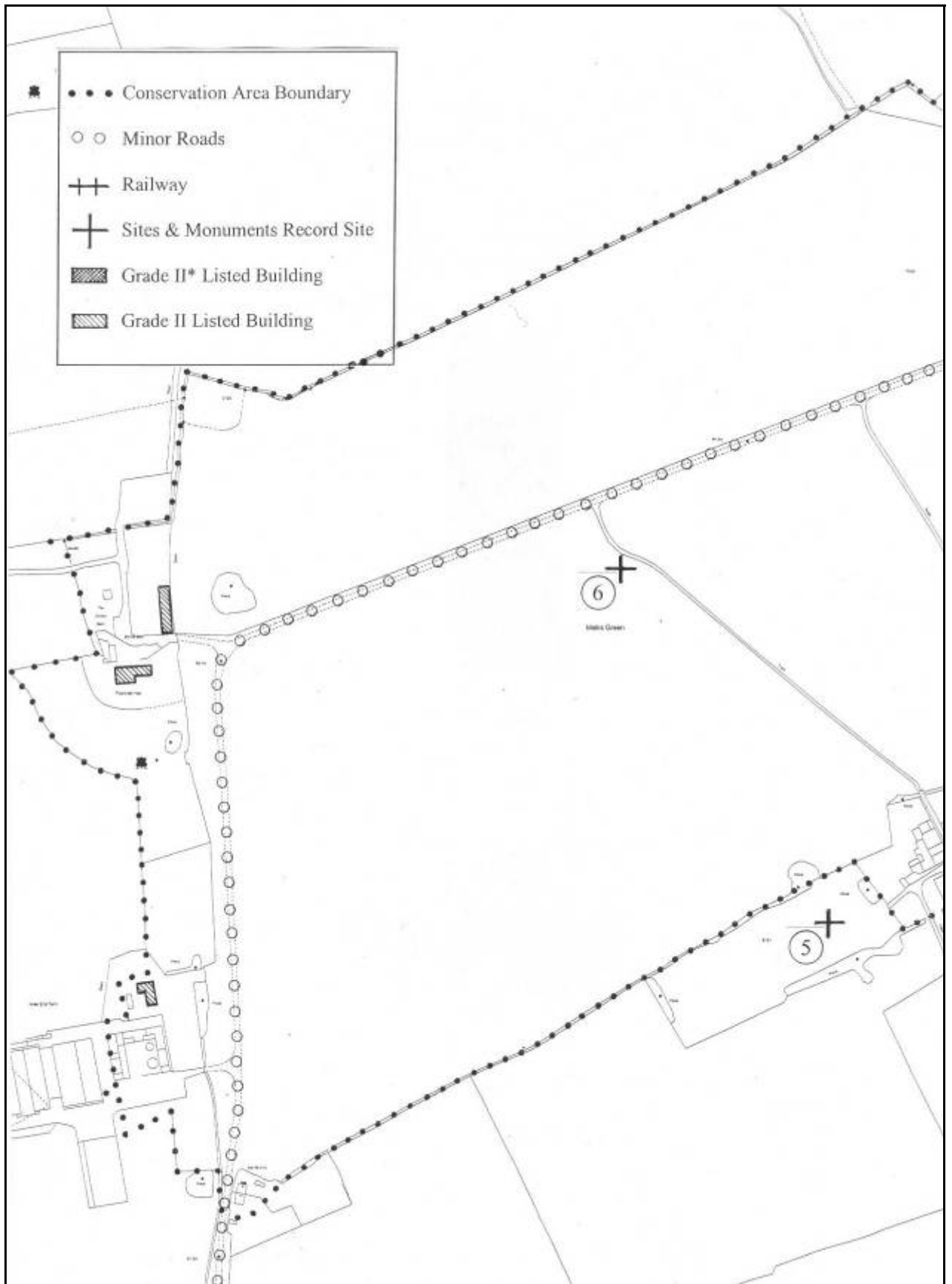




conservation area appraisal



Introduction

The conservation area in Mellis was originally designated by East Suffolk County Council in 1973, and inherited by Mid Suffolk 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 Mellis under a number of different headings as set out in English Heritage's new 'Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals' (2006).

