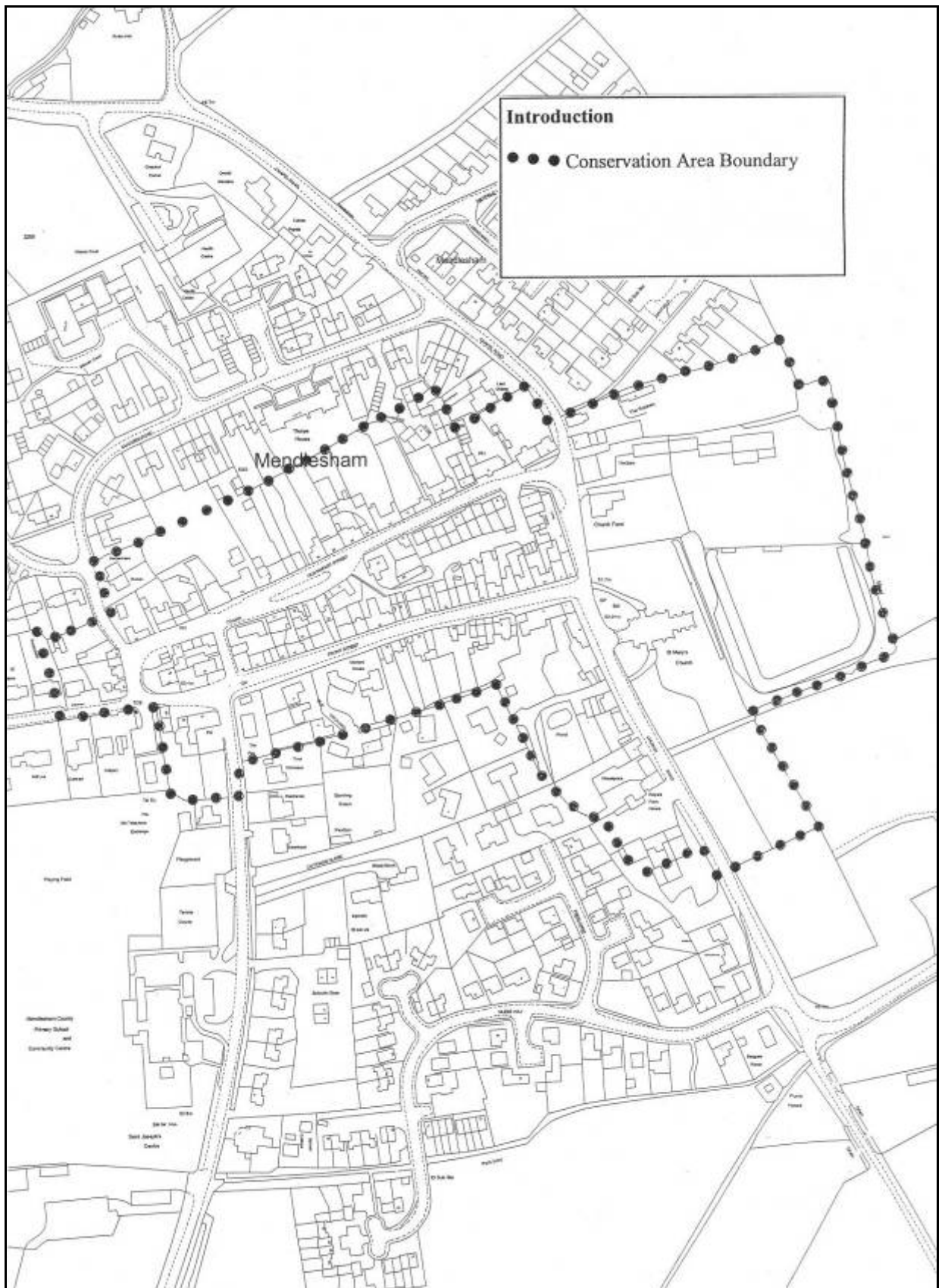




conservation area appraisal



Introduction

The conservation area in Mendlesham was originally designated by East Suffolk County Council in 1972, 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 Mendlesham under a number of different headings as set out in English Heritage's new 'Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals' (2006).

