



CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL



INTRODUCTION

The conservation area in Woolpit was originally designated by West Suffolk County Council in 1972, and inherited by Mid Suffolk District Council at its inception in 1974.

The Woolpit conservation area was last appraised and extended 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 Woolpit 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 Woolpit'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.

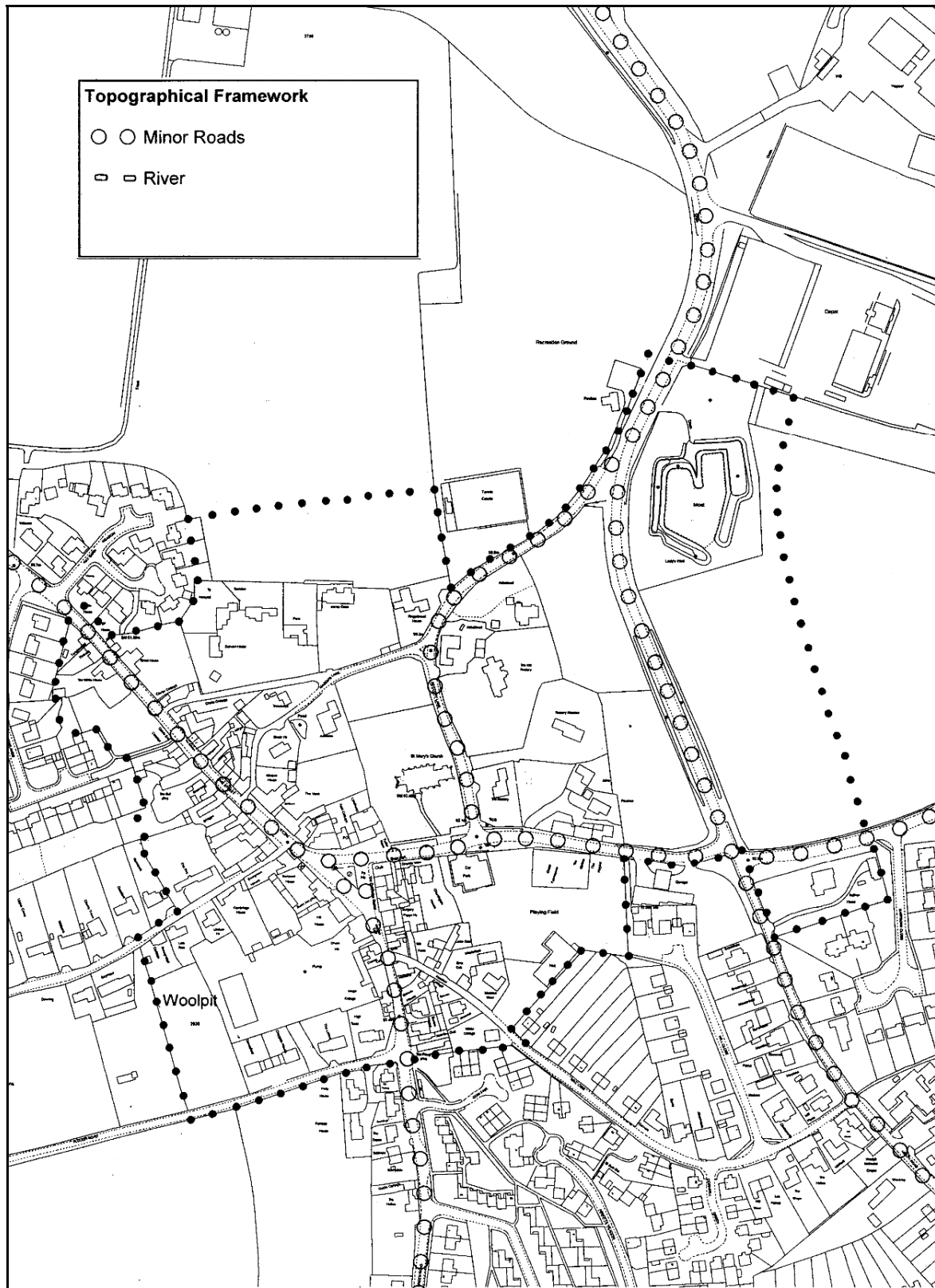
Text, photographs and map overlays by Patrick Taylor, Conservation Architect, Mid Suffolk District Council 2010.



New Surfacing



The Street



TOPOGRAPHICAL FRAMEWORK

Woolpit is a village in central Suffolk situated on a gentle spur of land projecting northwards between two tributaries of the Black Bourn, that flows northwards from there via the Little Ouse to the Wash.

The village is at about 60m above O.D. and the land rises gently to the south to nearly 80m O.D. two miles away, before dropping into the valley of the Rattlesden River, a tributary of the south flowing Gipping, at Rattlesden. It is thus very much at the watershed between the north and south of East Anglia.

