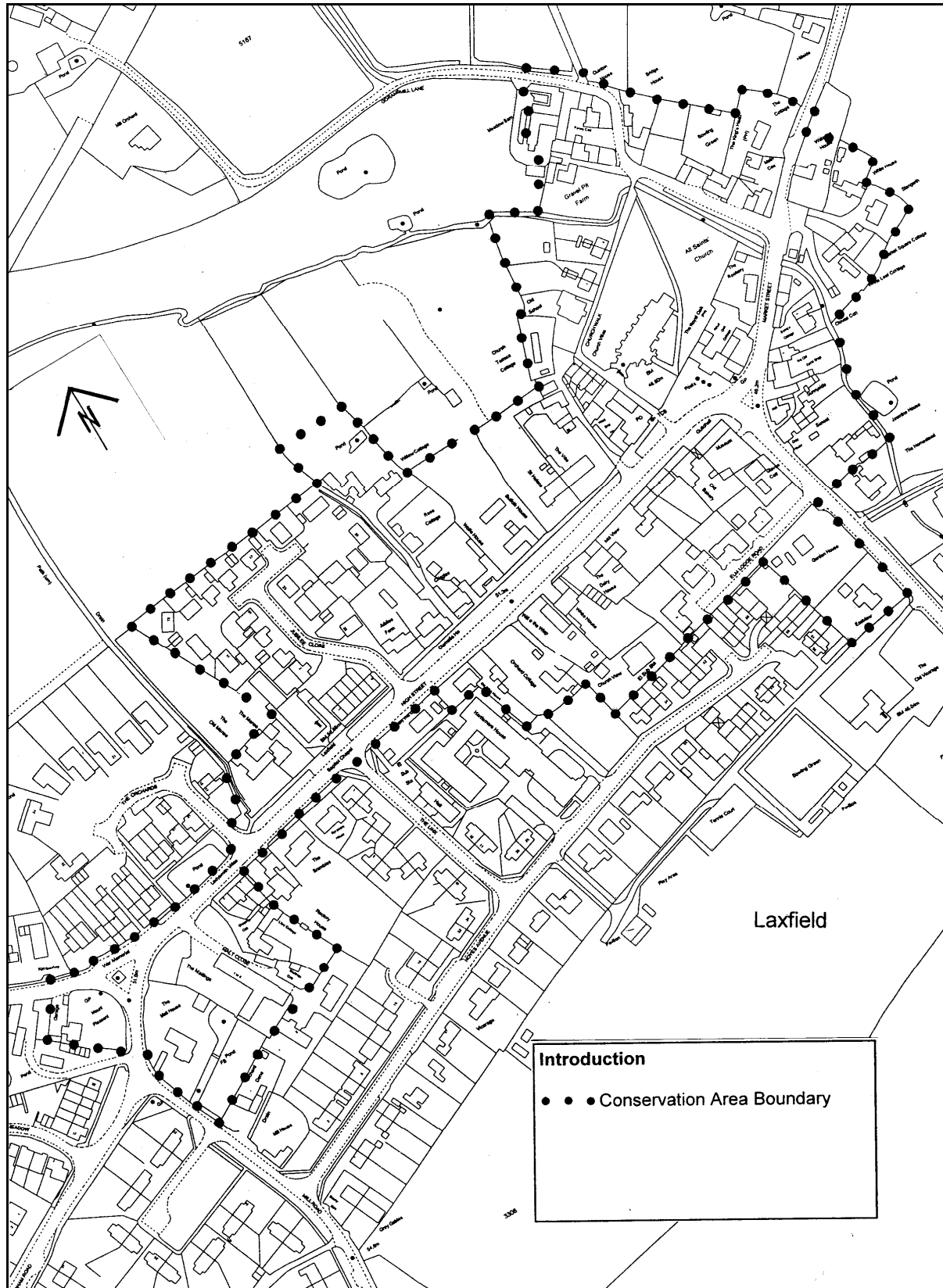




CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL



INTRODUCTION

The conservation area in Laxfield was originally designated by East Suffolk County Council in 1973 and inherited by Mid Suffolk District Council at its inception in 1974. The conservation area was last appraised by Mid Suffolk District Council in 2000.

The Council has a duty to review its conservation area designations from time to time, and this appraisal examines Laxfield 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 Laxfield'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.

