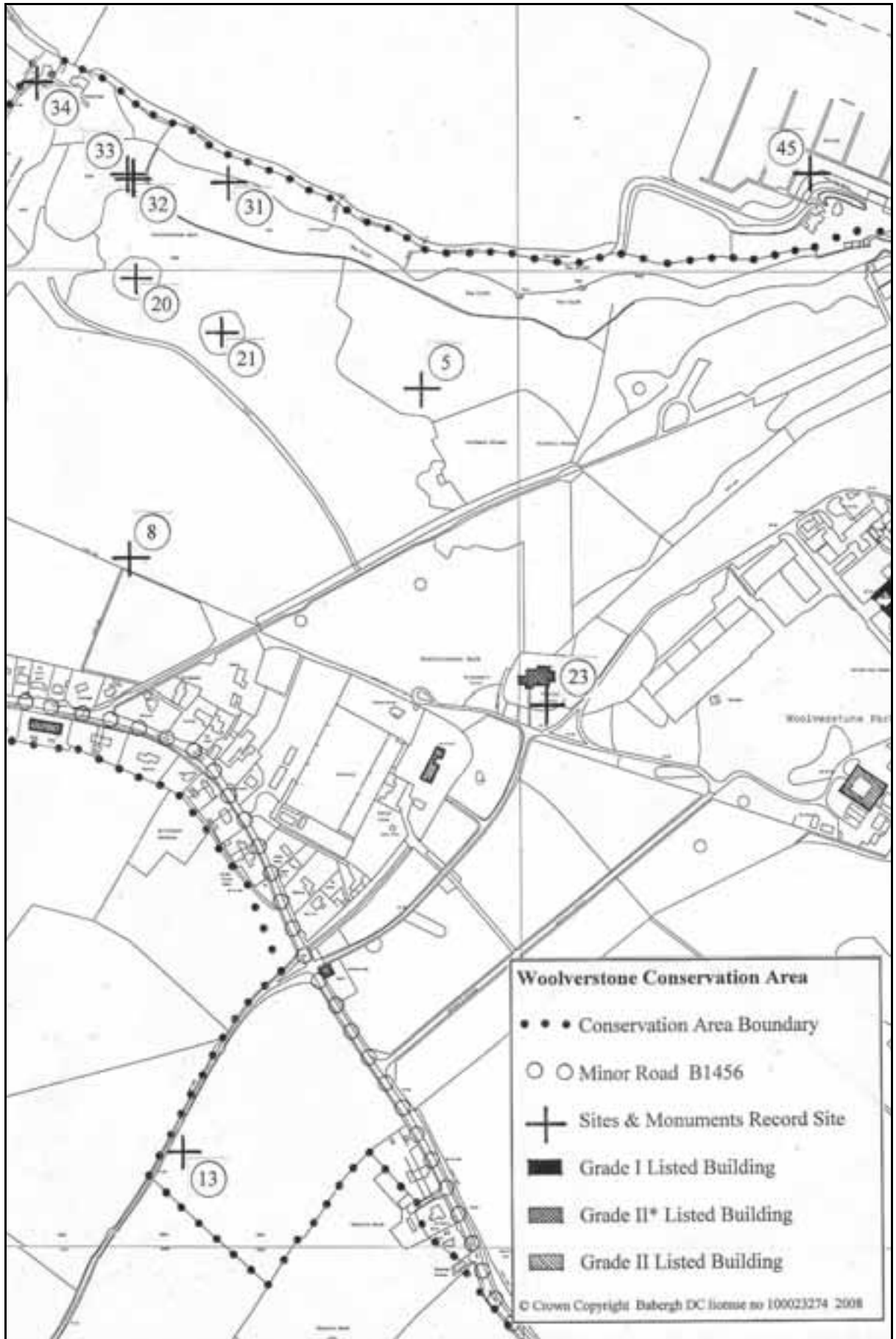
As such it is a straightforward appraisal of Woolverstone's built environment in conservation terms.



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 2008, on behalf of Woolverstone Parish Council.



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Topographical Framework

Woolverstone is a small but extended village situated in the Shotley peninsula on the south bank of the tidal River Orwell, between 0 and 30m above O.D. It lies roughly midway between the town of Ipswich at the head of the estuary and the two towns of Felixstowe and Harwich either side of the mouth.