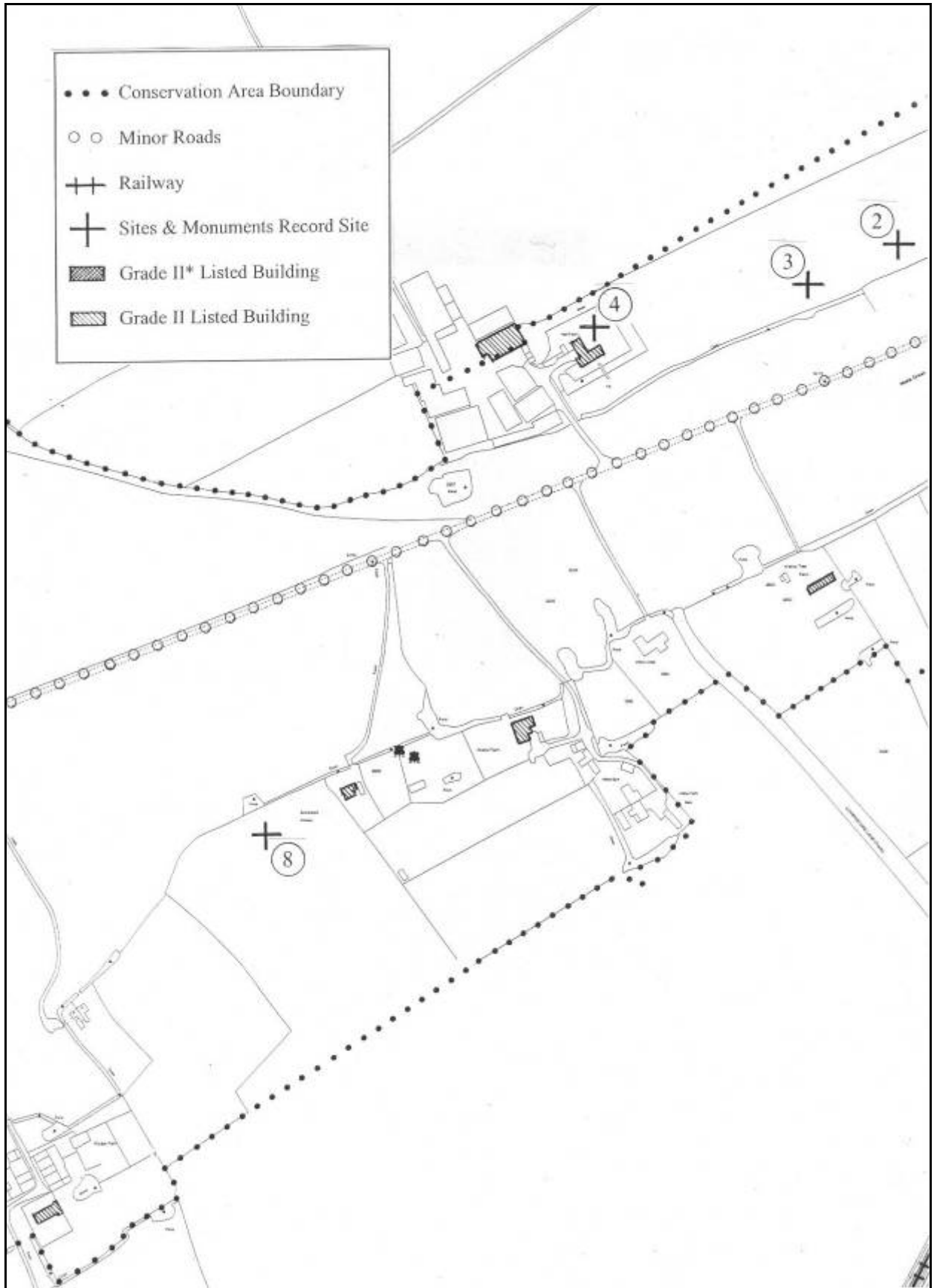
As such it is a straightforward appraisal of Mellis's built environment in conservation terms.



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 2007.

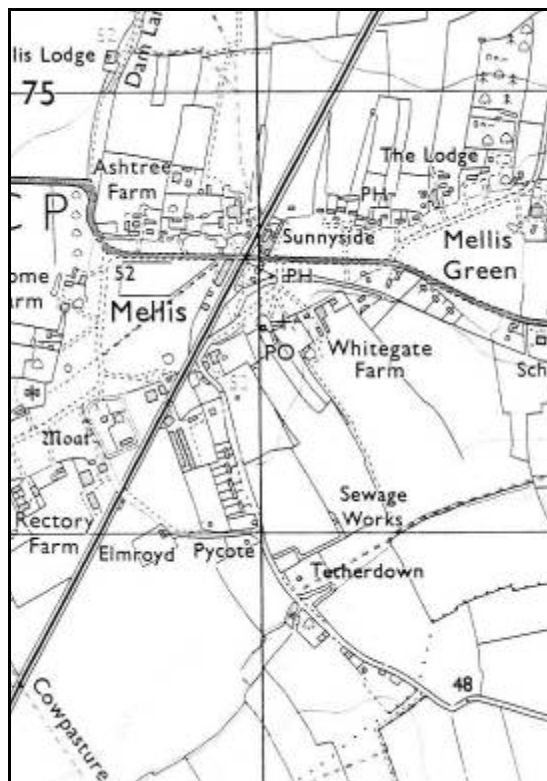


Topographical Framework

The village of Mellis is situated about four miles south of the Norfolk market town of Diss, in the northern part of Mid Suffolk District.

It sits on a spur of higher ground between two tributaries of the river Waveney that further north forms the county boundary just south of Diss.