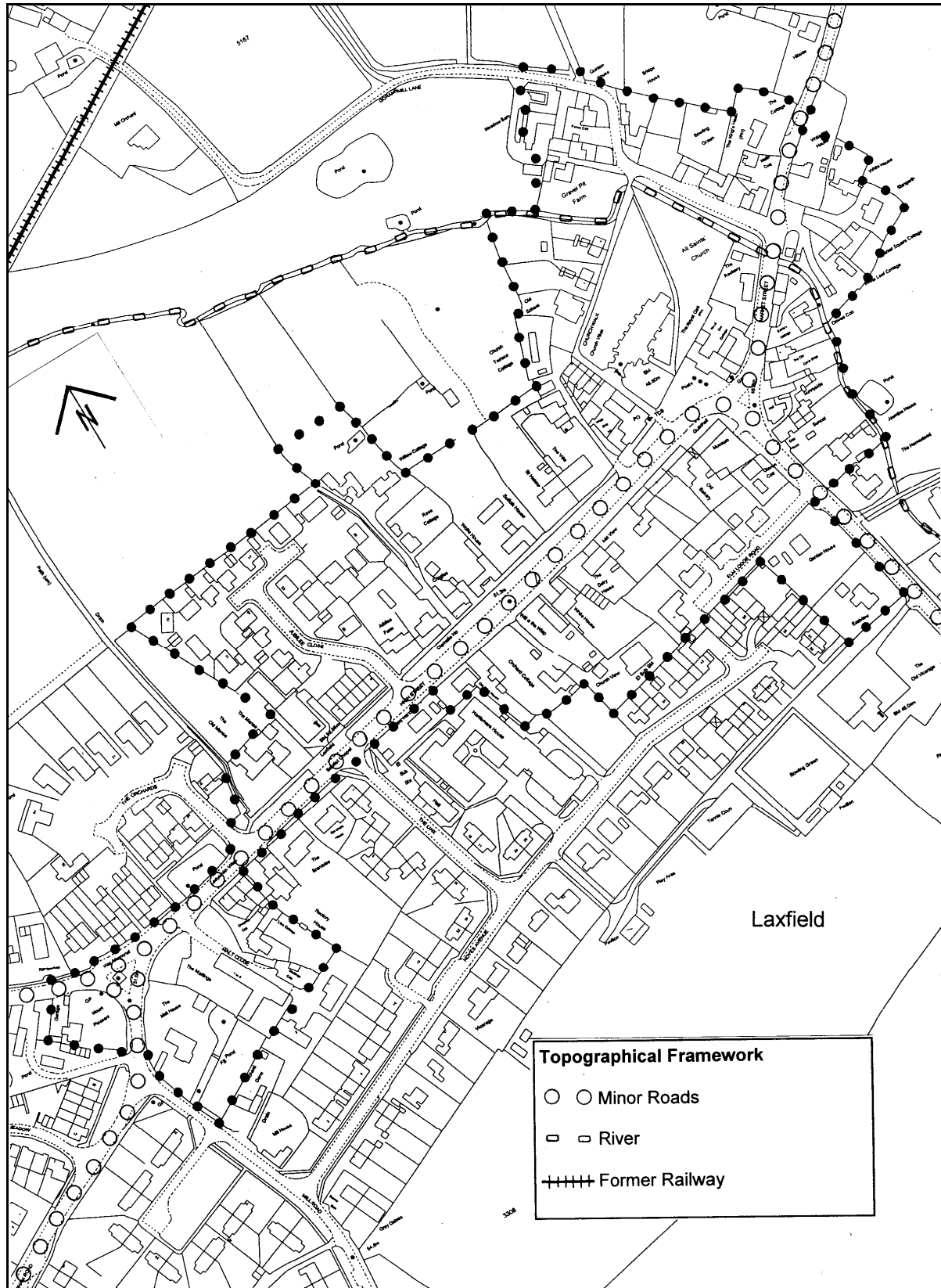
Text, photographs and map overlays by Patrick Taylor, Conservation Architect, Mid Suffolk District Council 2010.



Church Lane



Plaque on Chapel



TOPOGRAPHICAL FRAMEWORK

Laxfield is the easternmost parish of the Mid Suffolk District, situated where it adjoins the Suffolk Coastal District.

It lies at the head of the river Blyth, which flows some 15 miles eastwards from the village to join the North Sea between Walberswick and Southwold. The river was made navigable as far up as Halesworth in 1761 by the River Blyth Navigation.

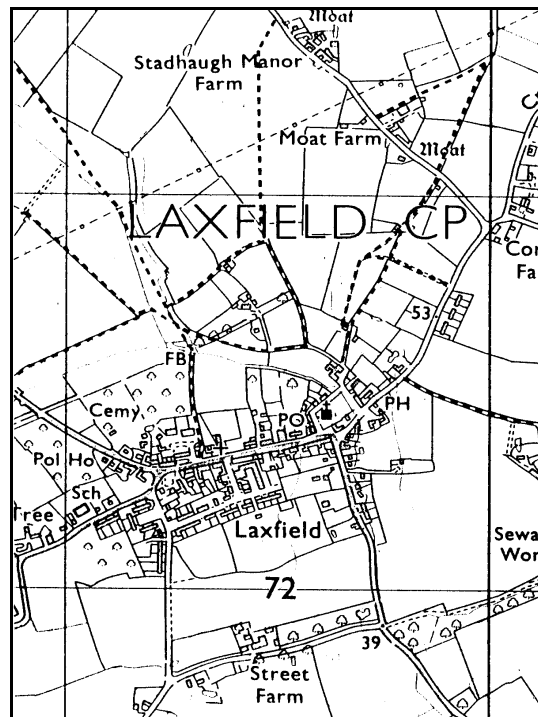
Laxfield is on the edge of the 'High Suffolk' area of heavy clay deposits, here overlying the coastal Norwich Crag with its sands, clays and gravels, which in its turn overlies East Anglia's ubiquitous chalk.

The village is essentially a linear settlement along a minor road that was not turnpiked, so that it remained fairly isolated until the early twentieth century.