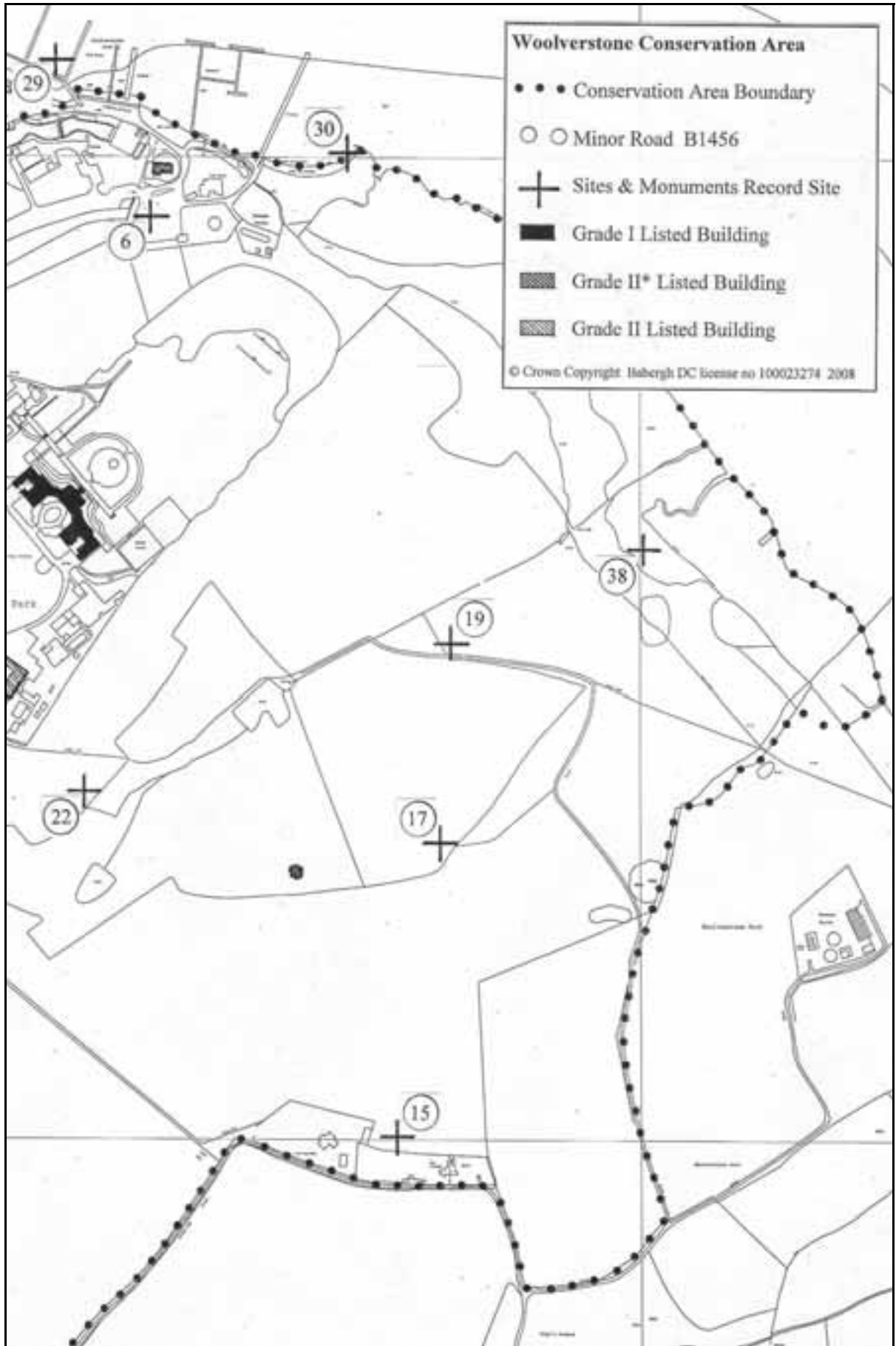
The conservation area is mainly spread out along the road towards Shotley Gate, mostly in the form of an estate village but also stretching to the north, towards the water's edge to include Woolverstone Hall, its parkland setting and some waterside development now including a marina.

To the west a small adjoining area of Freston parish, containing Home Farm, is included in the conservation area.



Situated clear of the high Suffolk claylands, effectively on the coastal sandlings strip, the underlying geology is basically glacial sands and gravels, with exposures at low level of the Red Crag more prevalent in the coastal strip across the river to the north.

These exposures are underlain in their turn by the older London Clay, itself more prevalent to the south. Within this clay are to be found nodular concretionary masses of a clayey limestone, known as 'septaria', which were at one time dredged from the river locally to make a form of Roman Cement.



Archaeological Significance

The parish of Woolverstone supposedly takes its name from one Wulfhere, whose 'tun' or enclosure was its beginning.

The County Sites and Monuments Record lists over forty sites of archaeological interest in the parish. The earliest of these comprise several flint axes and an arrowhead from the Neolithic.

There are also various mysterious 'Ring Ditches', 'Field Systems', 'Cropmarks' and 'Circular Mounds' all undated, some of which may be Neolithic or Bronze Age. The only confirmed Bronze Age artifacts are some Beaker sherds and flints.