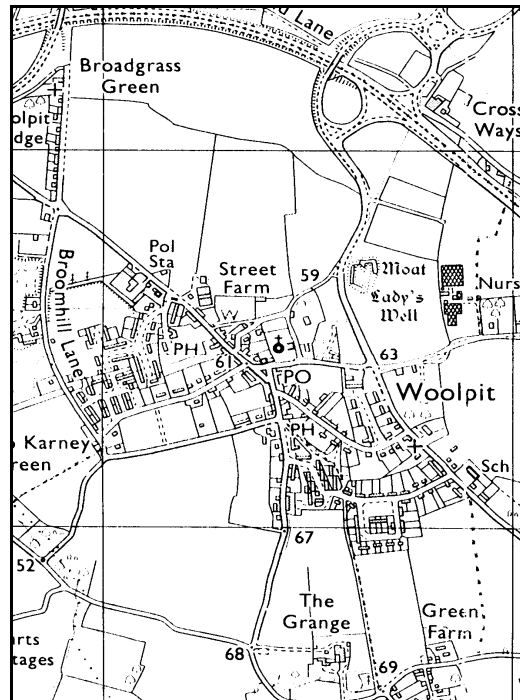
The underlying chalk is here covered by the Lowestoft Till, the glacial sands, gravels and clays of the High Suffolk plain, and even has its own 'Woolpit Beds' of laminated silts.

The village is now by-passed to the north by the A14 dual carriageway, the main road having originally passed through the village as part of the main Ipswich to Bury St Edmunds route, which had been turnpiked in 1711.

The railway linking the same two towns runs parallel to the road a little further north; the nearby station at Elmswell is said to have been connected to the brickworks in the village by a narrow gauge tramway.



Aerial Photograph



OS Map Extract



ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Woolpit parish is part of Thedwastre hundred and has its fair share of archaeological remains. The Suffolk County Historic Environment Record lists finds that include a Palaeolithic hand-axe, a Mesolithic pick, a Neolithic axe, Bronze Age axe and sword, through to Roman coins and pottery.

Remains of a Roman road, later the Peddar's Way, are to be found running south from the outlying hamlet of Woolpit Green.

The Domesday survey of 1086 lists a church with 15 acres of land and woodland for 20 pigs, the village being an outlier, as its hall was in another hundred.

Medieval remains include pottery finds, carved stones from the 12th Century and the Scheduled Monument Lady's Well. This last is a perpetual spring situated within a moated site in Palgrave's Meadow to the east of the village, now a wooded amenity area.

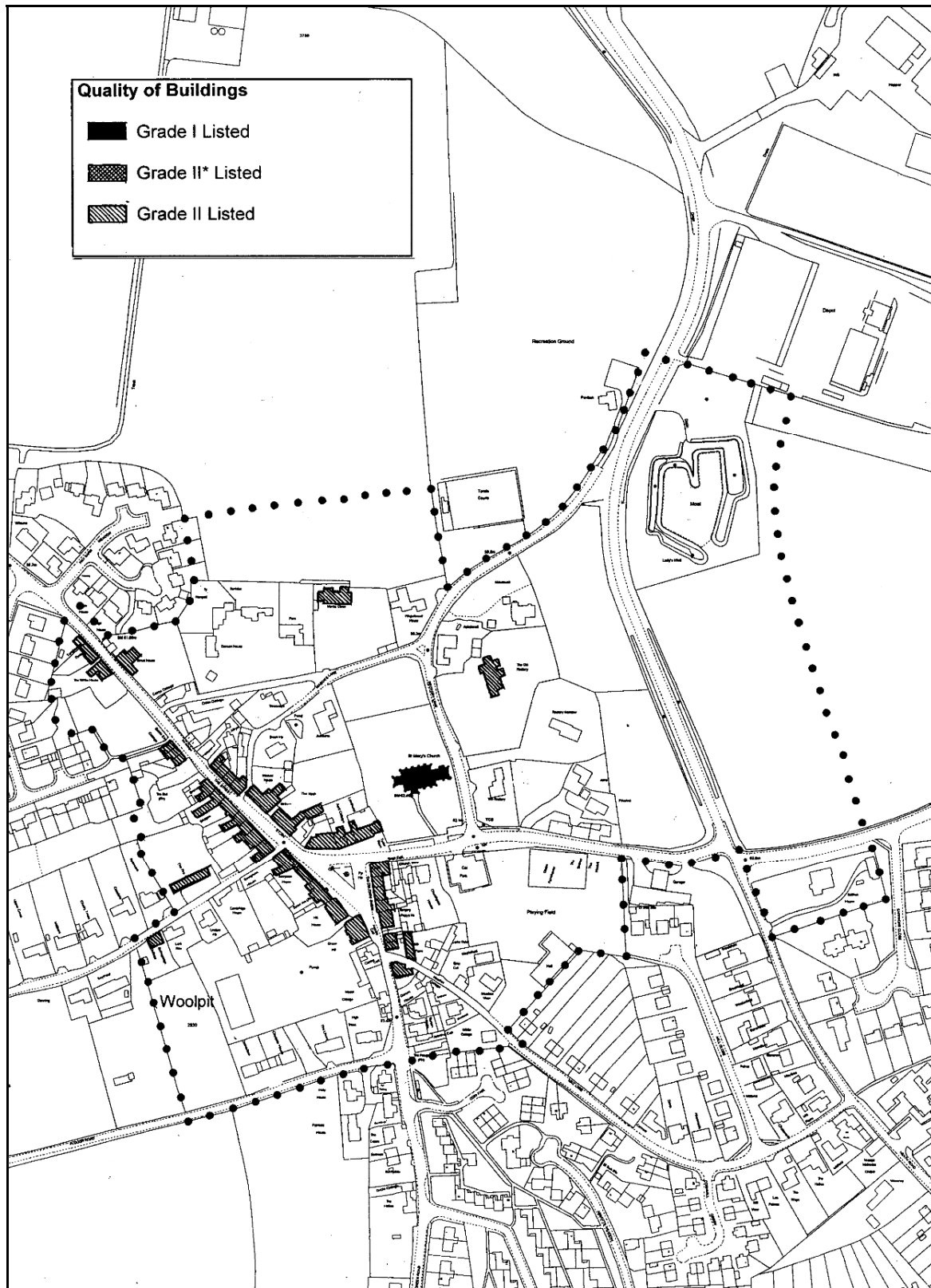
A 17th Century local legend tells of the 'Green Children' who appeared out the 'wolf-pits', after which the village is allegedly named, and spoke no known language. Eventually absorbed into the local community, they lost their colour, the boy died and the girl married a man from King's Lynn.



