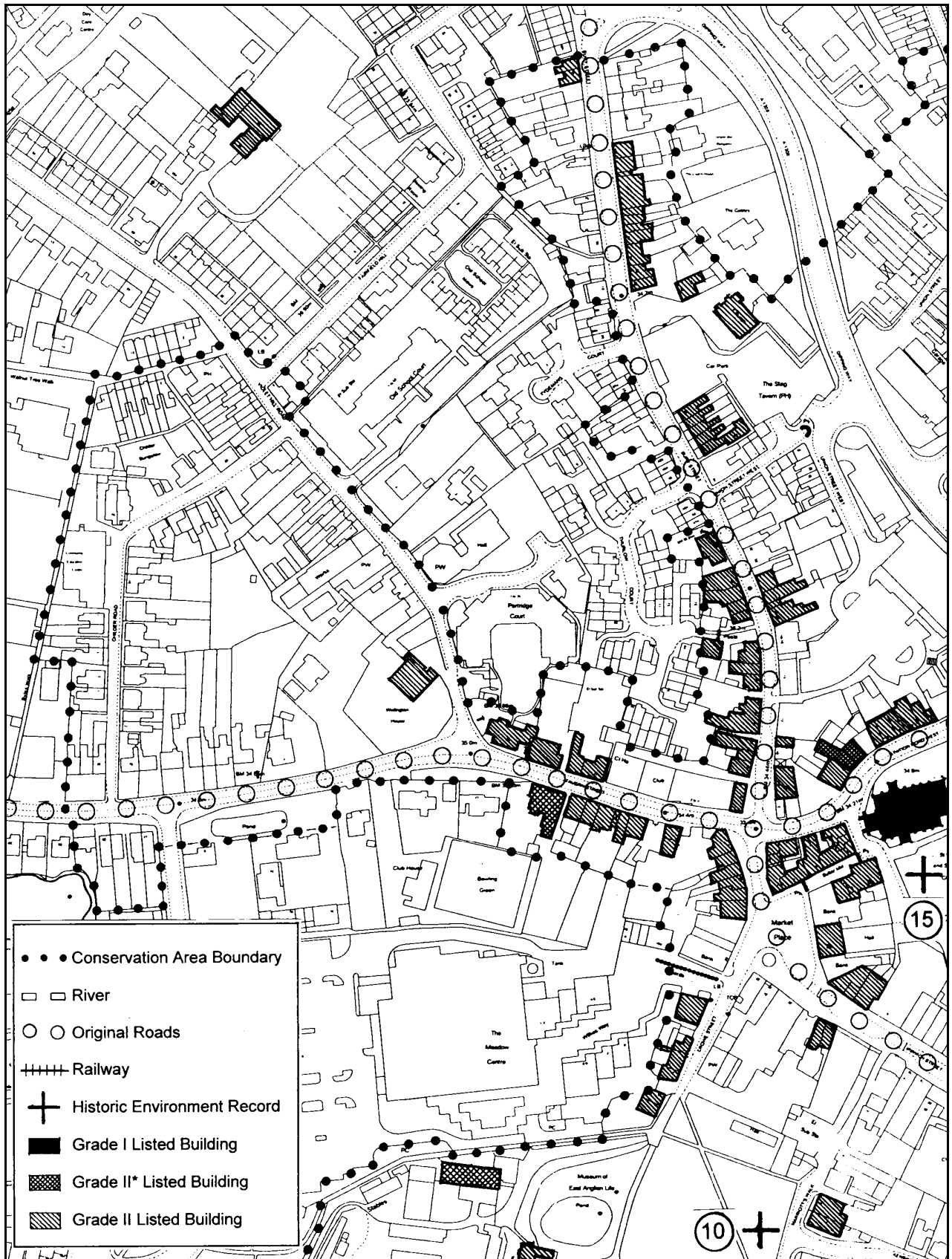




CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

Stowmarket NW



- • • Conservation Area Boundary
- □ River
- ○ Original Roads
- ++++ Railway
- ⊕ Historic Environment Record
- Grade I Listed Building
- ▨ Grade II* Listed Building
- ▧ Grade II Listed Building

INTRODUCTION

The conservation area in Stowmarket was originally designated by East Suffolk County Council in 1970. It was inherited by Mid Suffolk District Council at its inception in 1974 and then revised with several additional areas designated in 1997.

The Council has a duty to review its conservation area designations from time to time, and this appraisal examines Stowmarket 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 Stowmarket'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 2009.