The Romans have left us sherds and a brooch, whilst the Saxons in their turn have left us a coin and another brooch.

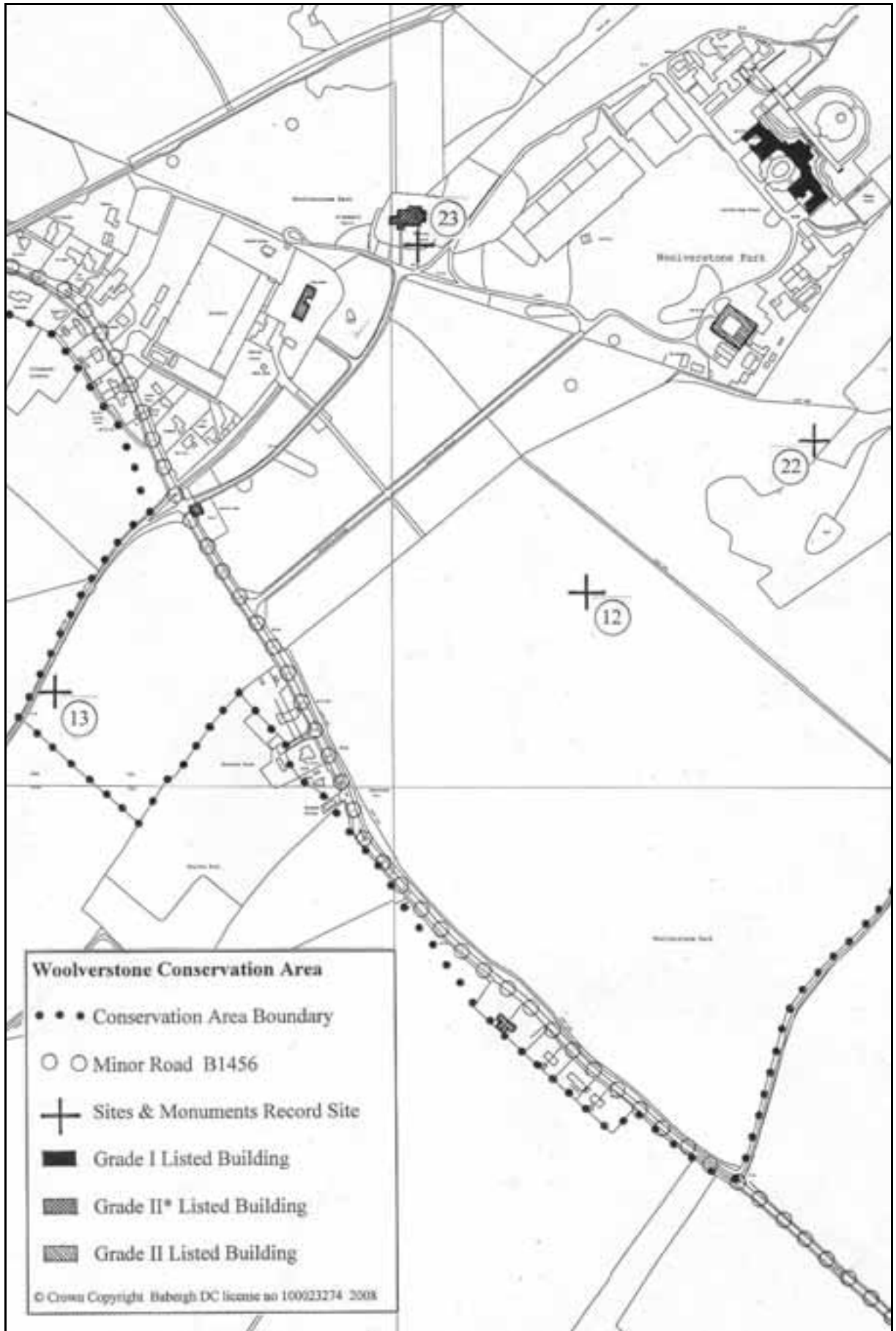


Two separate holdings were recorded in the Domesday survey of 1086, one including woodland for 15 pigs and 10 acres belonging to the Church.

The County Record shows the Medieval period as a little richer than the Saxon, with a Tile Kiln site, the Churchyard and some building remains. Post Medieval sites include the Hall and Park and an 'Embarkation Hard' by the river.

A number of other 'undated' sites are listed including two areas of Ancient Woodland and many 'Post Alignments' or 'Post Groups', mostly around the foreshore area.

Overall Woolverstone presents a rich array of finds covering most periods.



Intrinsic Quality of Buildings

The conservation area contains all of Woolverstone's listed buildings, and just Home Farm amongst Freston's.