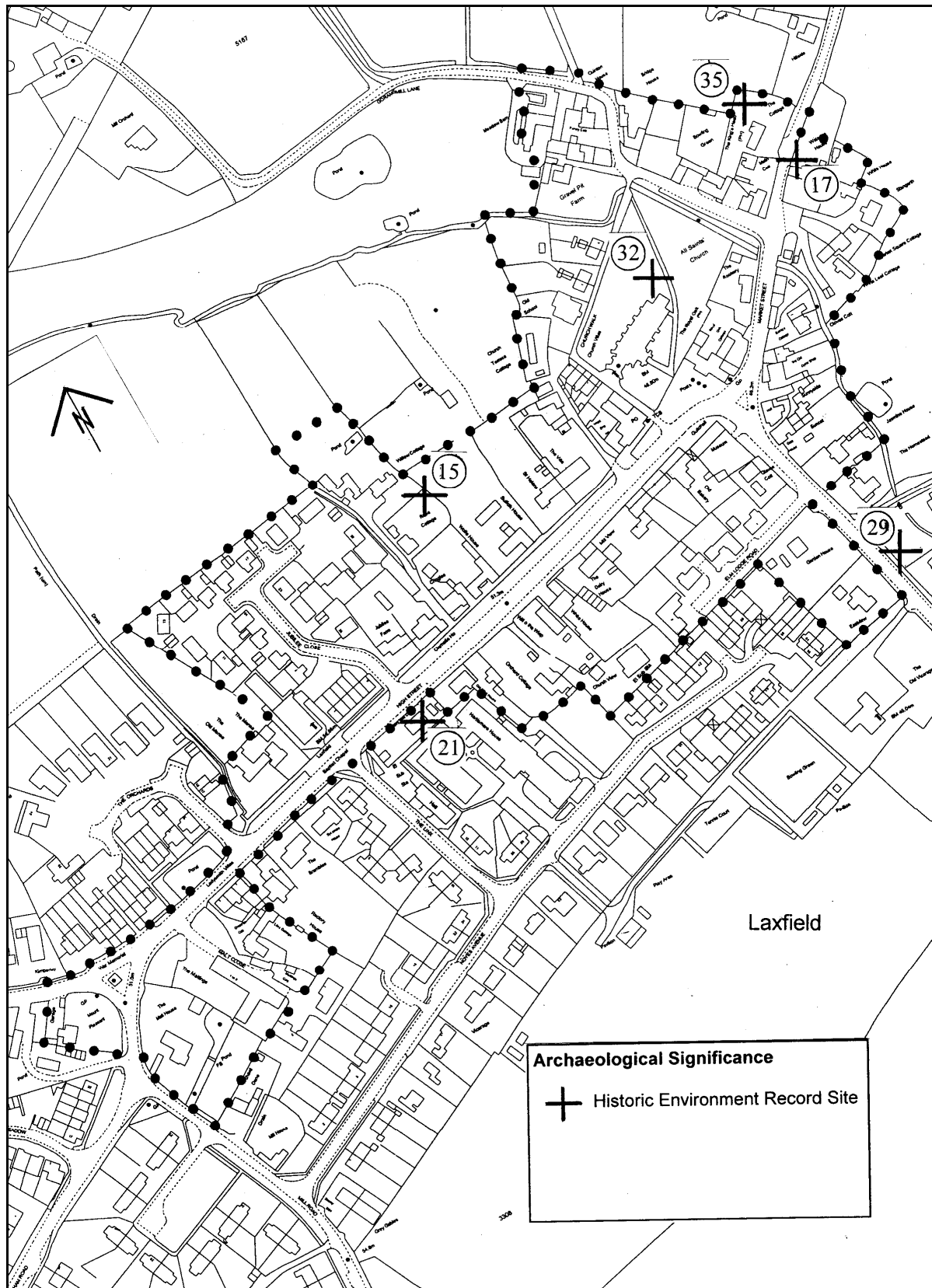
In 1904 the Mid Suffolk Light Railway was opened, running from the main Ipswich to Norwich line at Haughley, but terminating at Laxfield, unable to raise sufficient funds for its projected continuation through to the east coast line at Halesworth. From the station in the west of the village, field boundaries across the north still delineate its chosen route.



Aerial Photograph



Extract from OS Map



ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The village of Laxfield presents us with nothing remarkable in the field of archaeology, save ample evidence of the continued presence of man in the locality. The Suffolk County Historic Environment Record lists a number of sites from many different periods.

Two separate but nearby finds of Neolithic stone axes were made to the north-west of the village centre, whilst a Bronze Age axe was found to the south-east.

Immediately south of the village there is a cluster of Roman finds indicating some settlement in that area. Two Roman roads do pass nearby: one two miles to the north-east heading south-east, the other four miles south heading east, they both meet at nearby Peasenhall.

The Anglo-Saxons in their turn left us a ring near the centre of the village. The Domesday survey of 1086 lists a church with 43 acres and woodland for 260 pigs.

There are eight Medieval moated sites listed in the Historic Environment Record for the parish, as well as a good many Medieval scatter finds of pottery etc.

The village was granted a market on Saturdays in 1226, but this was out of use again by the 17th Century.