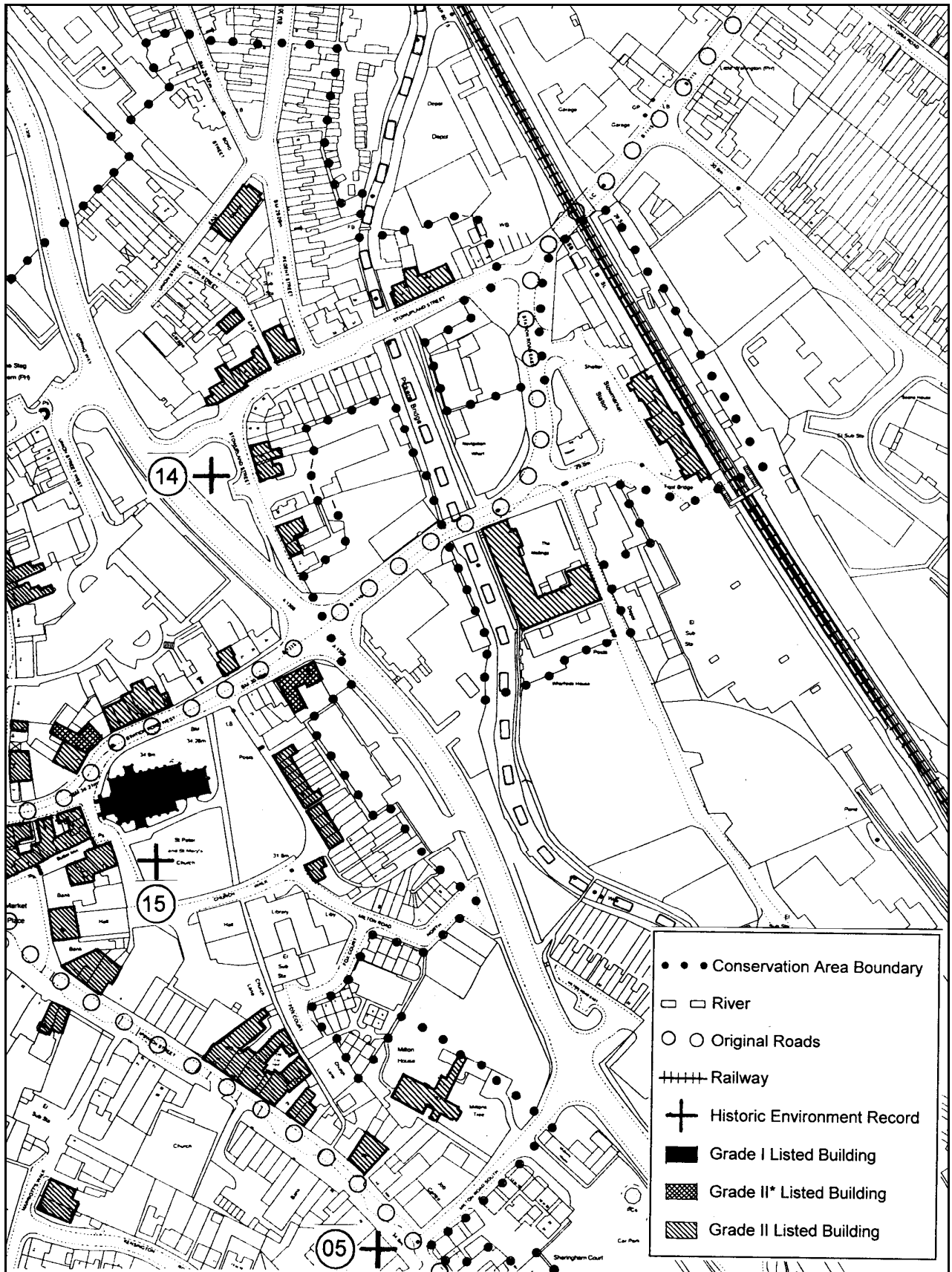


Church Walk



Church from Tavern Street

Stowmarket NE



TOPOGRAPHICAL FRAMEWORK

Stowmarket is situated in central Suffolk ten miles north-west of Ipswich between 30 and 50 metres above OD. It is built mainly on the western bank of the river Gipping above its junction with the Rattlesden River, this forming the southern boundary of the town. The Gipping continues from Stowmarket south-eastwards to Ipswich where it forms the Orwell estuary, this stretch of river having been canalised as the Ipswich and Stowmarket Navigation in 1793.

Surrounded by the boulder clays of 'High Suffolk', the town itself is built on alluvial deposits over the underlying strata of chalk and Pleistocene crags (roughly at the point where the former dips under the latter to the east), exposed by the river's action since the ice ages.

The town has arisen around a junction, where the old route from Ipswich to Bury St Edmunds, following the river valley and turnpiked in 1711 by the Ipswich to Scole Trust, has been crossed by roads from Finborough in the west and Stowupland in the east. This route crossed over the Rattlesden River into Stowmarket at Combs Ford, an old drover's crossing which had been replaced with a bridge by 1755.

This was paralleled in 1846 by the coming of the Eastern Union Railway along the same river valley route connecting Ipswich through to Bury St Edmunds and Norwich.