Unusually for a village the top grading does not go to the Church of St Michael, which is grade II. Pevsner comments on there being little here that is visibly medieval, saying "it looks all of the restoration". Altered in 1862 by George Gilbert Scott and then extensively restored in 1888, it does still have a 16th Century brick porch and a 15th Century tower of flint rubble and septaria.*

One other grade II quality building in the parish is a relative newcomer: Woolverstone House, off Mannings Lane, was designed in 1901 by 'arts and crafts' architect Sir Edwin Lutyens.*



Grade I status is here reserved for Woolverstone Hall, the country house designed in 1776 by John Johnson of London in the 'Adam' style for local landowner William Berners.

Now used as a school, this fine building of Woolpit brick and Portland stone with a slate roof, comprises a central 7 bay house with linked side wings. A number of ancillary buildings and structures are also listed in their own right as grade II. These include a matching white brick stable block with a high water tower attached, railings and gate piers, a parterre garden with urns and a stone balustraded retaining wall with ha-has.

Other listings around the estate include an Ice House in the woods and Cat House, a red brick and slate 1793 'gothick' cottage on the water's edge.

Traditional Building Materials



Traditional Building Materials

Apart from the main house and stables in its Suffolk white brick, the prevalent building material in Woolverstone is the humbler and softer Suffolk red brick, often employing the white as string coursing and for details. This pattern occurs on most of the former estate cottages spread along Main Road, and many others tucked away to the north. The pattern is reversed on grade II listed Holbrook Lodge, guarding the estate entrance off Main Road.

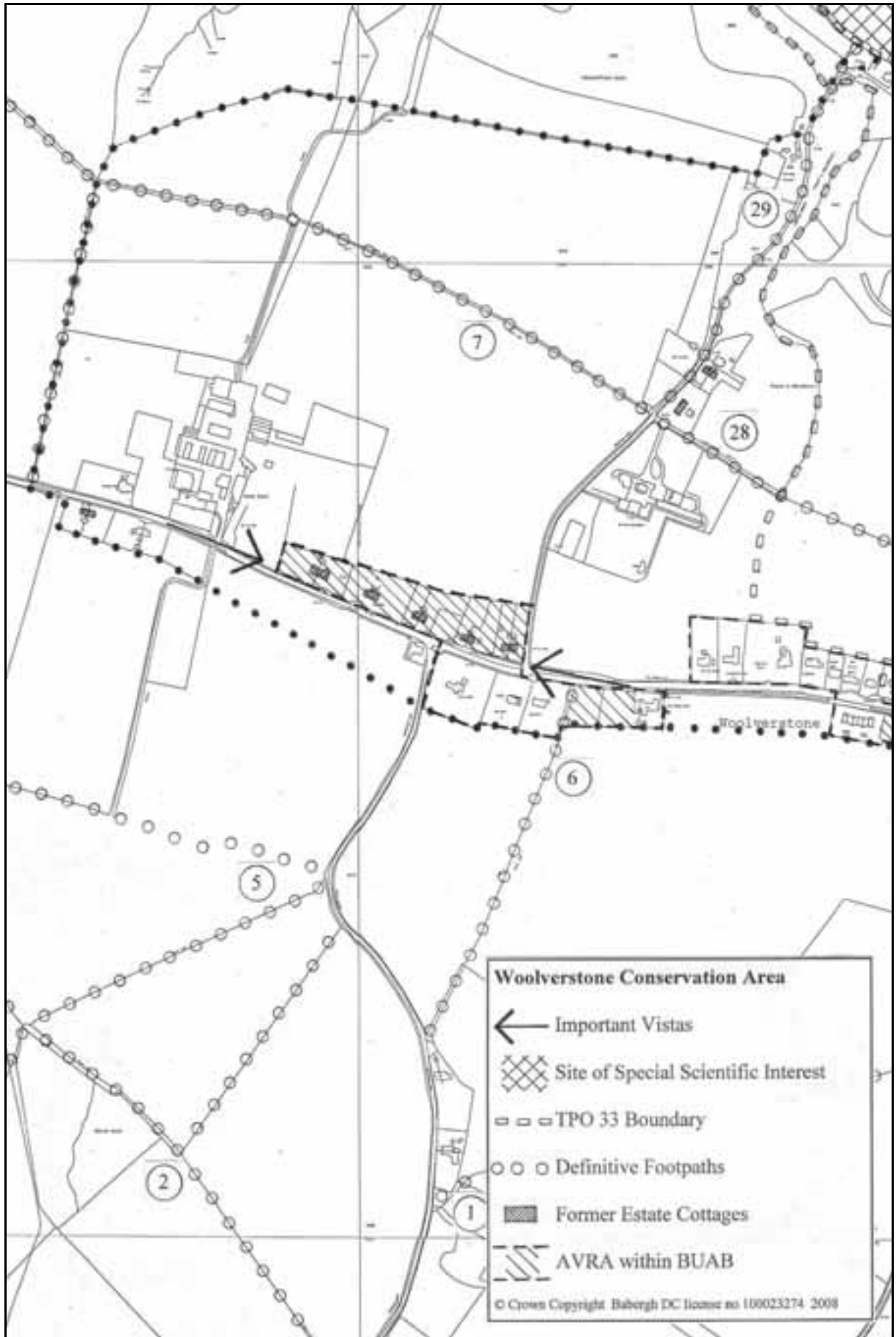
One other common walling material is red clay tile-hanging, usually with some courses of round ended fish-scale tiling. This seems to have been the norm on estate benefactions such as the Widow's Homes and Berners Hall (the former Reading Room) both also grade II listed.