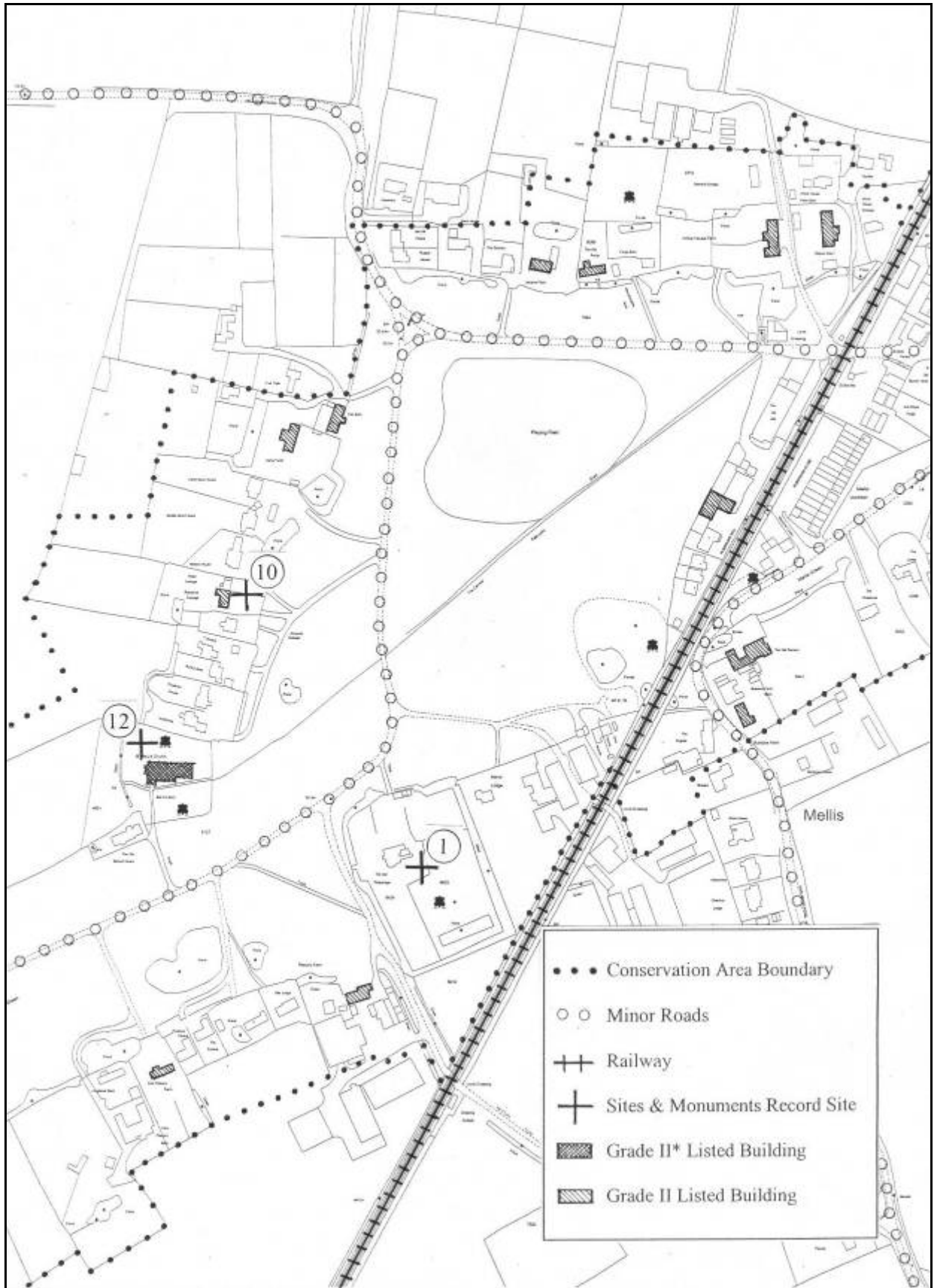
Since 1849 the Ipswich to Norwich railway line has passed through Mellis Common, the village's central green area. This had a branch line off to Eye and its own goods shed and railway station until 1966.



The 'built up' area lies around the eastern half of the common, cut in half by the railway and consisting mostly of one plot deep scattered development.

The village lies about one and a half miles west of the main A140 Ipswich to Norwich trunk road, formerly part of the Ipswich to Scole Turnpike Trust's road of 1711, which continued from Scole on towards Norwich.

The village is situated on the 'High Suffolk' claylands, deposited in the Ice Ages over the chalk that underlies most of Suffolk. The area is thus good for arable farming.



Archaeological Significance

The Suffolk County Sites and Monuments Record lists 14 sites of archaeological interest from various periods in the parish of Mellis.

The earliest remains listed include a ditch of unknown date, a Bronze Age arrowhead, an Iron Age Occupation site and some Roman pottery sherds. The remainder are all of Medieval date.