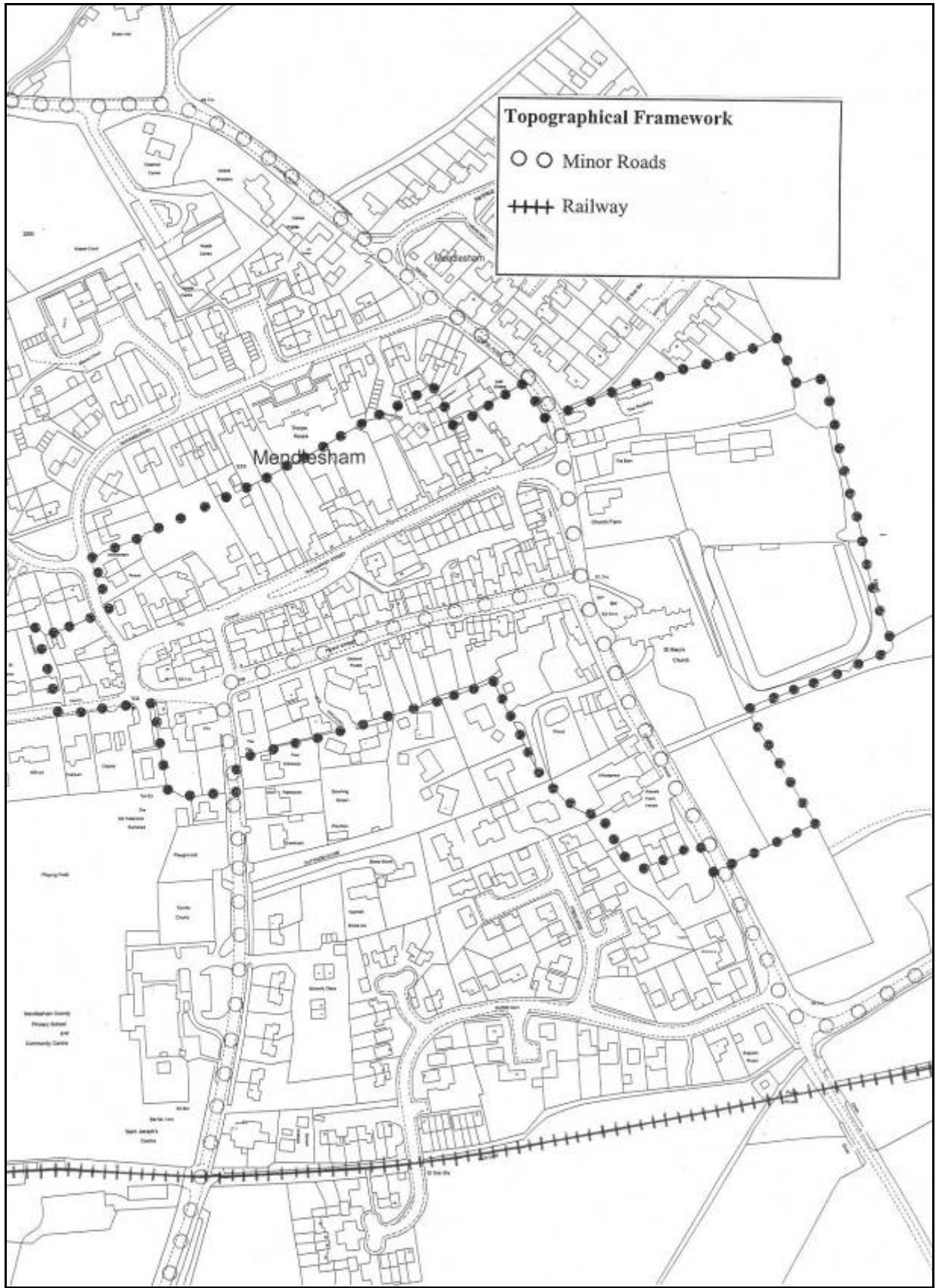
As such it is a straightforward appraisal of Mendlesham's built environment in conservation terms.



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 Mendlesham is about five miles north-east of the market town of Stowmarket and about nine miles south of Diss, roughly at the centre of Mid Suffolk District.