The majority of roofs are clay pantiles, but there is some slate on the fleeter pitched roofs. One cottage and a sports pavilion near the Hall are thatched and both the red and black glazed varieties of pantile can be found on a number of houses and some simpler farm buildings.

Along Main Road a number of infill properties have been built, mainly in brick. Some of these have incorporated inappropriate modern materials and detailing, particularly in the form of concrete roof tiles.

There are a number of other instances where modern building elements have crept in somewhat incongruously, such as the uPVC windows on the thatched cottage and many of the former estate cottages.



Hierarchy of Spaces

The conservation area in Woolverstone comprises two main spaces, arranged off two main axes that meet perpendicularly.

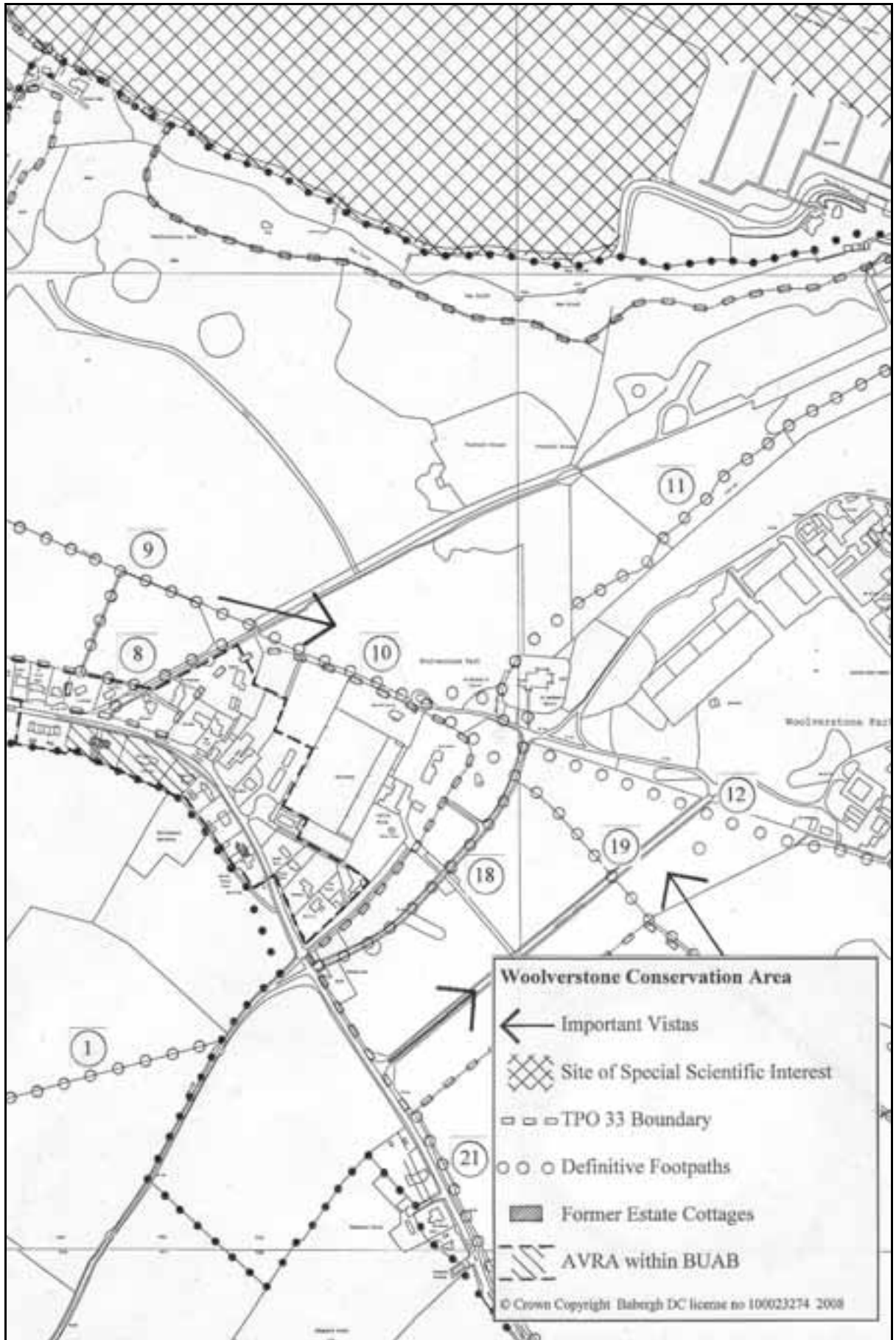
The main road from Ipswich to Shotley Gate, the B1456, runs right through the settlement. Whilst the village would not be there without the road, it can be busy at times and attempts to increase its traffic capacity would be visually intrusive. Too much signage is already becoming an issue at the marina turning and its adjoining bus stop.