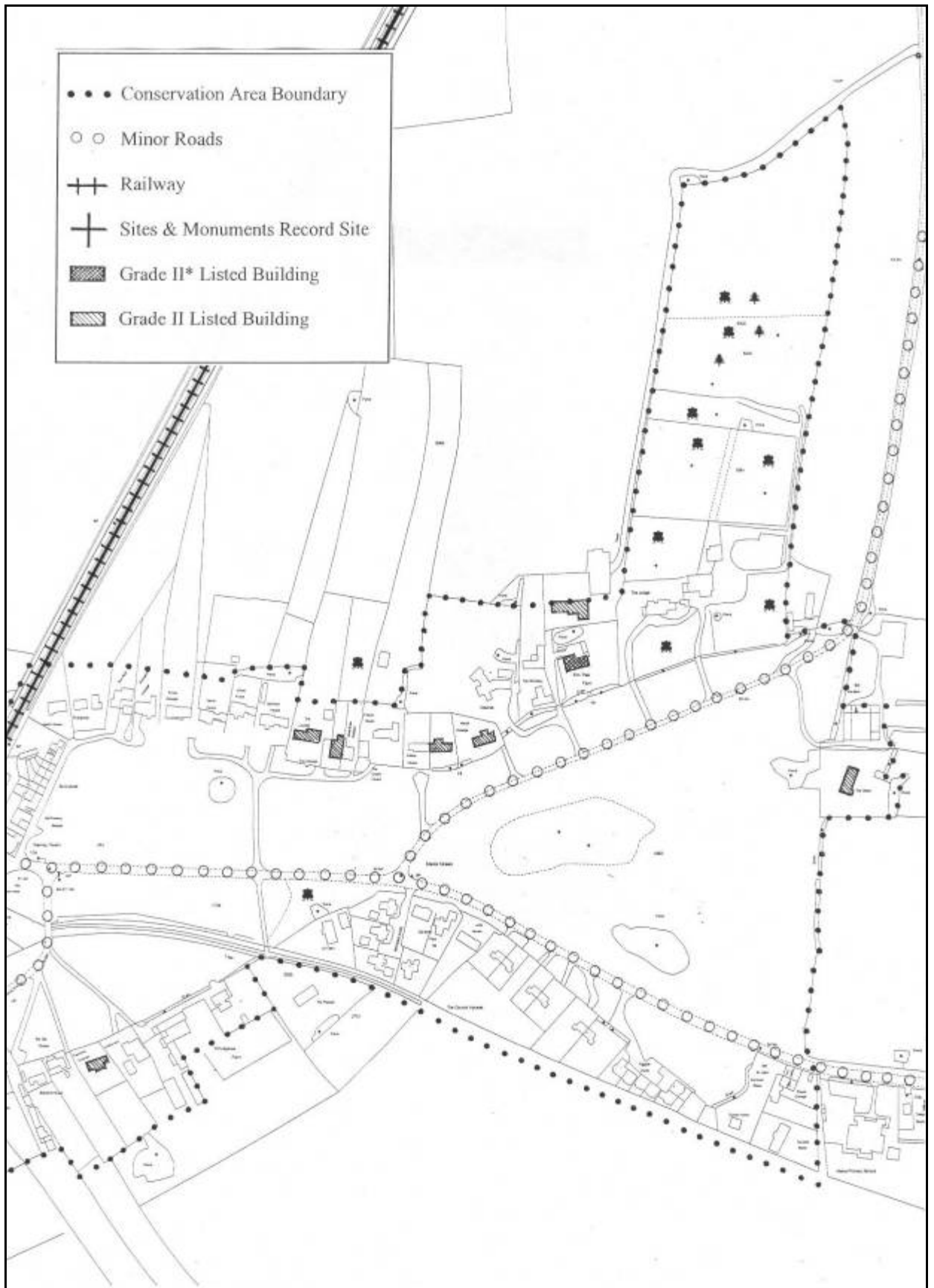


<p>In Metles ten. Leoric. lx. acr. p m. Tnc 7 p. i. car. modo. nichil. & iii. libi boes comend xv. acr. tc 7 p dim car m. ii. boues. Tnc ual lx fol. m. x. Vlugin antec alidici deues. dimid comid. 7 dimi foc. 7 viueua dimi comid. 7 Rex dimidia foc.</p> <p>In Mellis. i. libi Fulcard dimidi comid. Edrico. xxvii. ad. 7. i. bord. 7. i. car. 7. i. ocr pti. 7 dimi Ecclia. viii. acr. 7 ual. x. fol. Rex 7 Comes focum. Mai Roeti tenet.</p> <p>In MELLIS 1 free [man], Fulcard, half under the patronage of Edric; 27 acres. 1 smallholder, 1 plough. Meadow, 1½ acres. A church, 8 acres. Value 10s. The King and the Earl (have) the jurisdiction. Robert's mother holds (this).</p> <p>In MELLIS Leofric held 60 acres as a manor. Then and later 1 plough, now nothing. 3 free men in patronage; 15 acres. Then and later ½ plough, now 2 oxen. Value then 20s; now 10[s]. Wulfwin, Aubrey de Vere's predecessor, (had) half the patronage and half the jurisdiction; Wulfeva (had) half the patronage and the King (had) half the jurisdiction.</p>

The Medieval sites listed include the parish churchyard, the village green, a mill mound, some pottery finds and five moated sites, three of which are still visible at Hall Farm, Potash Farm and the Old Parsonage.

The name Mellis is believed to refer to Mills, which in this area would have been powered by the wind, rather than water. If so, it is not an ancient name.

Mellis appears several times in the Domesday survey of 1086, as 'Metles', but with no mention of a mill. It was mostly held by Robert Malet and had a church with 8 acres of land.



Intrinsic Quality of Buildings

There are 32 listings covering the parish of Mellis, 29 at grade II and three slightly more important buildings at grade II. Thirty of the listed buildings are actually within the conservation area, because this comprises a very large green area and there is not actually much of the parish beyond it. The older buildings are predominantly domestic in scale, mostly timber-framed and plastered with pantile roofs.*

The grade II listed Church of St Mary the Virgin provides the usual village exception to this pattern of building with its knapped flint walls and slate and lead roof. It is mostly early 14th Century, reworked later in the Perpendicular style and restored in the 19th Century. The west tower collapsed in 1730 and remains as a ruin attached to the church.*



Another top quality building within the central area is the grade II listed Elm Tree Farmhouse at the north end of the green. This 15th Century former open hall house is timber-framed and plastered with a plaintile roof. It has a carved oriel window soffit depicting an angel carrying a shield with the De la Pole arms.*

Just outside the conservation area to the east, adjoining the parish boundary with Yaxley, the third grade II building is Yaxley Manor House. Originally early 16th Century, it is also timber framed with a plaintile roof, but is now refronted in painted brick and render.*



Traditional Building Materials

Many of the unlisted buildings in Mellis are of traditional form and grouping, and although not up to "listing" quality as individual buildings, still have interest for their visual impact. A first glance would seem to indicate an abundance of rendered and brick buildings either painted or left natural as soft 'Suffolk Reds'.

This local red brick features scattered throughout the village, but principally on 'Sunnyside' a row of Victorian cottages north-east of the level crossing.