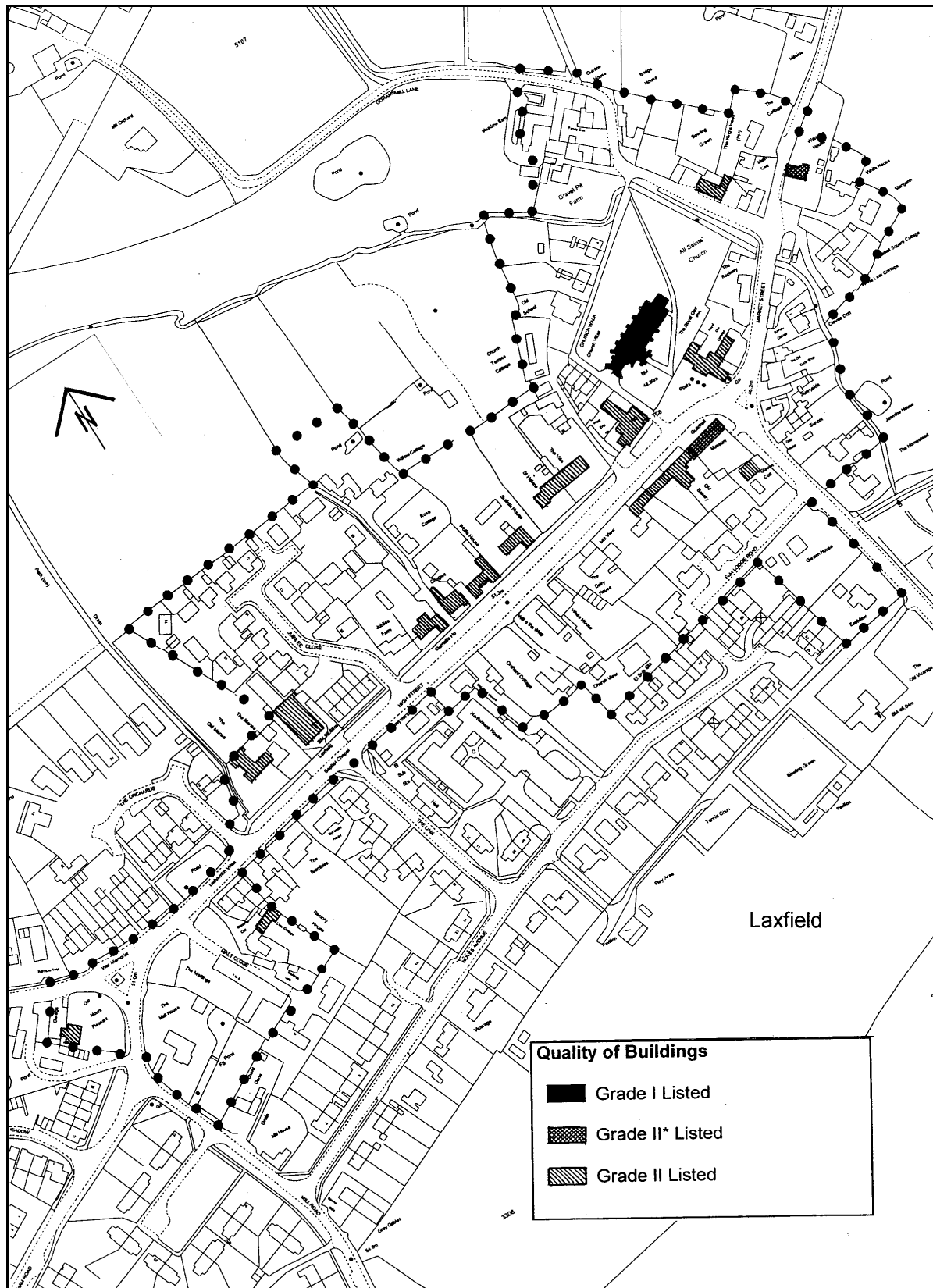


Church of All Saints

Laxfeldā . ten⁹ Edric⁹ . vi . car⁹ tze . 7 lxxx . acr⁹ . Tnc . xiiii .
uifti . p . viii . m . vi . Tnc 7 p⁹ xiiii . bor . m . xxx . vii . Tnc⁹
femp . iiii . car in dno . p . iii . m . ii . Tnc 7 p⁹ xiiii . car . m . xi .
Silua . cc . lx . por . xxvii . acr⁹ pti . 7 v . an . Tnc . xl . por . m . xxx .
7 vi . ou . 7 xiiii . cap . Ecclā . xl . iii . acr⁹ . 7 dim⁹ car . Tnc⁹
ual xv . lib . m . viii . ht . i . leu & diu in loh . 7 . i . leu . in lat . 7 vi . d⁹
7 ob de p . 7 Ten & Galter de hoc manerio iiii . uift . . l . acr⁹ . 7 ual⁹
xx . fol in eodem pto . Loernic . xl . acr⁹ . 7 ual x fol in eodē pto .

Edric held LAXFIELD; 6 carucates of land and 80 acres.
Then 14 villagers, later 8, now 6; then and later 14 smallholders,
now 37.
Then 4 ploughs in lordship, later 3, now 2; then and later 14
men's ploughs, now 11.
Woodland, 260 pigs; meadow, 27 acres. 5 cattle; then 40 pigs, now
30; 6 sheep; 24 goats.
A church, 43 acres, 1/2 plough.
Value then £15; now [£] 8.
It has 1 1/2 leagues in length and 1 league in width; 6 1/2 d in tax.
Of this manor, Walter holds 3 villagers; 50 acres.
Value 20s in the same assessment.
Loernic (holds) 40 acres.
Value 10s in the same assessment.

Domesday Extract



QUALITY OF BUILDINGS

As with so many Suffolk villages the only major grade I listed building is its Church, here dedicated to All Saints. This has a Decorated nave, the rest being Perpendicular, but with a 19th Century chancel and vestry.

It is mostly built of flint rubble, the exceptions being the white brickwork of 1827 and the fine 15th Century knapped flint flushwork to the limestone tower.

The village also boasts four grade II* buildings: two farmhouses in the wider parish plus Waterloo House on Bicker's Hill with its jettied timber frame and the Medieval Guildhall on Church Plain.

The former Guildhall is a timber-framed building with fine close studding infilled with herring-bone brick nogging on its street frontage. It has a plaintiled roof and at the rear it is rendered with only the main timber elements exposed.

The remaining listed buildings, grade II, are for the most part farmhouses and cottages, mainly of timber-framed construction originally with thatched roofs, although many have now been re-roofed with plaintiles or pantiles.