Gently winding left then right, one passes through expecting more of a village centre around the next bend. There are no shops here and the pub is long gone, so the old school and nearby unlisted K6 telephone box are effectively the centre.



The second main space in the village contrasts strongly with the informality of Main Road. Signalled only by the presence of a lodge house at the eastern end of the built up area, the drive leading to Woolverstone Hall is spectacular in its formality and surprising in its scale. The house is about half a mile from Main Road and the drive sits within Nelson's Avenue comprising mature Lime trees, framing the view of the distant house.

On arrival near the front beyond the avenue, one finds other buildings enclosing the space on either side, then an inner courtyard immediately in front of the main elevation behind gates and railings.



Woolverstone Conservation Area

- ← Important Vistas
- ▣ Site of Special Scientific Interest
- - - TPO 33 Boundary
- ○ ○ Definitive Footpaths
- Former Estate Cottages
- / - AVRA within BUAB

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Trees & Planting

Much of the parish of Woolverstone and parts of nearby Shotley, Chelmondiston and Freston are covered by a large Tree Preservation Order (TPO 33). Good views of these areas can be had from both on and across the river.

The woodland area within Woolverstone and part of Freston comprises some 350 acres and contains a good mixture of native trees such as Oak, Ash and Beech, with a few continental species thrown in for good measure such as Sycamore and Sweet Chestnut.

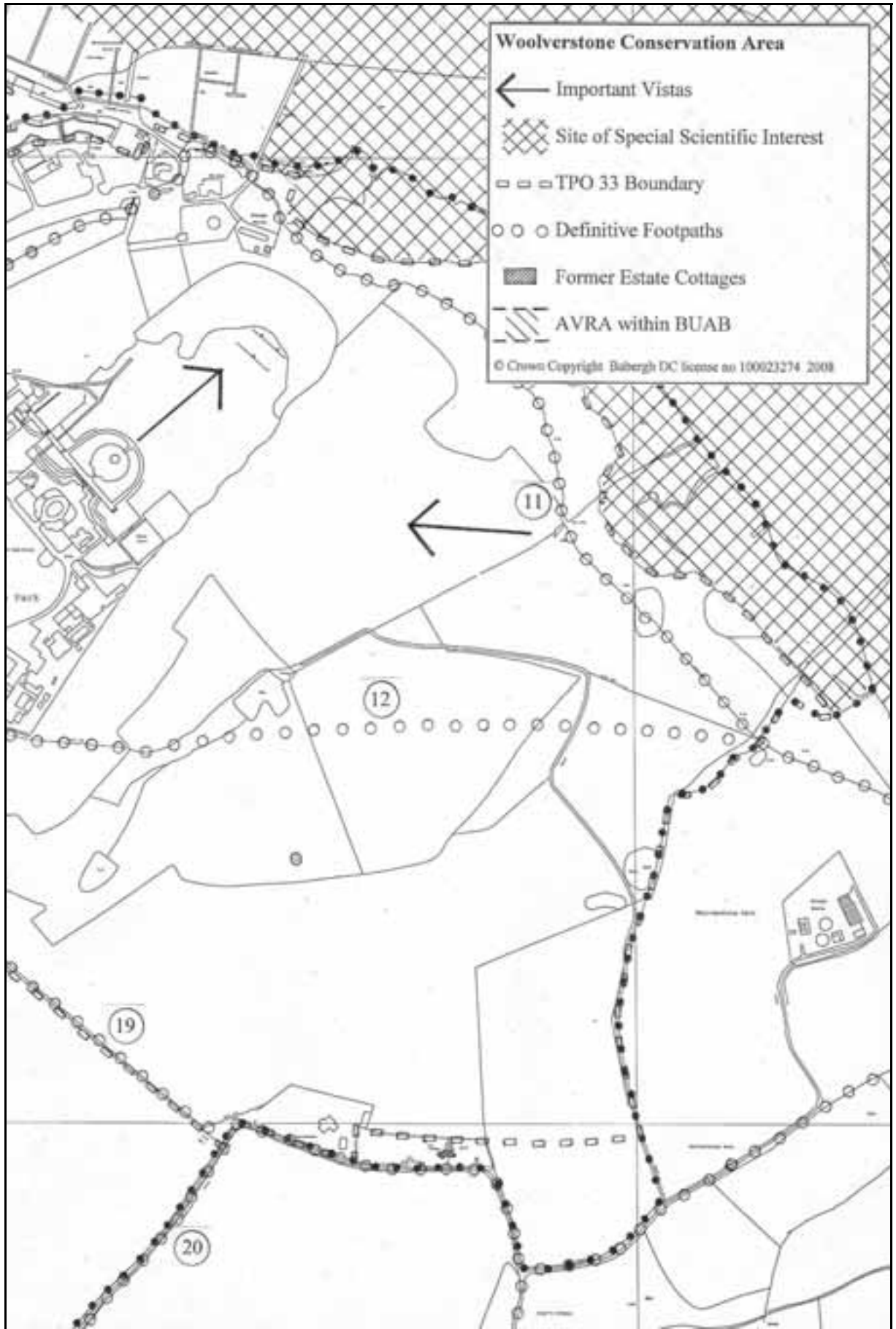
Within the parkland setting there is the avenue of Limes along with a good many mature Oaks scattered around, all cut off abruptly below at grazing level.