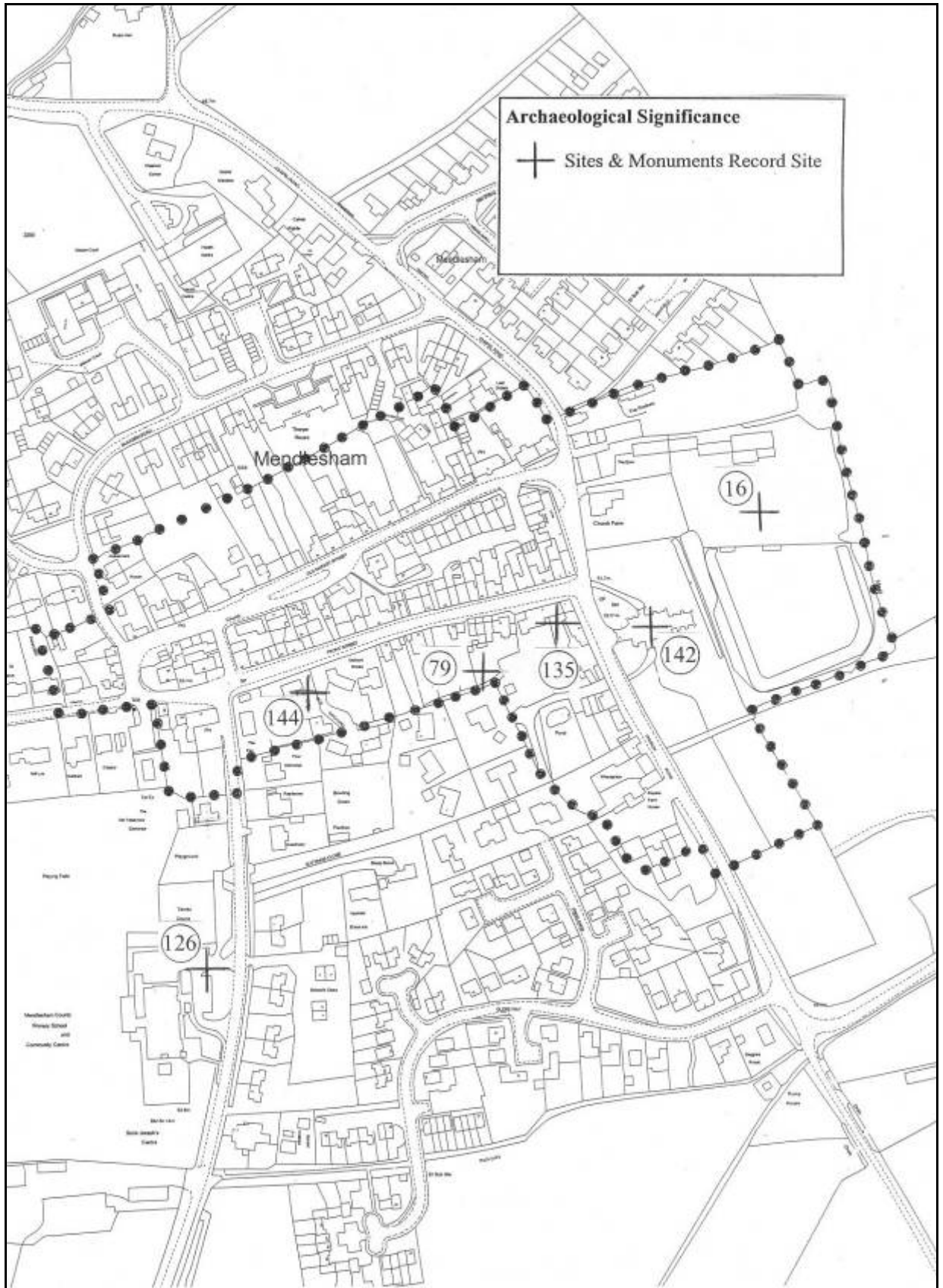
It sits on slightly higher ground between two tributaries of the River Dove that flows north-eastwards via Eye to join the river Waveney at the Norfolk border.

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.



The village is about a mile west of the main A140 road northwards from Ipswich, which runs along the course of an old Roman road. This was formerly controlled by the Ipswich to Scole Turnpike Trust of 1711, the road continuing from Scole onwards to Norwich.

Since 1849 the Ipswich to Norwich railway line has passed about three miles to the west of the village on its route northwards from Stowmarket to Diss. At one time, just south of the main village centre the Mid Suffolk Light Railway passed through the parish on its way from Haughley eastwards, but only reached as far as Laxfield.



Archaeological Significance

The Suffolk County Sites and Monuments Record lists nearly 150 sites of archaeological interest from various periods in the parish of Mendlesham.

These include a number of tranchet axes and flint scatters of Mesolithic date, along with a good many Neolithic polished stone axes and fragments.

The Bronze Age has also left its mark here with bronze implements including an arrowhead, a tanged knife and an axehead.