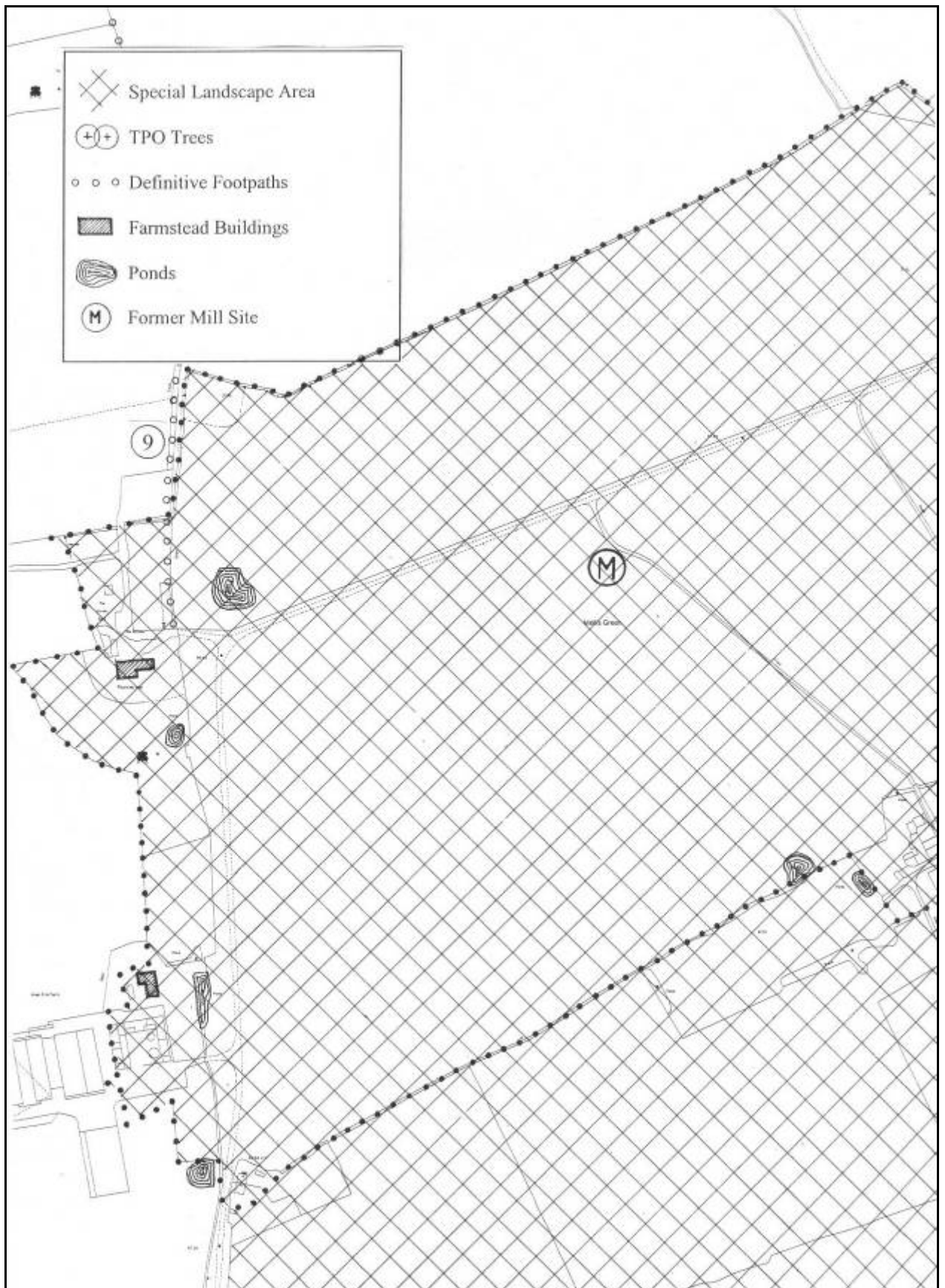
There are also examples of 'Suffolk White' brick such as at Robinson's Mill or 'The Lodge', the large unlisted house at the north-east end of the Common.



A small amount of flintwork is also evident around the village, most notably on the medieval Church, but also in later guise with red brick dressings on the Old Chapel and the Old Parsonage, both south of the Common.

A number of the older timber-framed and rendered properties are also thatched, and more would have been so in days gone by, the steep roof pitches now the only clue remaining.

The prevalent roofing materials now are pantile, either natural red or the black glazed variety so common in the Waveney valley, plaintile on some of the older timber-framed buildings and slate.



Hierarchy of Spaces

Both the village and conservation area in Mellis are very much centred around just one space, the Common. This is aligned south-west to north-east with the majority of settlement at the latter end. West of the church, the Common is largely used as pasture by a number of separate landholdings spread out around the perimeter: Hall Farm, Pountney Hall, West End Farm, Potash Farm, Willow Farm, Walnut Tree Farm and Cow Pasture Farm.