Crossing the entire parish through the parkland, footpaths 7, 28, 9, 10 and 19 by turn comprise the 'Common Way', an old route connecting the churches of Freston and Chelmondiston, via Woolverstone. Occasional views of the Church from this show the importance of not only the parkland trees, but the spaces between them.

The parkland area is supplemented further by plantations of conifers, some as small copses providing cover for game, others more extensive for timber such as down Mannings Lane.

In historical times the area around here was not tree covered, but would have been mainly heathland: poor sandy soils grazed by sheep, being the southernmost outpost of Suffolk's sandling heaths.



Relationship to Open Countryside

The line of Main Road here forms the southern boundary of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) covering both the Stour and Orwell estuaries. Within this the foreshore strip, which is just outside the Conservation Area, is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Despite the salty environment huge Oak trees seem to thrive along the back of foreshore.

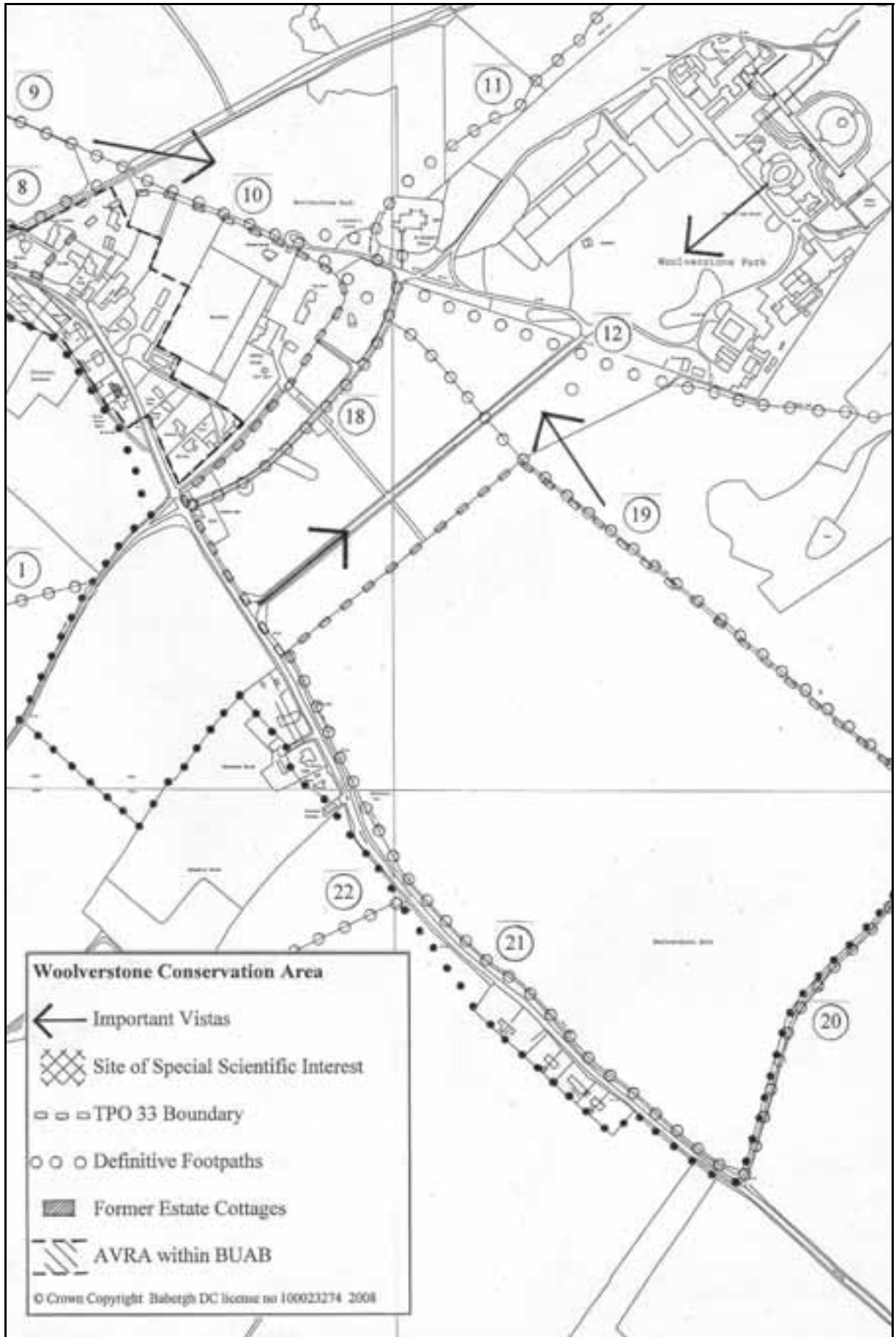
Further inland away from the shore, outside the central parkland area, the scene is agricultural, the man-made countryside of cornfields and potato crops. This provides the rear view from most of the properties in their one plot deep development along Main Road, so that even here the countryside is at hand. Two short sections of this development, each both sides of Main Road, are all