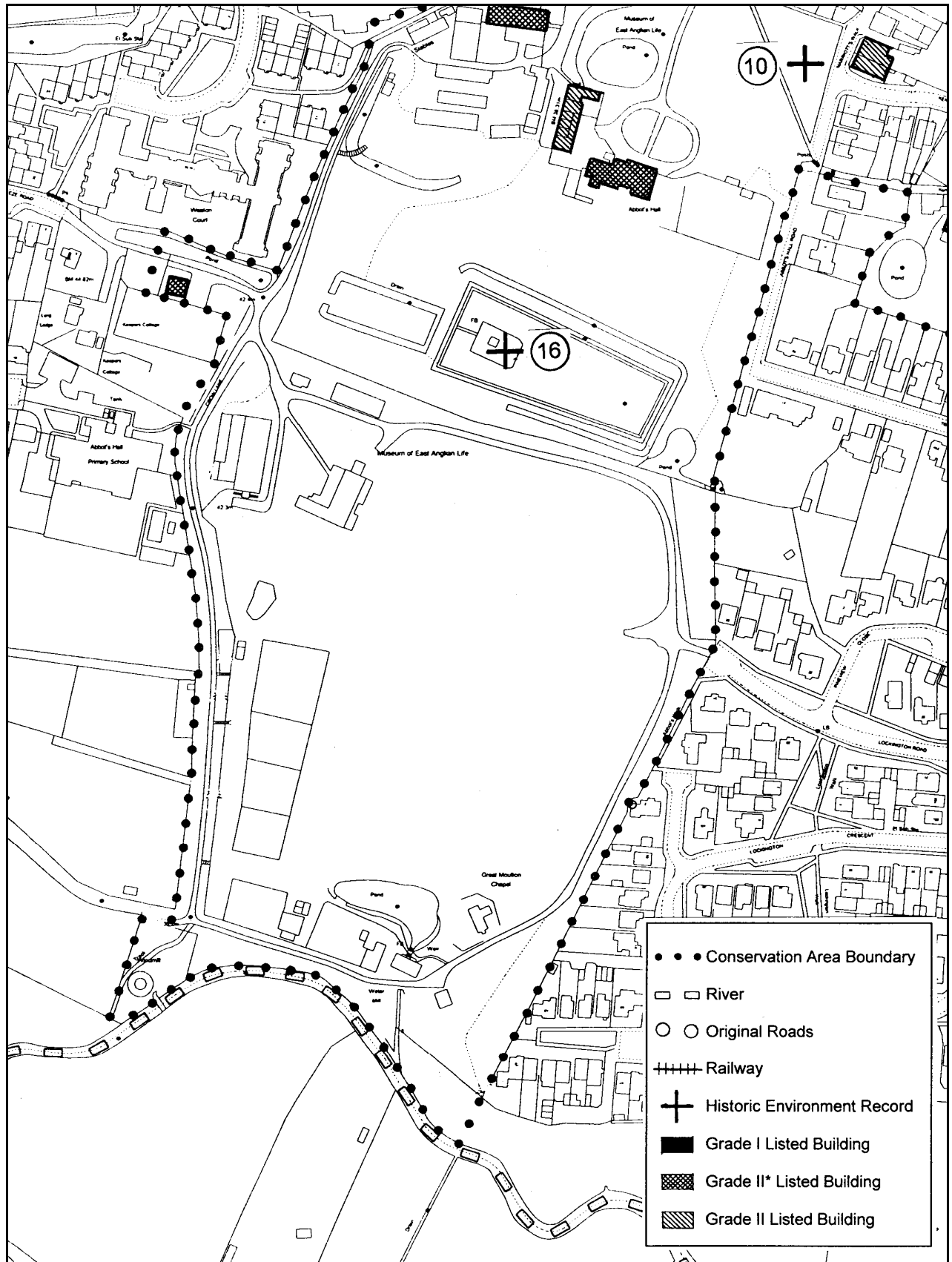


Aerial Photograph

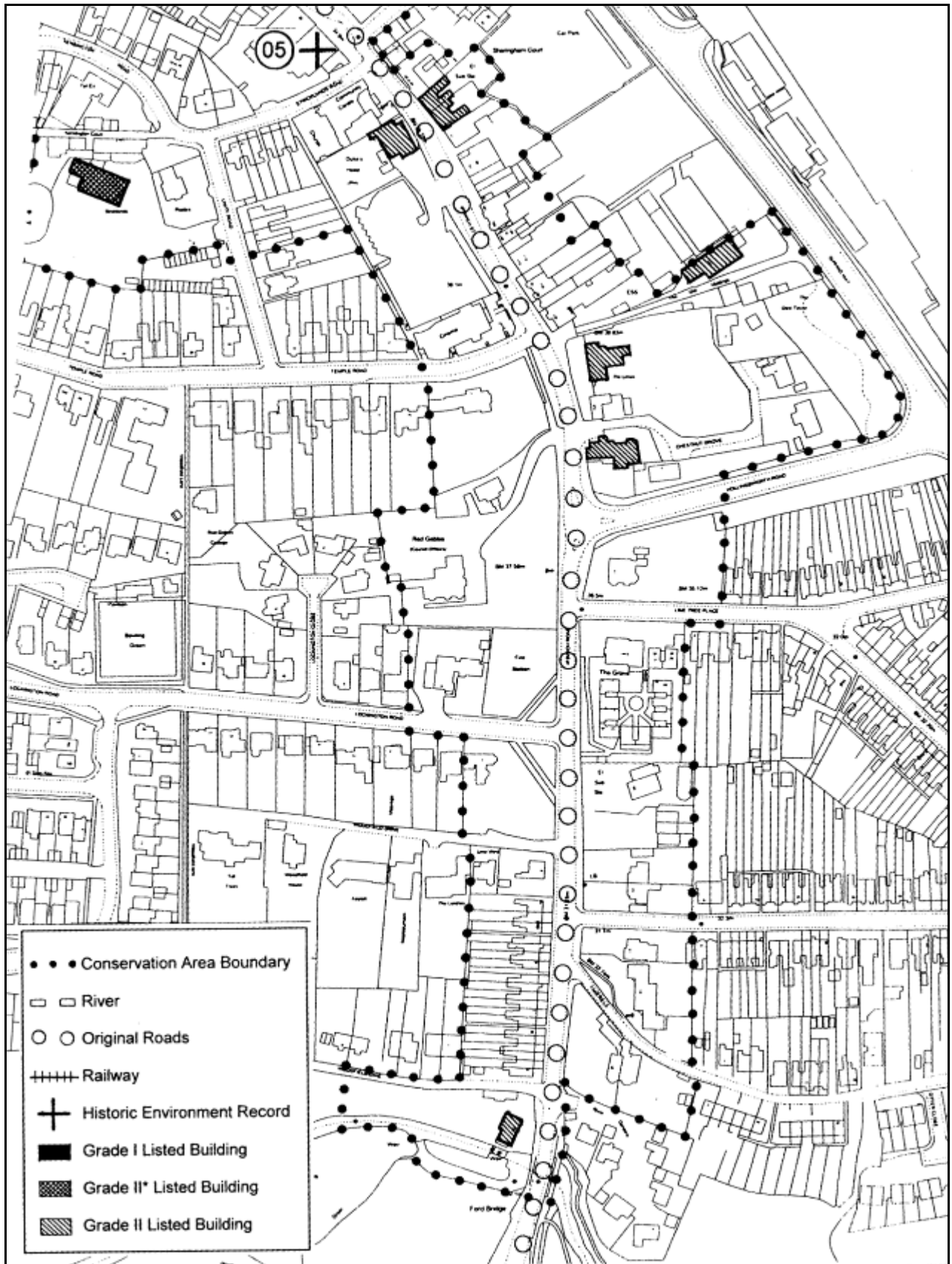


OS Extract

Stowmarket SW



Stowmarket SE



QUALITY OF BUILDINGS

Central Stowmarket's buildings range from the domestic, through domestic converted for commercial uses to purpose built commercial, with an industrial area along the line of the river and railway to the east of the town.

The medieval church of St Peter & St Mary is listed grade I and very much a central landmark in the town, glimpses of its spire being caught from many odd corners. It is described by Pevsner as 'Externally all Dec(orated), except for the porches, the tower and the clerestory', these last all being Perpendicular.

Within the parish there are a further 10 buildings listed grade II*. These range from the medieval timber frames of the Abbot's Hall tithe barn and Edgar's Farmhouse (now both part of the Museum of East Anglian Life) and no.3 Station Road to fine examples of more formal 17th and 18th Century houses at Abbot's Hall itself, The Stricklands, Lynton House and 15 Tavern Street.

The majority of other listed buildings, grade II, are within the conservation area and comprise the central commercial hub of the town (except for one large part of Ipswich Street), together with a group of more industrial buildings, comprising the area around the station. Two additional small concentrations of listed buildings also occur within the conservation area, one along Bury Street to the north and the other in Stowupland Street to the north-east.



Lynton House



Town Hall



Red Brick and Tile



Tile-hanging and Slate



White and Red Brick



Red and White Brick

TRADITIONAL MATERIALS

The initial impression given by Stowmarket is of its being a town of painted rendered buildings, with some infill of white brick and a scattering of red brick, tile-hanging and flintwork. Closer inspection, however, reveals that much of the paint is on brick buildings, so that underneath we have the more general mixture of render and brick buildings typical of Suffolk's vernacular.