Also listed grade II is the white brick Baptist Chapel originally of 1810, which has some fine cast iron railings to the frontage, separately listed.



Waterloo House



Guildhall



Red and White Brick



White Brick and Slate



Render and Black Pantile



Render and Thatch

TRADITIONAL MATERIALS

Laxfield presents an excellent array of traditional building materials illustrative of Suffolk's effectively stone-free vernacular. The Church with its flint, both rubble and knapped, and imported limestone, is virtually the only exception to this.

The timber-framed tradition is well represented by the exposed framing and brick nogging of the Guildhall, plus innumerable other rendered examples of the type more usual in Suffolk.

These are sometimes pargetted and variously have thatched, plaintiled or pantiled roofs. Often where a timber-framed building has been refronted in brick the steep roof pitch is all that gives it away.

Local soft red brick is abundant in the village, sometimes with white brick dressings, whilst many 19th Century buildings are of red brick construction but fronted with whites for effect.

One unlisted building on Vicarage Road has very unusual heavily moulded red brick or tile infill to its ground and first floor elevations that produces a striking diamond pattern.

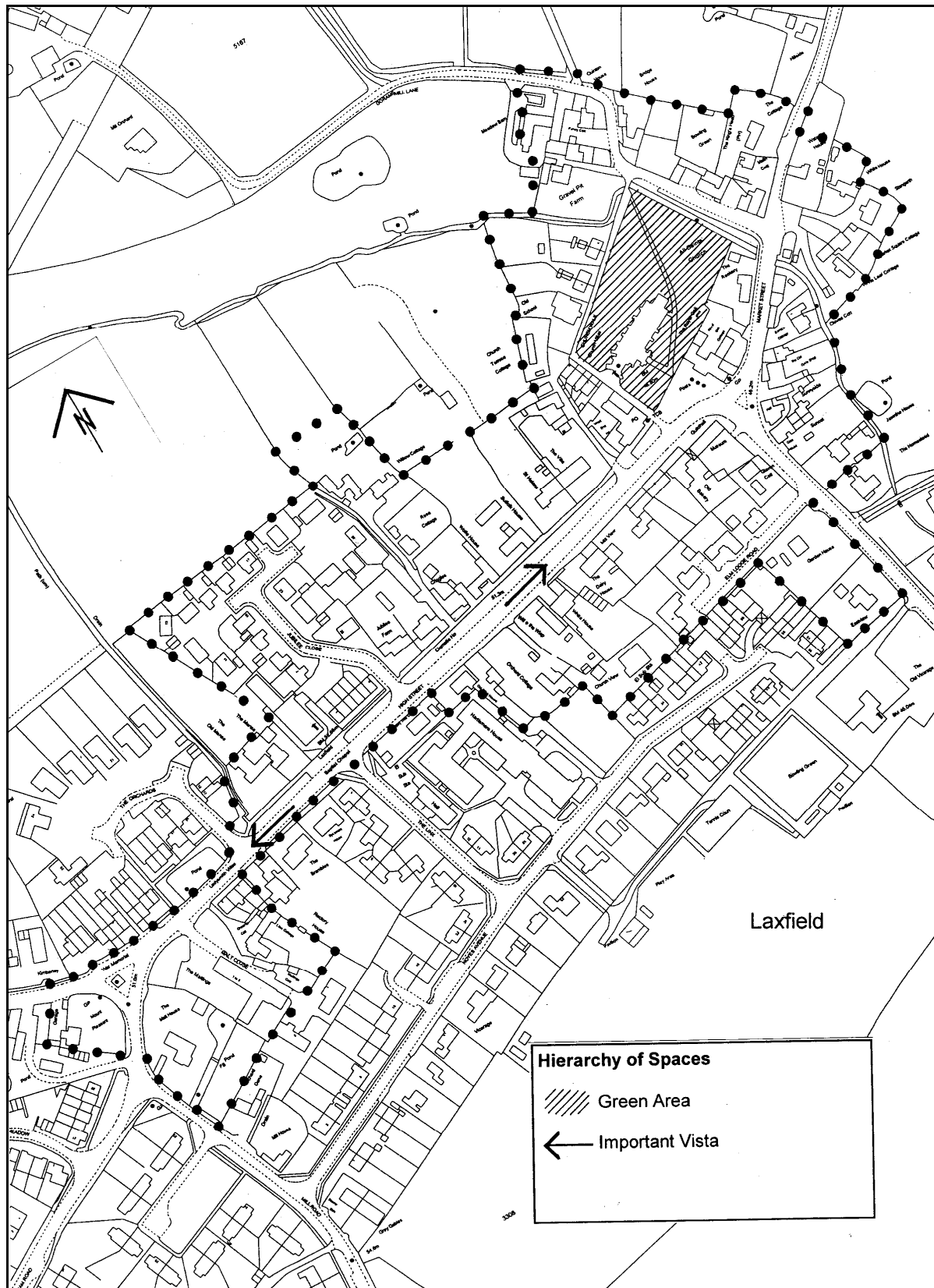
Apart from thatch and plaintiles, clay pantiles occur in two equally common varieties, the natural red and a glazed black. There is also a scatter of later lower pitched slate roofs.



Pargetting and Pantile



Moulded Brick



HIERARCHY OF SPACES

Laxfield's linear settlement pattern, one plot deep, is best seen in its main street running east-west between two sets of road junctions.

At the western end of the Street an unusual war memorial punctuates the junction.