that qualify as 'built up area' in the Babergh Local Plan. The rest is by definition 'countryside' and is for the most part easily accessible by a number of footpaths radiating from the Church.

To the west FPs 10, 9, 28 and 7 follow the Common Way towards Freston parallel to and north of Main Road. FP 29 crosses this, heading north down Mannings Lane giving access to the foreshore at Deer Park Lodge, where there are good views upstream to Ipswich and the Orwell Bridge.

To the north-east of the Church FP11 leads to Cat House and the marina, continuing along the foreshore eastwards towards Chelmondiston. Here at the parish boundary this path is joined by FP 12, which starts at the Church going eastwards traversing the park.



Prevailing & Former Usage

The estate, with its big house and farmworkers' cottages spread along Main Road and elsewhere, has been the major formative influence in the parish as we see it today. The Church appears to be the sole survivor of any earlier settlement, which must have existed to appear in Domesday.

The layout, particularly along Main Road with its well-spaced pairs of semi-detached cottages, leaving semi-detached vegetable plots in between, has some protection in the Local Plan. A number of these plots have the status of Areas of Visual or Recreational Amenity (AVRA), within the Built Up Area Boundary (BUAB), thus protecting them from infill.



17th Century records spell out the normal agricultural picture with a touch of the nautical thrown in. These list amongst the residents yeomen, husbandmen, a bricklayer, a carpenter along with a fisherman and a mariner.

In the 19th Century there was also a shopkeeper and the Tithe Apportionment mentions the Ball Inn (on the site of the Widow's Homes), Schoolhouse, Meeting House and Kiln Field, along with some less clear landholdings going by the names of 'Swampey', 'Great Denches', 'Stonepit Field' and 'Handkerchief Field'.

More recently the hall served as HMS Woolverstone, a 'stone frigate' for the Admiralty during World War II, and since the 1950s as a school.

Losses & Possible Gains



Losses & Possible Gains

Woolverstone appears to suffer very little from neglect, the majority of properties being well cared for. The wall fronting the old school is being eroded and needs careful repair in soft red brick and lime mortar to avoid collapse.

Another wall, less visible, but listed grade II, is that forming the old vegetable garden to the Hall, currently a tree nursery. Sensitive redevelopment might be the only way to secure a future for this wall and its more important associated structures, some of the former greenhouses, being very dilapidated.

Elsewhere the majority of damage is from modern intrusions. Some of the older 20th Century infill is not up to standard, employing foreign forms and materials, whilst others follow the brick and tile example of the estate buildings.



A 1990 Planning Brief highlights some of the failings in the older extensions to the school, affecting the setting of the grade I building. Fortunately some of the offending buildings have now been replaced by more sympathetic new ones.

Tree-lined views of Woolverstone as seen from the river are at risk from unsuitable ill-screened development on the water frontage. Careful consideration should be given to any proposed river frontage works in respect of their visibility, form, scale, design and materials.

Within the marina precinct the boats are generally aesthetically pleasing, even hauled out for maintenance or storage, however the mobile homes here scattered amongst the trees have the opposite effect.

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