The older rendered buildings generally conceal timber-framed construction and have steep plaited roofs, often with the characteristic slate eaves courses found elsewhere in the locality, particularly at nearby Needham Market.

The later Georgian buildings with low pitched slate roofs, are usually of Suffolk white brick, which may have been made locally or brought from Woolpit only 6 miles to the north-west. Red brick, probably of more local origin, appears on some of these as dressings, but does not appear to come into its own until the 19th Century. The supply of bricks of both colours was supplemented by a local brickworks opened by Fisons off the Finborough Road in 1823.

A number of tile-hung buildings, all very similarly detailed, are the result of one owner, O.G.Barnard, refacing his buildings this way early in the 20th Century.

More recent infill buildings also use a fair amount of red brick, but also a great many less traditionally coloured bricks and other foreign materials such as concrete roof tiles and cement render finishes.

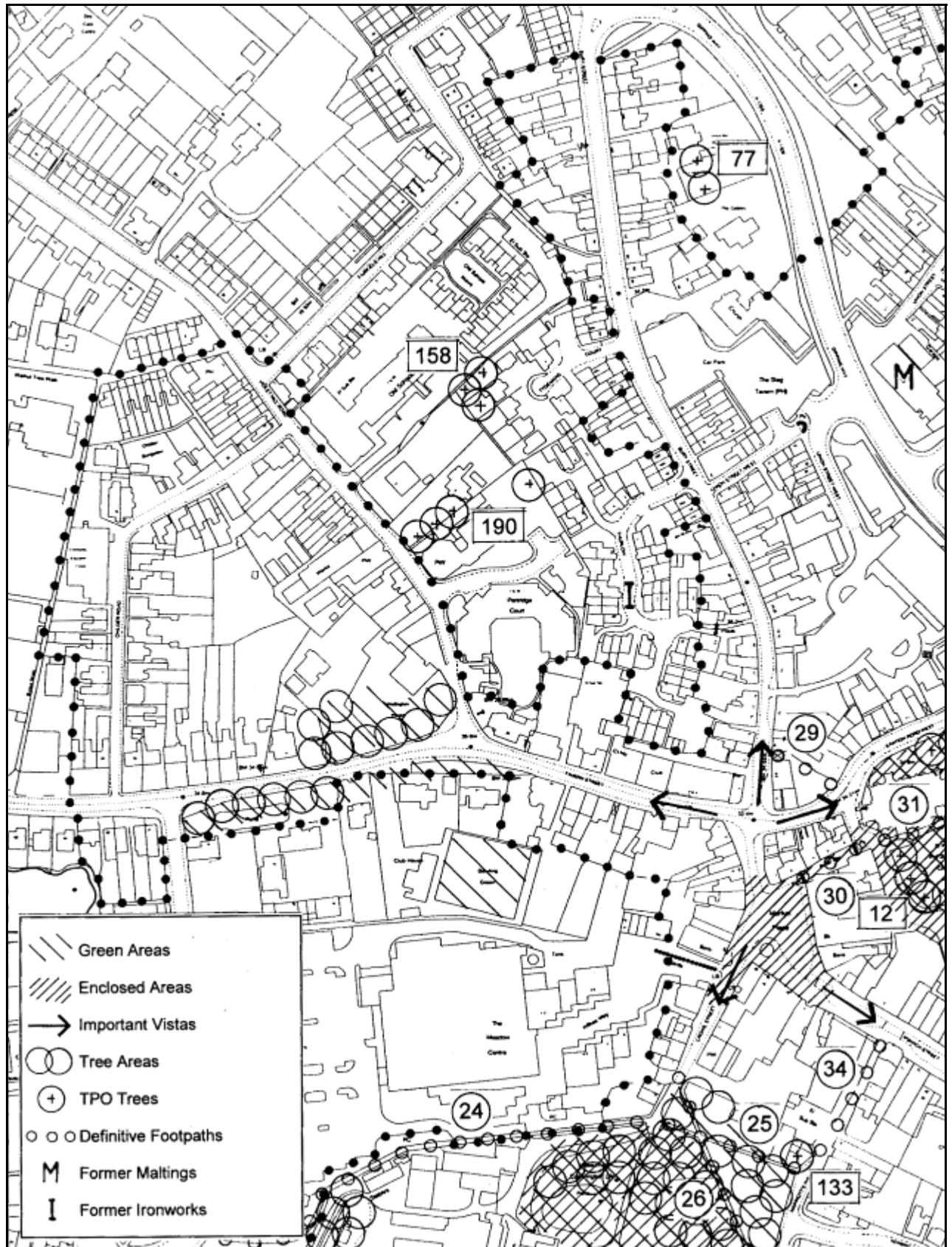


Railway Station



Former Waterworks

Stowmarket NW



HIERARCHY OF SPACES

The hub of the town is undoubtedly the Market Place, rather than the crossroads some 50 metres to the north around which the town originated. Around Market Place can be found a predominance of large three storey buildings, many financial houses of one kind or another, giving a good sense of enclosure.

South-south-west of Market Place runs Crowe Street, a cul-de-sac closed off by Abbot's Hall, set axially some 200 metres distant within its oasis of trees. Ipswich Street also runs off Market Place, but in an east-south-easterly direction, gently curving away to the right as it slowly ascends. Much rebuilt, it is effectively the 'high street', containing the majority of Stowmarket's trading community.

North of Market Place the crossroads feeds into Tavern Street, Bury Street and Station Road running off to the west, north and east respectively. Although a busy traffic intersection, these are three areas of lesser trading importance, which have consequently retained a larger proportion of good original buildings, the majority being listed.

Butter Market, a narrow footway leading off the north eastern corner of Market Place, is pleasantly small scaled and opens out dramatically at its eastern end into the churchyard south of Station Road. This larger open space can also be reached via Church Lane, running off the end of Ipswich Street, northwards along the backs of properties there.