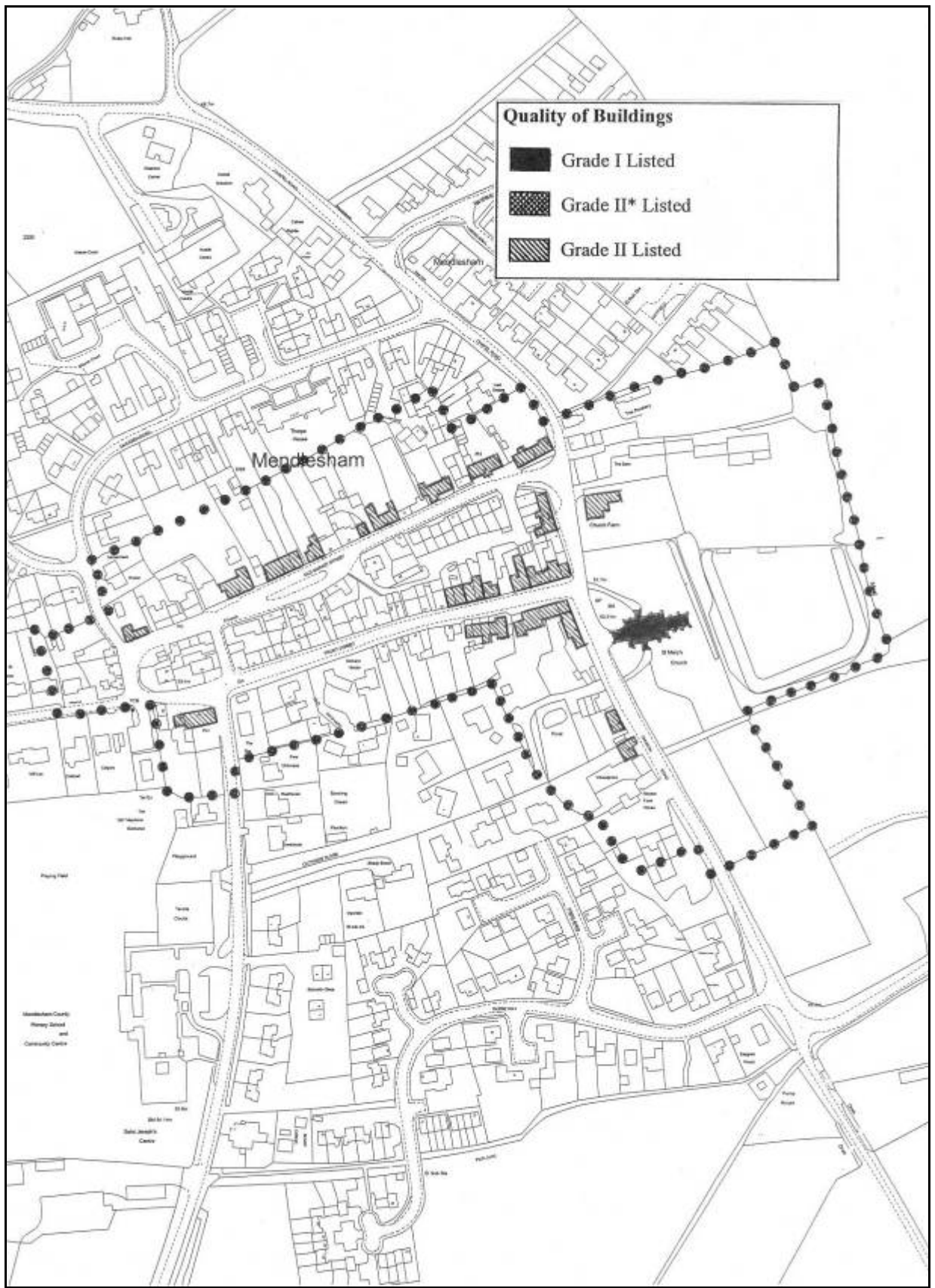
Compared with nearby Wickham Skeith with only seven sites recorded, none of which are this ancient, Mendlesham appears to have been a major centre in early times.



The story continues into Roman and Saxon times with a large number of scatter finds of pottery etc.

However, by far the greatest number of sites recorded, are of Medieval date. These are mostly scatter finds but include the parish church and graveyard along with fifteen moated sites. Of Post-Medieval date there is a windmill site, a pesthouse and some pits.

Mendlesham's entry in the Domesday survey of 1086 indicates its being owned by the king but held by Burghard. It had woodland for 800 pigs and included a church with 40 acres of land, valued at twenty five pounds.



Intrinsic Quality of Buildings

There are 45 listings covering the parish of Mendlesham, 23 of which are actually within the conservation area.

These older buildings are predominantly domestic in scale, and mostly timber-framed and plastered with roofs of plaintiles or pantiles.

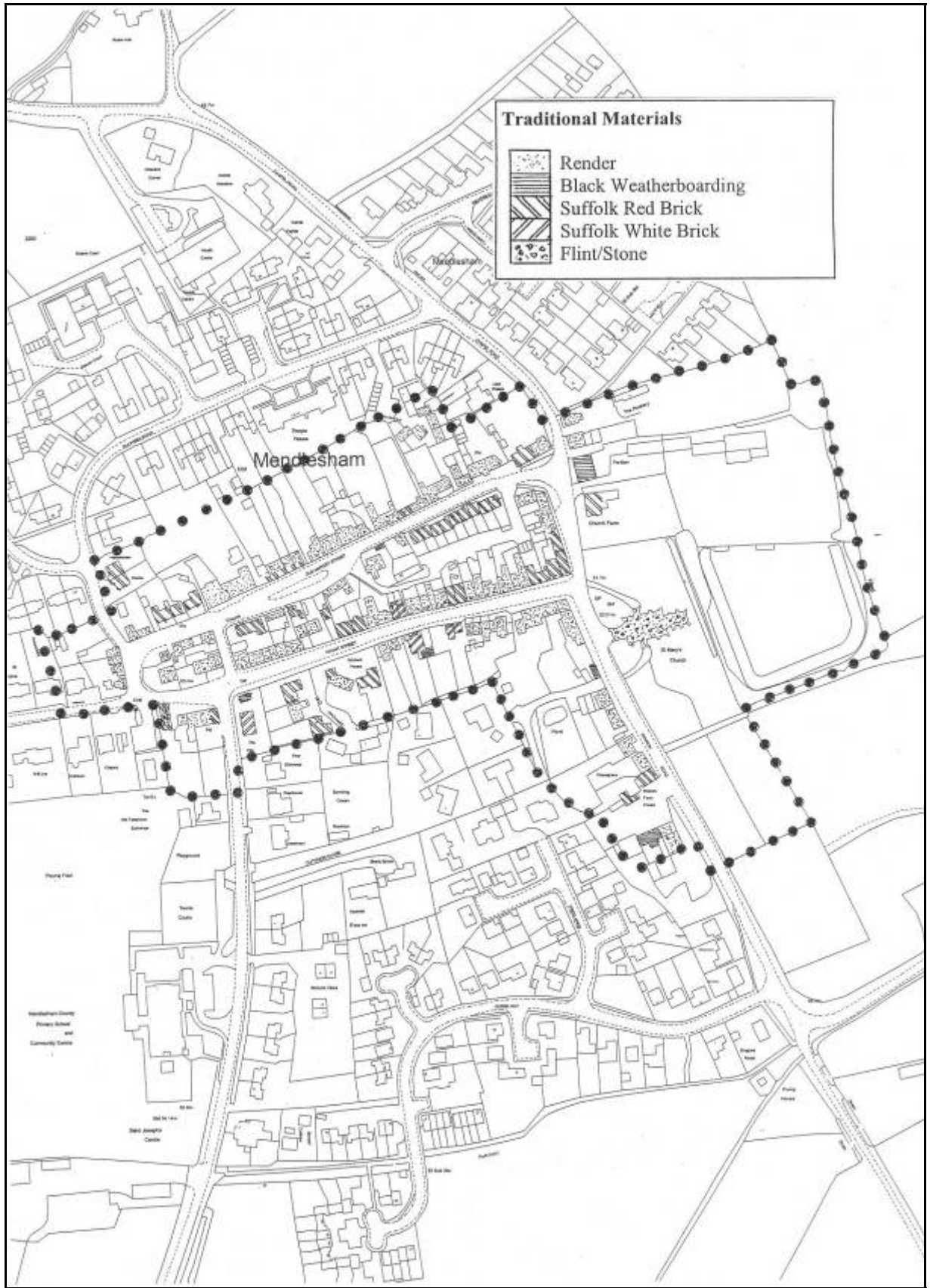
The grade I listed Church of St Mary lies at the eastern end of the village and provides the usual village exception to this pattern of building with its flint rubble, stone-dressed walls, and its leaded and plaintiled roof. It was described by Pevsner as 'an ambitious church at the end of a village street', has some good Decorated parts but is dominated by later Perpendicular work.