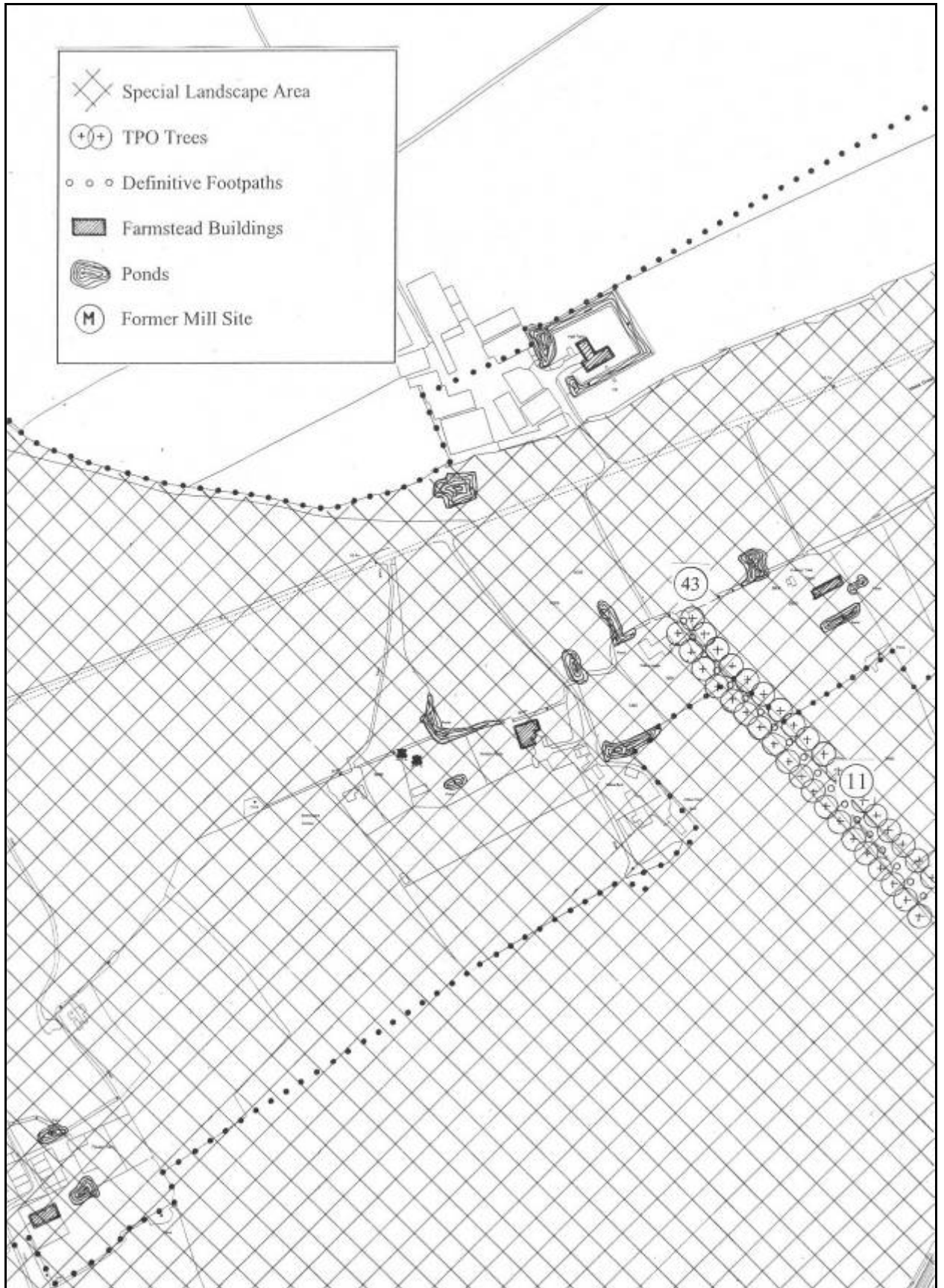
East of the church the development comprises a more continuous strip around the green area, a space now pinched into two areas by the railway crossing. The perimeter farms here still remain, but now amongst an infilling of later development: Home, Ashtree, White House, Elm Tree, Whitegates, Bullocks and Rectory Farms.



Running through the Common there is a central road, about a mile long and dead straight in the west, more meandering and with connections to the north and south in the east.

The far eastern section beyond the level crossing retains the name Mellis Green, whilst the postal addresses in the more central section are 'The Common'. Here there is less agriculture, with a playing field and central pathway across to the church called the Carnser.

The green area itself is ringed around by a series of drainage ditches, locally enlarged in many places to form substantial ponds. The preservation and maintenance of these is important, both visually and for flood protection.



Trees & Planting

Although trees are abundant in Mellis, because of the wide open spaces they are not dominant. Scattered around the perimeter of the Common there can be found specimens of Ash, Oak Horse Chestnut, Poplar, Sweet Chestnut and Field Maple.