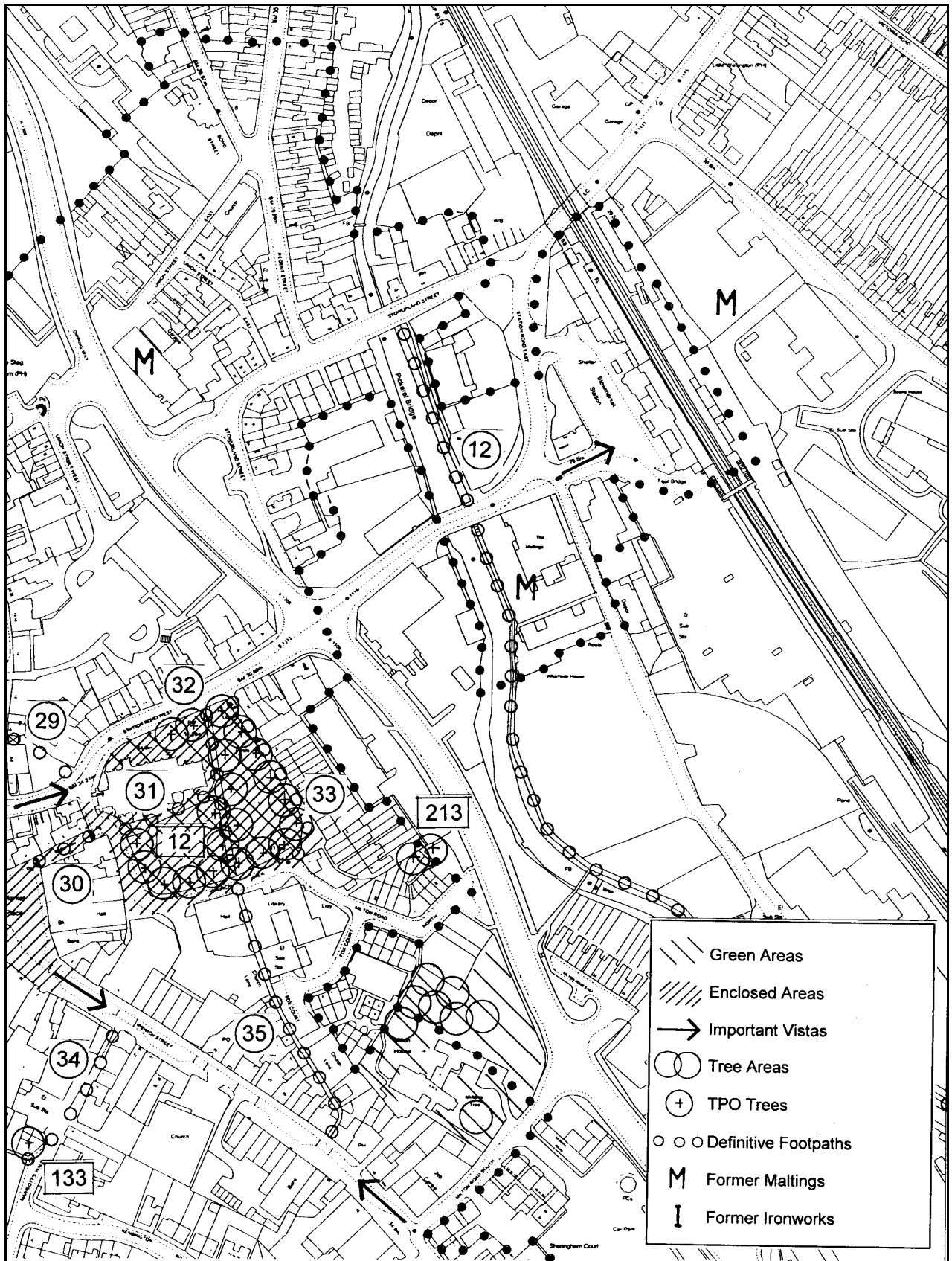


Butter Market



Crowe Street

Stowmarket NE



TREES AND PLANTING

Two main areas of green occur within the original conservation area. The churchyard, subject of Tree Preservation Order no.12, contains a large number of mature Lime trees plus an assortment of Horse Chestnut, Sycamore, Oak and Yew. With its bench seating and well-groomed grass within a short Cherry Laurel hedge, it performs the functions of an urban park, providing an accessible oasis of green very close to the town centre.

A slightly larger area of trees lies as far south of Ipswich Street as the churchyard is north. This is however less accessible, mostly in the grounds of Abbot's Hall, but can be seen in the distance looking down the length of Crowe Street.

A small triangular section of this area lies outside the grounds at the top of Marriott's Walk and contains fine examples of Wellingtonia, Corsican Pine, Lime and some very mature Silver Birch. Adjoining this area a single Horse Chestnut opposite no.11 Marriott's Walk is the subject of Tree Preservation Order no.133.

Just outside the original conservation area in Milton Road, there is a small area of grass and garden around the Old Vicarage and Oak Cottage. This contains 'Milton's Tree', an old black mulberry, reputedly planted by the poet John Milton, a visitor to the vicarage. Further south along Ipswich Road the front gardens of some of the larger villas have good trees, notably Red Gables with its Wellingtonia and Corsican Pines.

Within the town centre itself the majority of buildings are built hard on the back of pavement line without front gardens, but near Market Place this has recently been softened with some small tree planting included as part of recent traffic control measures.