At its eastern end The Street widens into Church Plain, bounded by the churchyard to the north and the Guildhall to the south, the eastward vista being closed off by the Royal Oak public house.

Towards this eastern end, the Street gently drops away before dropping further into the valley of the upper Blyth running across north-south beyond the churchyard.

The southern section of this presents views of fields across the valley to the south-east, whilst further north the east bank is developed. Here next to the stream runs Goram's Mill Lane with the King's Head public house, known locally as the 'Low House', looking back up across the churchyard and its trees, a visually important open space.

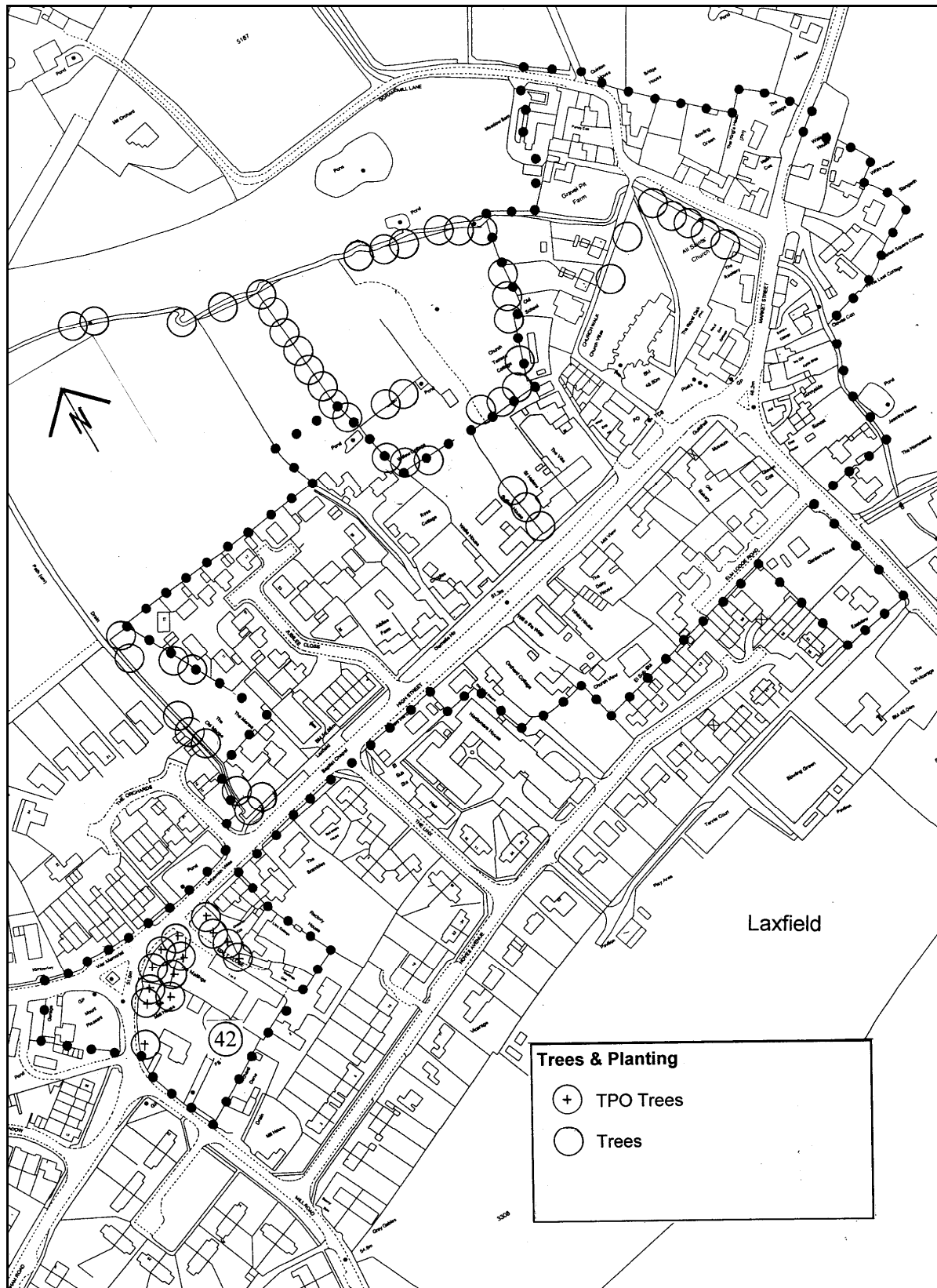
Before the coming of the modern infill estates at the western end of the Street the linearity of Laxfield's settlement pattern was only broken by the cluster of dwellings that huddle round this churchyard area.



War Memorial



Low House



TREES AND PLANTING

A mile and a half south of the village at the southernmost tip of the parish lies Laxfield Wood, a small remnant of ancient woodland.

The churchyard with its majestic Horse Chestnuts is however the major green space within the village itself.

There are trees elsewhere in the village, many of them considered sufficiently under threat to warrant Tree Preservation Orders.

One such applies to two Oaks in Vicarage Road, south of the centre (T.P.O. 62), whilst another protects twelve Limes, four Yews, three Horse Chestnuts, two Sycamores and a Beech around the malthouse complex at the west end of The Street (T.P.O. 42).