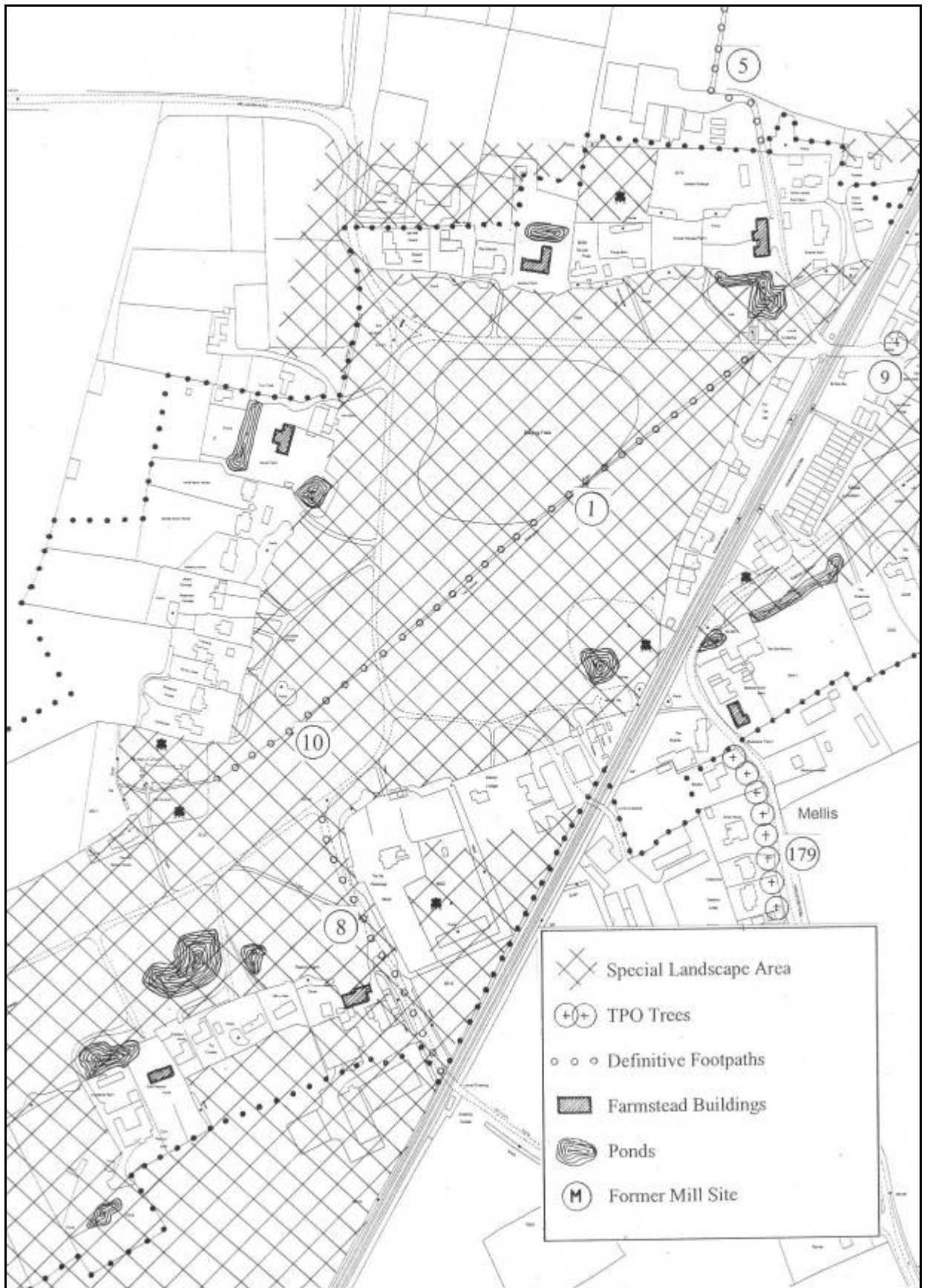
Along the north side of Mellis Green in the east, there is a surviving Elm and a pollarded Ash plus in the grounds of The Lodge, a fine Wellingtonia.

Nearby at Sunnyside Cottages, a row of pollarded Limes is protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO 9), which also includes a single Lime adjoining the level crossing.



Further afield in the parish there are other trees, which have also been felt at risk and thus made the subject of tree preservation orders. These include a group of Horse Chestnuts along Earlsford Road, south of Bullocks Farm (TPO 179) and a large area of hedgerow trees either side of Cowpasture Lane south of the Green, including Ash, Oak and Field Maple (TPO 43).

Another large group of trees can be found lining the old railway branch line eastwards towards Eye, many of them Poplars.



Relationship to Open Countryside

The settlement pattern in Mellis, with houses clustered around the large green area and its approach roads is mostly one plot deep. The size and agricultural use of the Common however mean that Mellis is as much in the countryside as the countryside is within Mellis.

Accordingly Mellis has a central footpath running the length of the Common and enshrined as 'The Carnser' at the eastern end, where it forms definitive footpaths 1 and 10, east and west of the road through.