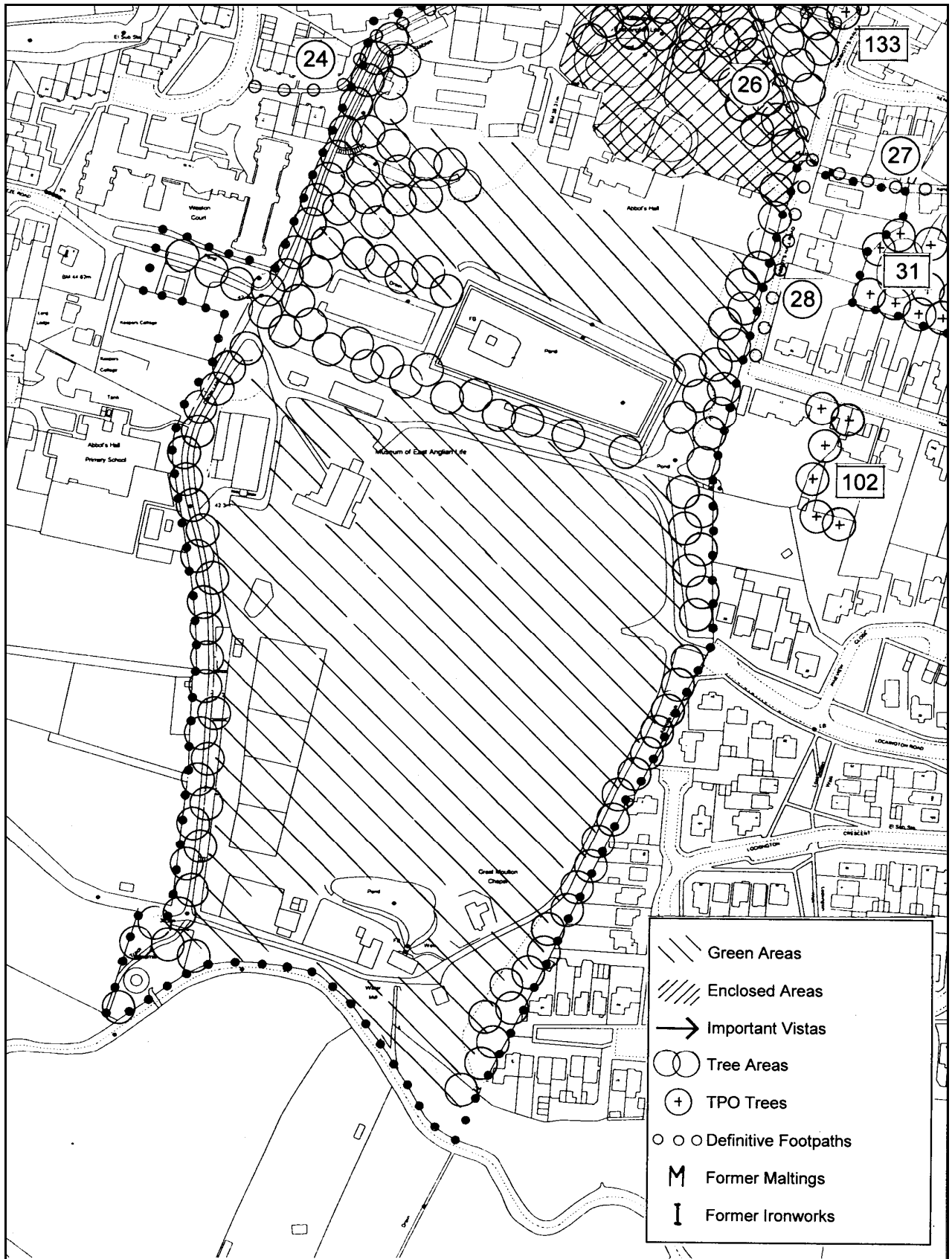


Churchyard Limes



Milton's Mulberry

Stowmarket SW



COUNTRYSIDE SETTING

Whilst apparently in a built up area when in Stowmarket's central shopping area, one is actually never far distant from open countryside. The whole town is no more than two kilometres across.

One major wedge of green space remains to the south-west of the centre, from Abbot's Hall through the Museum of East Anglian Life site right through to the green fields opposite on the south bank of the Rattlesden River. This wedge has remained undeveloped due to past and present ownerships, many roads ending in culs-de-sac at its boundary. Either side of this wedge to the south and west of the centre there is a network of footpath fragments that eventually emerge onto roads near Combs Ford and on the Finborough Road respectively.

A slightly more tenuous link to the countryside exists in the river Gipping, winding its way through unnoticed to the east of the centre. The riverside footpath here can be followed from the bridge in Stowupland Street southwards along the old towpaths all the way to Ipswich if desired, intersecting with many other footpaths in the valley along the way.

Apart from these two links to the countryside, the small size of the town means that the roads leading out of the centre generally climb for a short while and then fall away revealing views of distant fields.