The other top quality building within the parish is the grade II listed Elms Farmhouse in Old Station Road south of the centre. This is a timber-framed and plastered 'wealden' type house with a crown post roof to the former open hall. Originally late 15th Century, it contains some fine 16th Century wall paintings.*

Another wealden house listed grade II can be found at 16 Old Market Street, with exposed timber framing and a jetty at either end. Dating from the late 15th Century, the bay below the western jetty appears to have been a shop at one time.





Traditional Building Materials

A first glance around the older buildings in Mendlesham would seem to indicate an abundance of rendered buildings in the village.

However the local red brick features not only on chimney stacks and as a plinth on many rendered timber-framed buildings, but also on some older timber-framed buildings such as nos 2/4 and 18/20 Front Street refronted in soft 'Suffolk Red' brick in more recent times.

A number of unlisted Victorian cottages are also red brick, although many have been painted over.



'Suffolk White' brick is also present on a number of cottages, but flint only occurs on the Church, one short terrace and a few outbuildings.

The prevalent roofing material is clay plaintile or pantile, some the black glazed variety more common in the north of Suffolk. Slate can be found on some of the Victorian cottages.

Modern infill buildings generally respect the local vernacular using render and red brick, again often painted over. Most of the infill has plaintile or pantile roofs, although some of the latter are concrete.