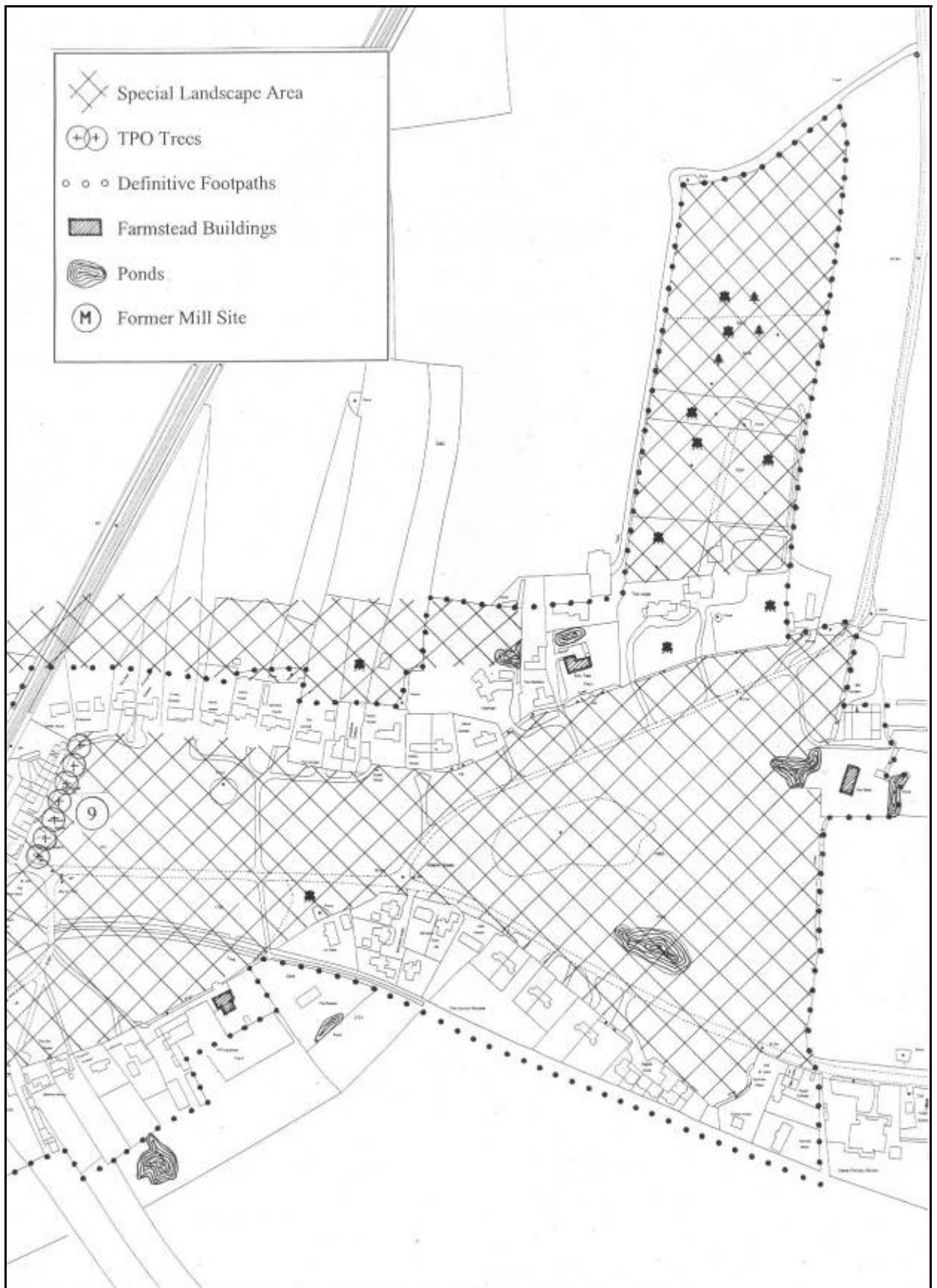
A northwards heading track serving White House Farm, just north of the level crossing, continues northwards, with a number of recent diversions now in place, as footpaths 5, 4, 3 and 2, before becoming Burgate footpath 12 .



Similarly at the western end of the Common footpath 9 continues northwards from Pountney Hall a short distance before becoming Burgate footpath 22. East from here as far as Stone Bridge, midway towards Mellis Hall, the parish boundary follows the edge of the Common, and Stonebridge Lane heading north forms Burgate footpath 34.

To the south of the Common footpath 8 leads into Rectory Road and byway 11 runs along the old green lane known as Cowpasture Lane towards Thornham Parva.

The entire green area and adjoining farmland to the south, west of the railway line forms part of a Special Landscape Area designation.



Prevailing & Former Usage

The origins of Mellis as an agricultural settlement are still very visible in the collection of farms that encircle the Common. Each farm would have had access to grazing on the Common, ponds around its edge for water, some enlarged into moats, and fields in the hinterland. This is most apparent at the western end where this historic pattern remains and later development has not infilled the gaps as in the east.

The only recorded windmill serving this agricultural community was central to the western end of the green, just north of Potash Farm, but demolished around 1898. Another one in the east would perhaps justify the plurality of the name.



Late 17th Century records for the parish list six yeomen, two thatchers, a linen weaver, a cooper and a feltmaker amongst the residents.

19th Century directories present a similar picture listing 14 farmers, a miller, a carpenter, a cooper and a wheelwright.

This general agricultural picture is borne out by field names in the Tithe Map of 1839, but not in the usual interesting way. There is but one field called 'Hemmland' indicative of the linen industry, whilst the majority of entries are for 'Field', 'Premises' or 'Cottage'.



Losses & Possible Gains

The more recent infilling around the eastern end of the Common probably started when the railway cut through the village. Around the level crossing there is a concentration of 19th Century buildings with the Steam Mill now converted to flats, other industrial buildings plus the Railway Tavern and Sunnyside Terrace. These all have their story to tell about the development of the village, and their local Victorian brickwork should perhaps not be painted or rendered over.

Many infill sites now house chalet style bungalows with oversized dormers or modern houses with low-pitched concrete tiled roofs, all of which do little to complement the local vernacular. Elsewhere some of the conversion of old mill buildings or barns is of a reasonable standard and adds to the overall picture.



The worst that Mellis has to offer in terms of overhead wiring is that supplying the railway line, and it is not suggested that this could be undergrounded. Near the level crossing however, there are some areas of no-mans-land, with spoil heaps and poor surfacing, presumably to be tidied up once the nearby developments are completed.



Traffic appears to be an issue in Mellis only at particular times of the day, and mainly in relation to the School site. The motor car can still have a detrimental effect if parking is allowed to overrun the Common, leading to erosion of the grassed areas. Control of this, if found necessary, needs to be carried out in a restrained and low key manner.

References & Further Reading

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Tithe Map & Apportionment 1839 Mellis Suffolk Records Office

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*This Appraisal adopted as
Supplementary Planning Guidance
by Mid Suffolk District Council
Environment Policy Panel
9 December 2008*