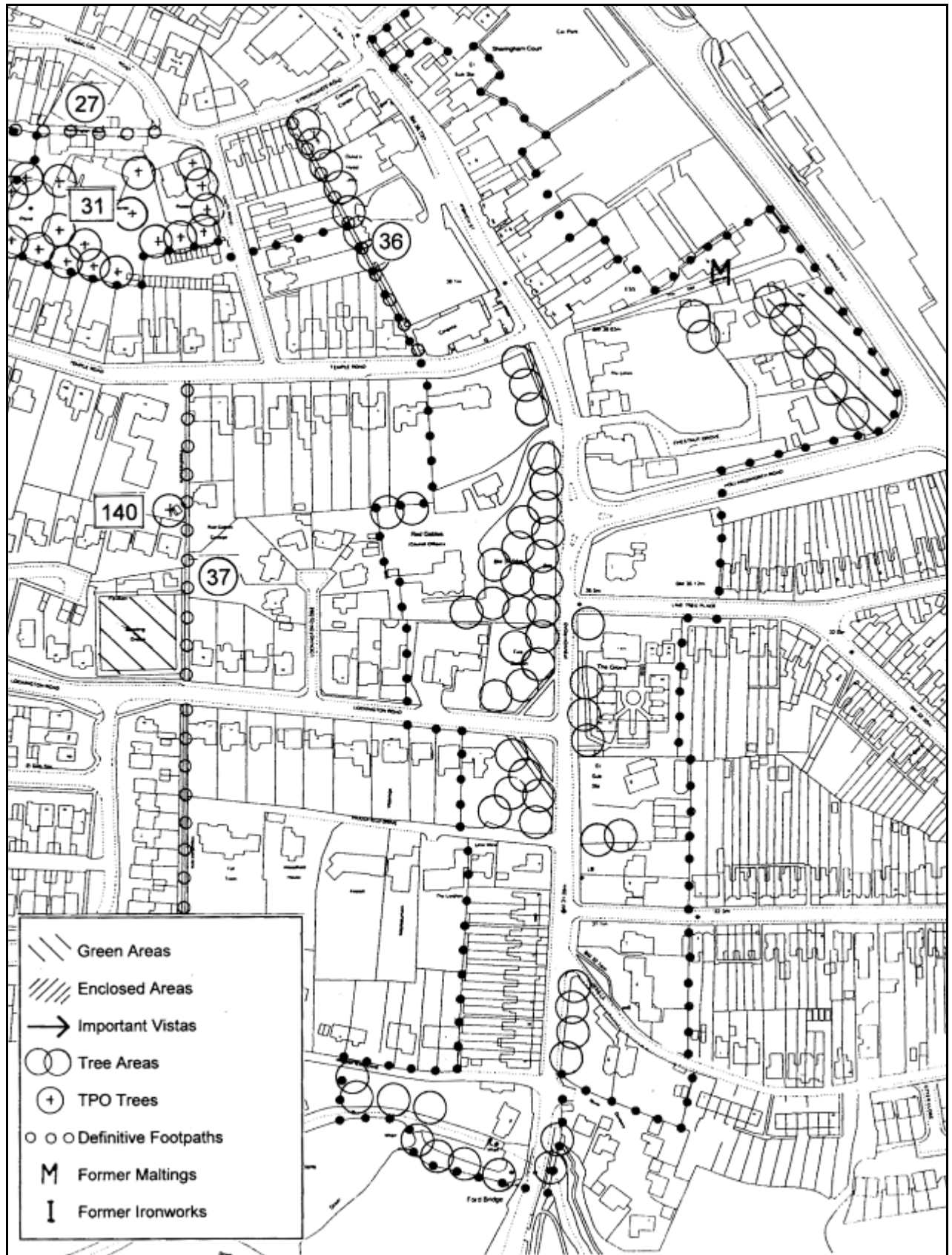


Distant Fields



River Gipping

Stowmarket SE



PREVAILING AND FORMER USAGE

Stowmarket, along with the rest of East Anglia, went into decline after the boom years of the medieval wool trade.

The area along the river was originally important for hop growing, however the arrival of the canal in Stowmarket at the end of the 18th Century brought with it great potential for development of the town beyond its market town origins. The river corridor to the east of the centre, which later carried the railway as well, became the industrial heart of the town.

Much of this was originally agriculturally based with a multitude of maltings and warehousing for the produce from the 'High Suffolk' farmlands. Of these, there still remain today Munton & Fison's malt business and Quinton's who supply animal feeds and agrochemicals.

In behind Bury Street, Wood & Co ran their Suffolk Iron Works, which from 1920 reappeared under new ownership south of the station between the shunting yard and the river as the Suffolk Iron Foundry. Both of these probably arose from agricultural needs, and eventually evolved into the Atco-Qualcast mower factory, now owned by Bosch Industries and still in business today.

Stowmarket also boasts some chemical industries, the end result of an early venture in nitrogenous fertilisers. South-east of the centre adjoining the river, there once stood a gun cotton works; this spectacularly blew up in 1871 with great loss of life, leaving behind a hundred foot crater, and saw later reincarnation as the 'New Explosives Company'. This last formed the basis of what is now ICI's Paint Division works, whilst also along the river there is Climax Molybdenum's lubricant and alloy works, both dominant features of today's industry in Stowmarket.



Former Maltings



Former Coal Merchant



7 Ipswich Street



23 Ipswich Street



25 Ipswich Street



29 Ipswich Street

MANAGEMENT PLAN: BUILDINGS

The major damage perpetrated on the area to date was in the sixties when large areas of Ipswich Street were cleared to make way for redevelopments. The south side of Ipswich Street thus comprises largely poor quality modern buildings set well back from the road as a result, whilst elsewhere there remain smaller pockets of similar lower quality building. If these come to be redeveloped, now the area is included in the conservation area, hopefully a higher standard of building will be achieved and the building line brought forward back to where it was historically.

The provision of rear servicing to some of these developments has also had its impact, particularly off Church Walk. The impact of the motor car has now been softened to some extent, both by the provision of a by-pass, now the A14 trunk route from the midlands to Felixstowe, and more recently by the provision of Gipping Way, an inner relief road that cuts through the conservation area between the shopping area and the station.

Many of the town's historic shopfronts have already been lost, altered or hidden behind modern plastic signing or are at risk of suffering a similar fate. A number of such properties with poor shopfronts, where a maximum improvement is achievable with minimal intervention, can be identified, mainly along the north side of Ipswich Street. Many of these would also benefit from the reinstatement of their traditional sash windows on the upper floors.

Many of the 19th Century brick buildings, and even one of the tile-hung ones, have been painted, especially above ground level. Although these now blend with the other rendered buildings, removal of the paint would present a more honest face and recreate the original variety of materials in the town.



8/10 Ipswich Street



Gipping Way

MANAGEMENT PLAN: SPACES

Within the conservation area a number of opportunities for improvement to spaces have been identified:

Ipswich Street has now been made one-way with parking restrictions, essentially discouraging traffic by sending it along a constricted route through. The attendant bollards and signage have recently been given a more consistent treatment appropriate to a historic town. Paving finishes could similarly be improved, preferably to match the York stone paving recently laid in Church Walk and Butter Market.

There is an opportunity in Crowe Street to improve the paving and boundary treatments. This should be done in a low key manner, such as with a chipping finish, more akin to a rural village setting and distinct from the more formal hard paving appropriate for a town centre. This will enhance the setting of grade II* listed Abbot's Hall and by removal of part of its boundary wall, the building could be more obviously seen set on its axis as approached from the town centre.

The railway station forecourt does not present a very welcoming approach to the town for rail travellers. The large amorphous open space with no apparent directions or boundary could be remodelled to provide more formal parking, pick-up and pedestrian facilities with clear directions towards the town.

The town's historic associations with the river and navigation could also be emphasised more. The river walk area is being enhanced by the Pickerel Project and made more accessible especially now it is slightly more visible as a result of the new relief road cutting through. Some of the unsightly sites adjoining the river will need improving and/or screening. With proper interpretation and a co-ordinated effort with the Inland Waterways Association, currently working on improving various locks towards Ipswich, a new focus in the town could be created.



Crowe Street



Ipswich Street

GAZETTEER BY AREA

THE CENTRAL AREA

The centre of the conservation area is essentially the old commercial heart of the town, the main part included in the original designation in 1970. It comprises the majority of the town's listed buildings around which the boundary was fairly tightly drawn.

The unlisted buildings in the centre of the conservation area fall into two main types, those from the 19th Century and more recent additions. In Tavern Street, Bury Street and Station Road, the former predominate, mainly as houses and shops, with occasional modern infill buildings, mostly attributable to the Co-op.

Here too are to be found the former Court House and former Waterworks (itself a former Brewery) buildings, each of which contributes something extra to the street scene.

In Market Place and Ipswich Street the mix is reversed. Here there is a predominance of modern infill buildings, with a scattering of Victorian commercial buildings around Market Place and shops at the outer end of Ipswich Street.



Station Road West



Bury Street

WEST BEYOND TAVERN STREET

One area where the conservation area was extended in 1997 was to include a residential area at the west end of Tavern Street.