Hierarchy of Spaces

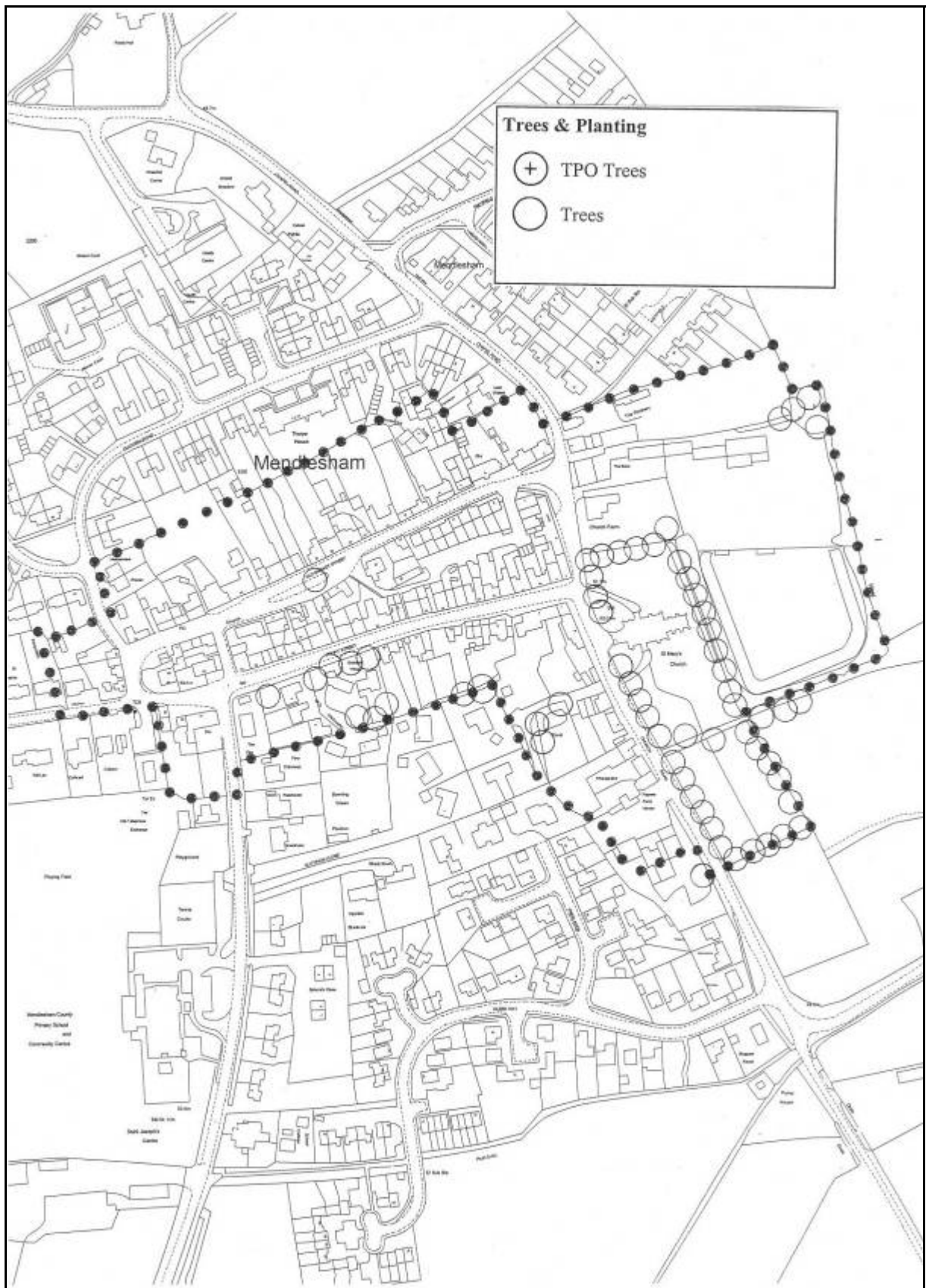
The conservation area in Mendlesham is centred around an area that originally may have been an open green or market place. This area between the parallel Old Market Street and Front Street has been built up since at least Medieval times.

The centre of the village thus has a fairly urban built up character. In many places listed buildings, tight onto the back of pavement, face each other across a narrow street. This character could be amplified with the introduction of a comprehensive paving scheme using traditional materials in place of the current blacktop.



Elsewhere as at the western end of Front Street, new development in a former orchard area is more set back from the road. From the western end of Front Street, Mill Road continues westwards, whilst Station Road joins from the south. The eastern end of Front Street forms a T-junction with Church Road to the south and Chapel Road to the north. A short way up the latter a second T-junction is formed where Old Market Street joins from the west.

Beyond this core area, the settlement rapidly thins out, either to open countryside on the west and east sides or the modern housing estates immediately to the north and south. These last can be glimpsed where the roads lead out of the central area, but do not unduly impinge on the character of that area.



Trees & Planting

The most dominant trees in the centre of Mendlesham are those that encircle the churchyard. These are mostly Yews plus a few other conifers, but on the western road frontage nearest the village centre they comprise a fine row of mature Limes. These sit behind the churchyard wall with its grassed verge adjoining the roadway bringing some greenery into the centre of the village.