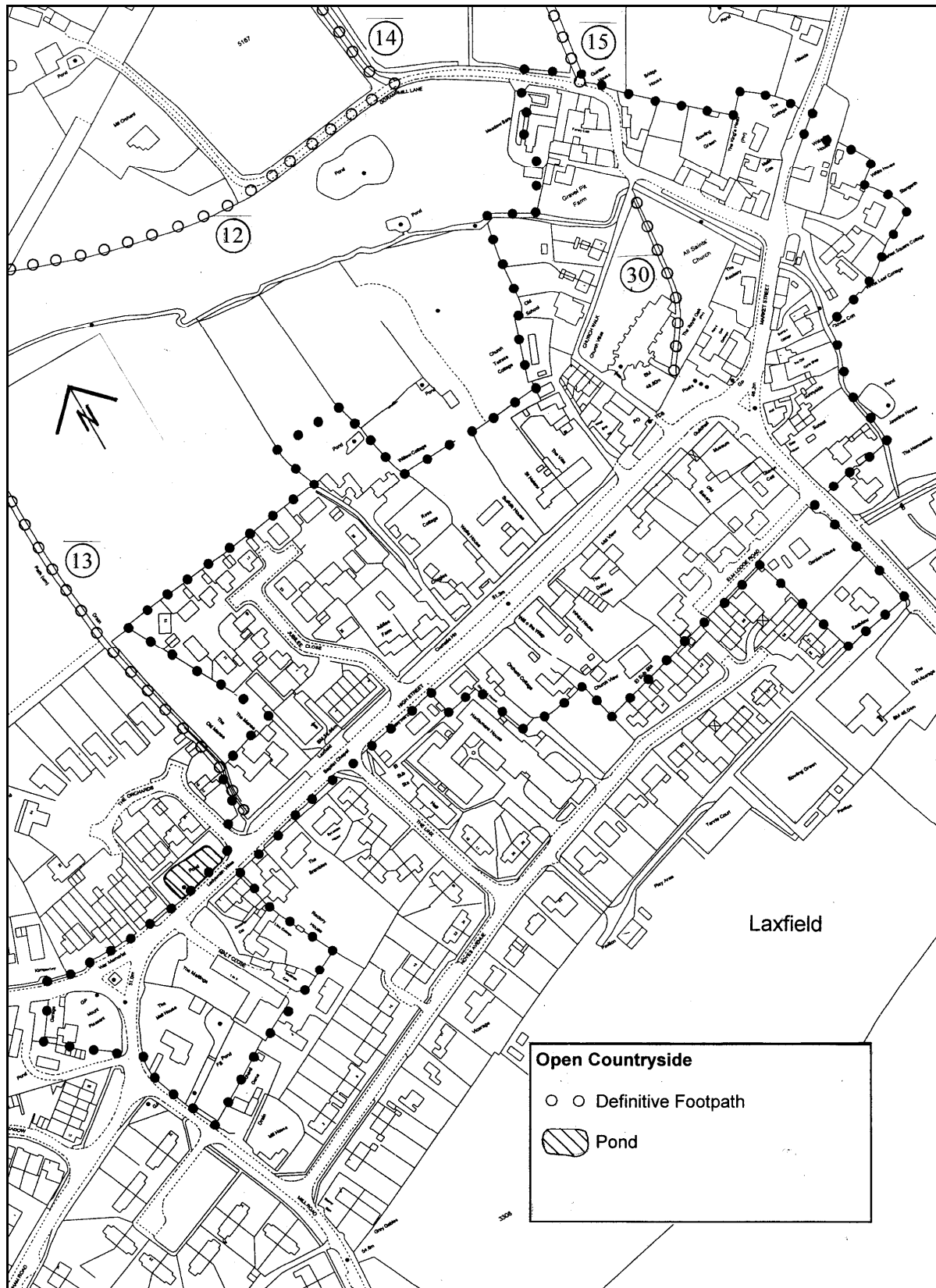
Further west we find T.P.O. 259 in Station Road with two Limes, two Horse Chestnuts, a Sycamore and an Ash; overall nothing very remarkable in terms of species, but nevertheless all important as part of the streetscape.



Churchyard Trees



Footbridge to Churchyard



COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS

Being mostly one plot deep either side of the Street, the countryside can be found close by to the rear of many properties in Laxfield.

Indeed, it can also be found at the front of a few such as along The Street where the village pond interrupts the frontage, and newer development has been set back behind it.

Fields can be glimpsed from many parts of the village, and nowhere, other than perhaps Church Plain, achieves any degree of built-up urban feel.

Despite this the major connections to the countryside are by road, there being only one footpath that penetrates the village centre: FP 13 leading off northwards from the western end of The Street.

Apart from FP 29 heading westwards from the Framlingham road and FP 18 heading eastwards from Bicker's Hill, all the footpaths in the parish anywhere near the village are spread out fanlike across the area to the north.