Wellington House, the grade II listed former vicarage now serving as a residential home was an obvious candidate for inclusion, whilst further west runs Childer Road, a good quality residential street of mainly early Victorian housing but including an old school now used as a youth centre. This was probably Stowmarket's first suburb outside the medieval core of the town.

The adjoining parts of Finborough Road and Violet Hill Road linking back to Wellington House also include good buildings, some of them early nineteenth century with both white brick terraces and villas. On Finborough Road itself these houses are fronted in places by good stands of mature trees that define well where the commercial area ends and the residential begins.



Wellington House



Finborough Road

NORTH ALONG BURY STREET

Along Bury Street to the north of the town centre there is a concentration of listed buildings along the eastern side from the Bethesda Chapel as far as no.104, together with a further pair, nos.101 & 103, at the far end on the western side, all survivors of the 'Great Fire of Bury Street' at the end of the last century.

With the exception of two new areas of housing, fronting parts of the western side of this street, the remaining buildings were also considered of reasonable traditional quality, sufficient to warrant their inclusion within the conservation area on both sides of the street up to the new roundabout.

Just to the east of Bury Street and at the eastern end of Station Road West and Milton Road North, there remain a number of good buildings that were originally excluded from the conservation area, due to uncertainties at the time about the exact line to be taken by Gipping Way, the new relief road. These include some timber-framed survivals in what is now Union Street West, part of the old Waterworks buildings, nos.25/27 and no.10 (Lynton House, grade II* listed) Station Road West and nos.66-74 Milton Road North.

Gipping Way itself has cut a swathe through the eastern part of the town, leaving a number of amenity planting areas and potential infill sites, which it was felt would benefit the town best if developed within the controls of the conservation area.



Bury Street



Bury Street

OFF STOWUPLAND STREET

East of Gipping Way to the north of Stowupland Street there is an interesting area of potentially good tightly knit townscape with small streets of mainly Victorian terraced housing. Much of this has been eroded by recent misguided alterations, probably too numerous to allow its inclusion in the conservation area.

Part of this area, however, lies around the junction where Regent Street and Bond Street meet Union Street East, and provides a good focal point in front of the grade II listed Methodist Church. This area was considered worthy of inclusion in the conservation area in 1997, which along with Stowupland Street and the area around Gipping Way link back to the town centre.

Another concentration of listed buildings, outside the original conservation area, occurs across the relief road along Stowupland Street, once the main route out eastwards. This narrow gently curving street is conveniently linked by a short stretch of riverside walk amenity land back to the maltings and station 'island' of the original conservation area.



Methodist Church



Stowupland Street

THE STATION AREA

The station area was originally a small separate island of conservation area providing the setting for two grade II listed buildings, the station itself and an old maltings. This last unfortunately suffered a serious fire in early 1996, but now rebuilt and overshadowed by an adjoining development, continues in its more recent use as a nightclub.

Now joined to the main part of the conservation area by the inclusion of the Stowupland Street area, the area around the railway station also warranted enlarging slightly in 1997 by the inclusion of a number of minor industrial buildings, including the signal box and a carefully detailed electricity supply building, to the north.

Near the station, the approach to the forecourt is framed by two unlisted Victorian brick buildings, formerly public houses, both in red with white dressings and matching well with the station itself.



Former Maltings



Station Approach

OFF IPSWICH STREET

At the outer end of Ipswich Street the conservation area boundary was extended in 1997 to include the Old Vicarage and Milton's Tree. Other listed buildings in the vicinity include nos.67/69 Ipswich Street, the Duke's Head public house and Stricklands (grade II*).

The area between these and Ipswich Street to the north, where the original conservation area ended, was also felt suitable for inclusion. This would help achieve a higher standard of design should the south side be redeveloped and protect the setting of the north side of the street with its listed buildings, which were already in the conservation area.

This southern side of Ipswich Street includes the modern United Reformed Church set well back and the 1930's former Post Office, suitably neo-classical in style, on the original building line. Redevelopment of this area up to the old building line would allow this frontage to remain and continue its contribution to the street scene.

To the rear of Ipswich Street there is an area of mixed housing in Kensington Road, Kensington Court, Stricklands Road and Unity Road which includes some semi-detached properties of no individual value, but also some good Victorian terraces, the former Oddfellows Hall, the neo-Georgian Telephone Exchange and the R.C. Church.



Stricklands



Former Post Office

SOUTH ALONG IPSWICH ROAD

Further to the south-east of this area the approach to Stowmarket along Ipswich Road was also considered of value. Apart from the outer part of Ipswich Street with the Regal Cinema on one side and a mixed terrace on the other, Ipswich Road itself is mainly larger Victorian villas set in wooded grounds. The Limes and Verandah Cottage, dating from the 18th Century, are listed grade II, whilst over the road the Victorian brick built Red Gables, now used as offices, perhaps ought to be.

To the east, on Duke Street behind The Limes, there are two converted maltings, one grade II listed, which at one time were served by a branch of the navigation. As the road dips towards the Rattlesden River, there is a range of terraced Victorian cottages on the right, built by the Freehold Land Society, ending with the listed Mill House adjoining the bridge over Combs Ford.

To the east of this corridor leading into Stowmarket there is another Victorian suburb of small terraced houses comprising Bridge Street and Lime Tree Place. These are mainly white brick with good slate roofs mostly intact, although as with the Regent Street area to the north of the centre, they have suffered the usual window replacements and render applications. As with that area, if these now adjoin the proposed conservation area, they may be considered suitable subjects for tighter controls in the future.



Red Gables



Ipswich Road

MUSEUM OF EAST ANGLIAN LIFE

The final addition to the conservation area in 1997 was to the south of Abbot's Hall where the boundary of the existing conservation area was revised to include all of the Museum of East Anglian Life site together with Crow Lane along its western boundary. This is an ancient green lane and includes some mature trees that screen the site from the new car park and some recent housing.

Crow Lane leads gently uphill at first to a large field, where the land drops away southwards to the Rattlesden River.

Here there is the museum's collection of salvaged and rebuilt buildings as opposed to those that were already on the site within the original conservation area. These include Edgar's farmhouse, a tin tabernacle, a wind driven drainage pump, a watermill and several more industrial type buildings all saved from total demolition by a move to this site.



Abbot's Hall



MEAL Offices



MEAL Barn

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This Appraisal adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance by Mid Suffolk District Council Environment Policy Panel
29 March 2011