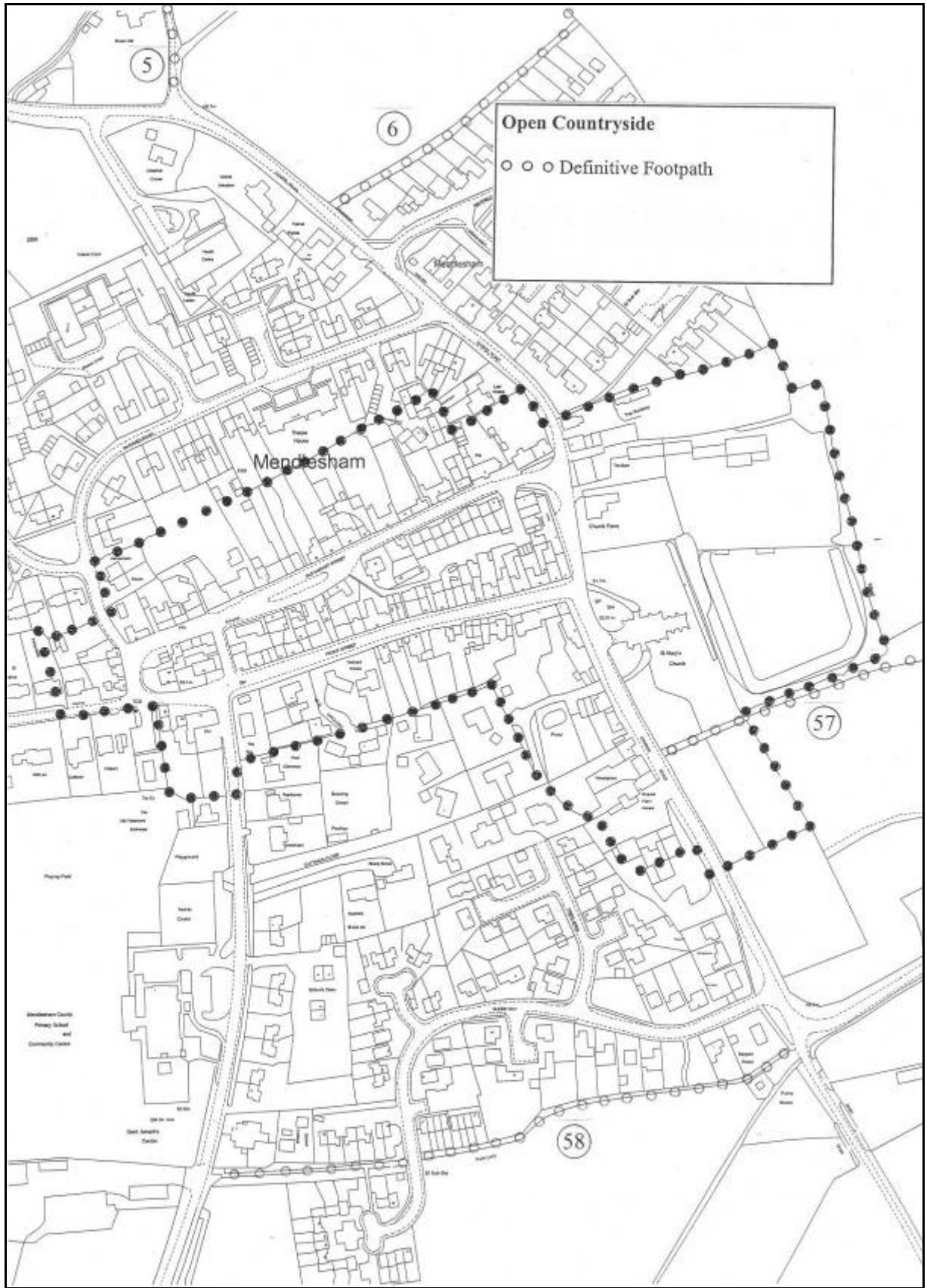
Elsewhere there is a flowering Cherry on the small strip of green in Old Market Street and a row of remaining Ash along the old orchard frontage in Front Street.

A solitary Ash also remains fronting Ropes Farm opposite the churchyard in Church Road. This one marks the entrance to the conservation area along this route.



Mendlesham village's built up nature precludes the presence of other trees in the centre. Further afield in the parish some trees have been under sufficient threat to warrant Tree Preservation Orders being made.

South of Mendlesham Green a strip of Elm, Ash, Oak, Maple, Thorn and Hazel along One Hundred Lane is protected by TPO no. 66. Also at Mendlesham Green there is TPO no. 308 protecting a solitary Holly at Holly Cottage and TPO no. 324 protecting a woodland group of Maple, Ash, Oak, Cherry and Apple at High House Farm.