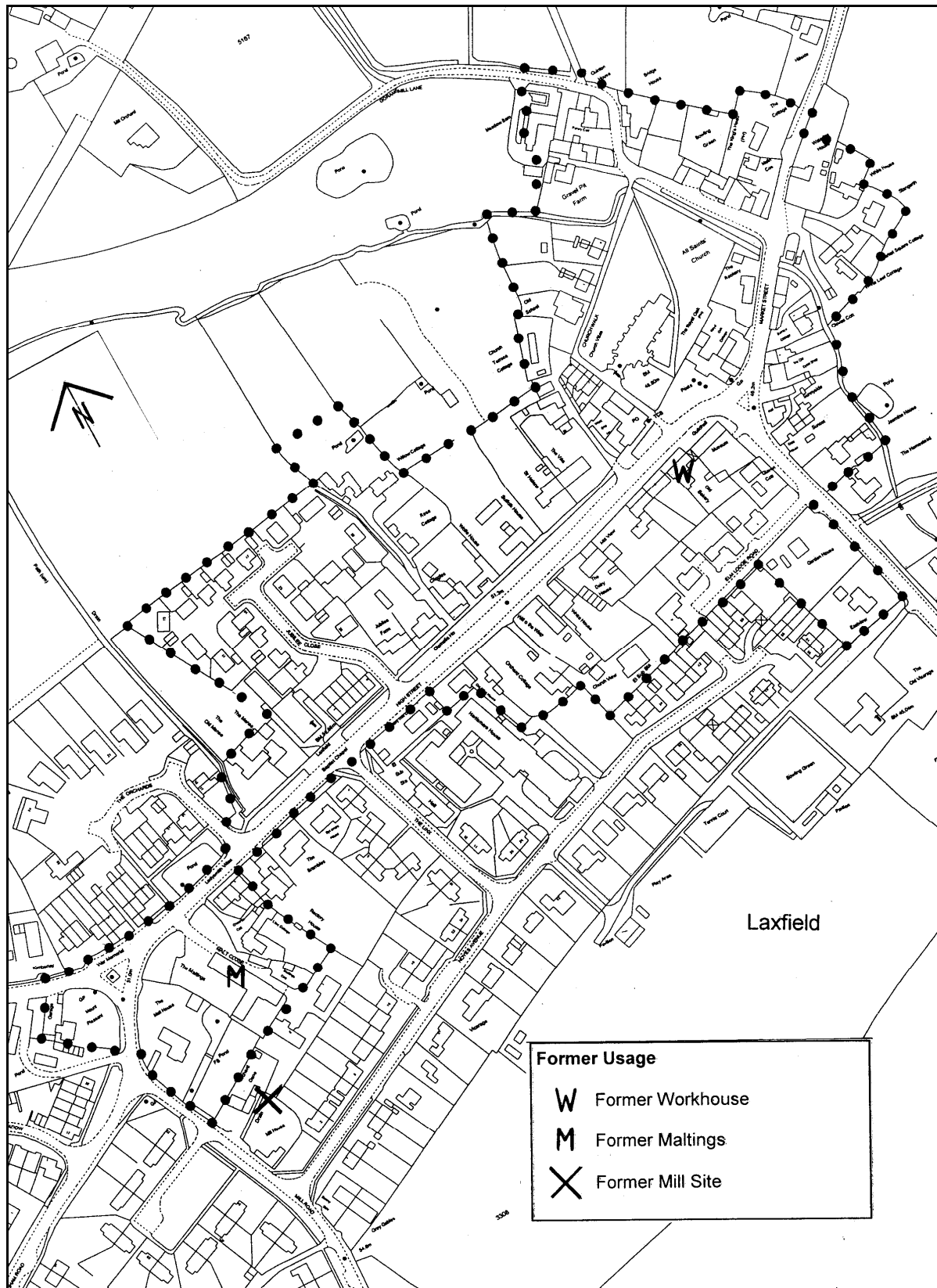
One follows the projected course of the old railway east of the village and they all connect back into the village either by way of FP 13 in the west or Goram's Mill Lane in the east.



Village Pond



Start of Footpath 15



PREVAILING AND FORMER USAGE

Laxfield's past was mostly agriculturally based, although tithe records do indicate a Gravel Pit Field and a Brick Kiln Hill within the parish.

The 'Old Bakery' adjoining the Guildhall served at one time as the village's local workhouse, prior to the Hoxne Union workhouse being built in the neighbouring parish of Stradbroke in 1834.

There was a 'malt office' at the east end of the village tucked in behind the school, whilst at the west end the old malthouse and kiln buildings can still be seen now converted to flats.

Behind the maltings there once stood a post-mill, demolished c.1941. Other mills are recorded in the wider parish but the remains of only one can still be seen today: Gorham's Mill, built in 1842 immediately north of the village was a smock mill demolished some time after 1939 except for its lower octagonal sections still used today as a store.

The projected railway passed nearby here and can still be traced in the form of field boundaries. It appears on an old map as 'In course of construction', a certain amount of land having already been purchased ahead of its demise.

Traces of a better trading past are still to be seen around Laxfield with a number of traditional shopfronts still attached to what are now merely dwellings. These relics should be retained wherever possible.



Former Maltings



Former Shop



The Link



Low House Parking



uPVC Windows



Painted Brick and Flint

LOSSES AND POSSIBLE GAINS

Laxfield's relative isolation has to a large extent been the cause of its good state of preservation. Without modern pressures the central 'commercial' area, such as it is, has gently declined, and is now reduced to a combined shop and post office and two public houses.

To the south-west of the village centre new infill development has swollen the village beyond its one plot deep original form. 'The Link' is the well named road that connects this to the otherwise untouched Street with a wide visibility splay and a touch of suburbia.

One other area might also benefit from improvement. The parking area opposite the Low House (King's Head) is somewhat untidy and poorly surfaced and would obscure less of the view of the churchyard, and the stream, if its levels were reduced and it was resurfaced with sympathetic materials.

A few unlisted buildings let the side down a bit, with the use of non-traditional uPVC windows and sometimes the painting over of good local materials such as flint or brick.

Elsewhere there have been improvements with the application of sympathetic surfacing materials on Church Plain and the removal of overhead wiring.

Also Glaven Cottage, a long term entry on the 'buildings at risk' register is now approaching the completion of its repairs.



Church Plain



Glaven Cottage

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This Appraisal adopted as
Supplementary Planning Guidance
by Mid Suffolk District Council
Environment Policy Panel
27 March 2012