Relationship to Open Countryside

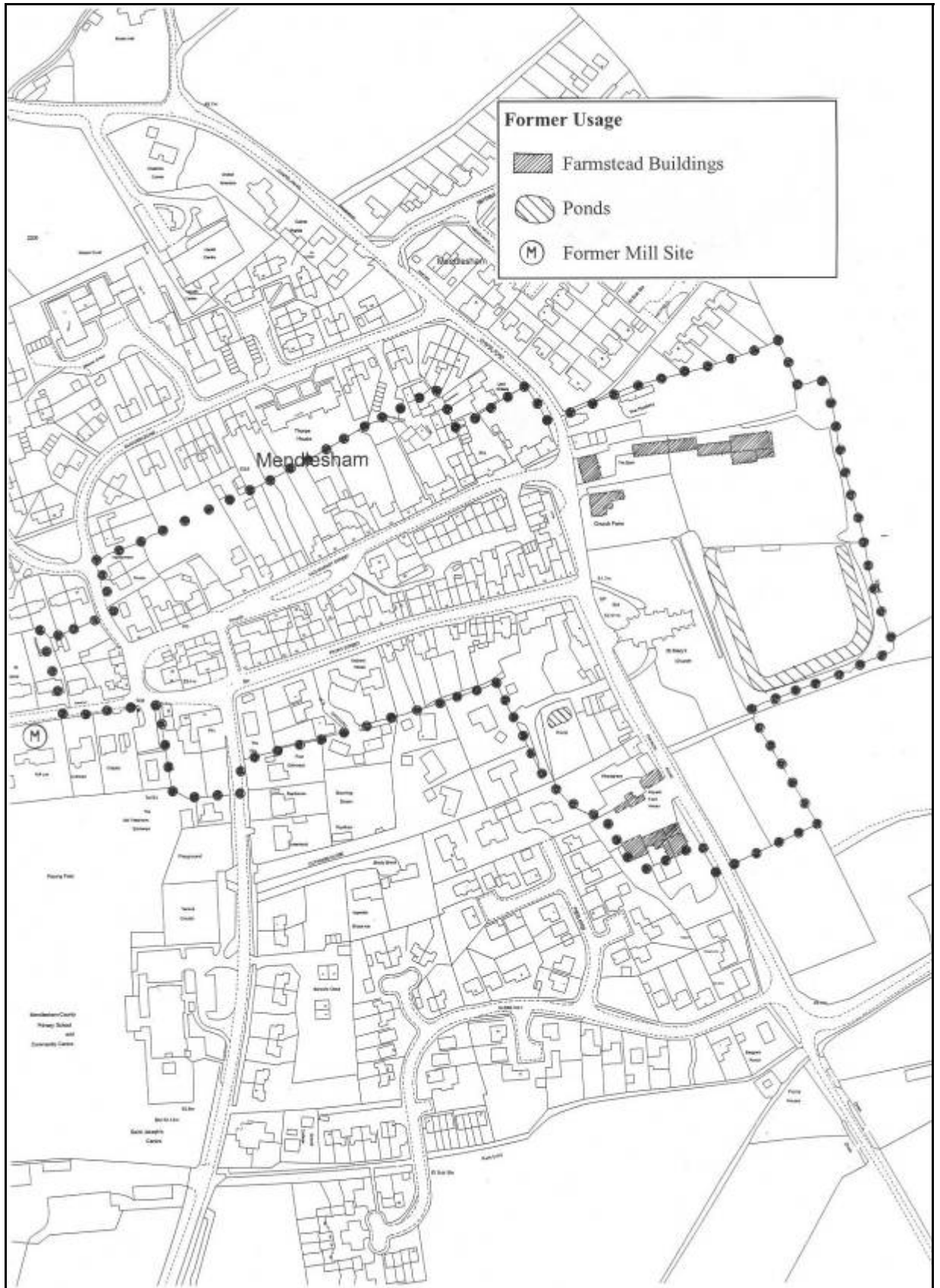
The historic settlement pattern in Mendlesham, with houses clustered around the central area was mostly one plot deep. The pattern now, with the central area infilled and more recent developments abutting, is more complex. However a number of parallel plots stretching back to the conservation area boundary can still be discerned from the original layout.

Although rarely visible and despite the urban feel of the centre, the countryside is never far away. Any of the roads serving the village centre allow easy access on foot out into the countryside to the east, south and west.



In addition a number of parish footpaths also provide access to the countryside. To the north footpaths 5 and 6 head off into a large area devoid of roads on their way to the neighbouring parishes of Wickham Skeith and Thwaite respectively.

Mill Road, the westwards extension of Front Street, continues westwards as footpath 53 beyond a T-junction where it meets Hobbies Lane from the south. Just south of the churchyard and its adjoining moated site, footpath 57 heads off eastwards, before eventually joining Brockford Road. Church Road and Station Road, the two roads leaving the village southwards are linked by footpath 58, roughly along the line of the former Mid Suffolk Light Railway.



Prevailing & Former Usage

Mendlesham has its origins as a successful agricultural community that grew into a local market place and thus developed something of an urban character.

It enjoyed the benefits of Suffolk's historic cloth-making enterprises; the southern woollen and northern linen industries both had weavers there. In the late 17th Century records show 27 yeomen, 8 husbandmen, a spinster, 2 cordwainers, a joiner and a blacksmith amongst the residents.

By the mid 19th Century, directories for the village list 26 farmers, 4 blacksmiths, 7 wheelwrights, 3 millers, 10 shoemakers and a host of shopkeepers of various kinds.



This general agricultural picture is borne out in detail by field names in the Tithe Map Apportionment of 1839. There is but one 'Hemmland' indicative of the linen industry, two entries of 'Mill Meadow', a 'Mill Field', two entries of 'Shoemaker's Shop', plus mention of wheelwrights, butchers, blacksmiths and even a 'Fire Engine House'.

There are five mill sites recorded in the parish, four of which are at Mendlesham Green, the hamlet to the south. The other was Kent's Mill, off Mill Road just west of the main village centre. This Post and Roundhouse mill was part demolished in 1910 and may itself have supplanted an earlier Smock Mill.



Losses & Possible Gains

Overall Mendlesham seems to have resisted too much modern intrusion. There are a few infill houses dotted around the centre, but for the most part these respect the local vernacular using red brick or render with clay plaintile or pantile roofs. A few have perhaps too fleet a roof pitch or use concrete tiles, inappropriate in a conservation area.

Like many small villages, Mendlesham suffers from a surfeit of overhead wiring carrying the village's telephone and electricity supplies. This is particularly intrusive along Church Road and Old Market Street and the under-grounding of these utility supply lines would greatly improve the appearance of the village.



The village shop on Old Market Street in an unlisted building suffers from a poor quality modern fascia and illuminated signs. The presentation of this business could be better handled in a manner more appropriate for its conservation area setting.

Near here the house at the western end of the central 'island' has some alarming decorative plasterwork and two rather bright red garage doors behind an area of gravelled drive that lacks enclosure.

Elsewhere there are instances of poor non-traditional colour choices and the occasional building left to the mercy of rampant ivy growth.

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