Church of St Mary

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<p>55 St. Edmund's held WOOLPIT before 1066 as an outlier; 3 carucates of land. The hall to which it belongs is in another Hundred. Always 17 villagers; 3 smallholders. Always 3 men's ploughs; ... in lordship. Meadow, 4 acres; woodland at 20 pigs. 40 free men with 1 carucate of land. Always 6 ploughs. Meadow, 3 acres. These (free men) could all grant and sell their lands before 1066, but the jurisdiction over the land, and every service, always belonged to St. (Edmund's), and all belong to the fold. Value 10s 8d. 15 acres in alms, belonging to the church. Value of this outlier always £3. It has 9 furlongs in length and 6 in width; 11d in tax, but several hold there.</p>
<p>56 In DRINKSTONE 11 free men with 1 carucate of land. They have 6 smallholders; 3 ploughs. Meadow, 8 acres. These (free men) could grant and sell their land before 1066, but jurisdiction over the land still belonged to St. (Edmund's). Value 10s 8d.</p>

Domesday Extract



QUALITY OF BUILDINGS

The jewel of the village's buildings is undoubtedly the grade I listed church of St Mary. This is described by Pevsner as having a 'conspicuous spire of 1854, perhaps more at home in the Nene valley than Suffolk'.

The church is mainly Perpendicular, although the south aisle and chancel are Decorated, and has a fine double hammer-beam roof and a south porch with fine flint and stone chequered flushwork.

Apart from a grade II* house at Woolpit Heath to the east of the village, the rest of the listed buildings are grade II, mostly timber-framed houses, many now refronted in brick.

The Swan Inn is one of these, in red brick, the earlier two storey timber-framed part was refronted in 1759, the three storey wing adjoining in red brick with a tall carriage arch on the right having been added in 1826.

A similar situation exists at the Woolpit Institute, the older building with exposed timber framing dates from the early 16th Century, whilst adjoining it an extension of mid 19th Century date is in white brick with a black glazed pantile roof.



Swan Inn



Woolpit Institute



White and Red Brick, Plaintile



Black Weather-boarding, Pantile



White Brick, Slate



Painted Brick, Plaintile

TRADITIONAL MATERIALS

Many of the 'unfronted' timber-framed buildings in Woolpit, such as Weaver House, retain their timber framing in its exposed state, and suggest by the even quality and regularity of their framing that it was intended that way, rather than rendered over as in most Suffolk examples.

For many timber-framed buildings, the cover up came much later with the advent of Woolpit's famous brickworks, whose Suffolk whites became very fashionable and were exported far and wide in the 19th Century. The whites were used extensively locally as was a soft red brick, more typical of Suffolk, but not to the total exclusion of other materials.

Flintwork can be found, not only on the church, but also on outbuildings to the former rectory, and in a number of important boundary walls within the village centre.

Timber weather-boarding also makes an appearance, mainly in its black form on several outbuildings, but also in white, cladding the house adjoining the Post Office.

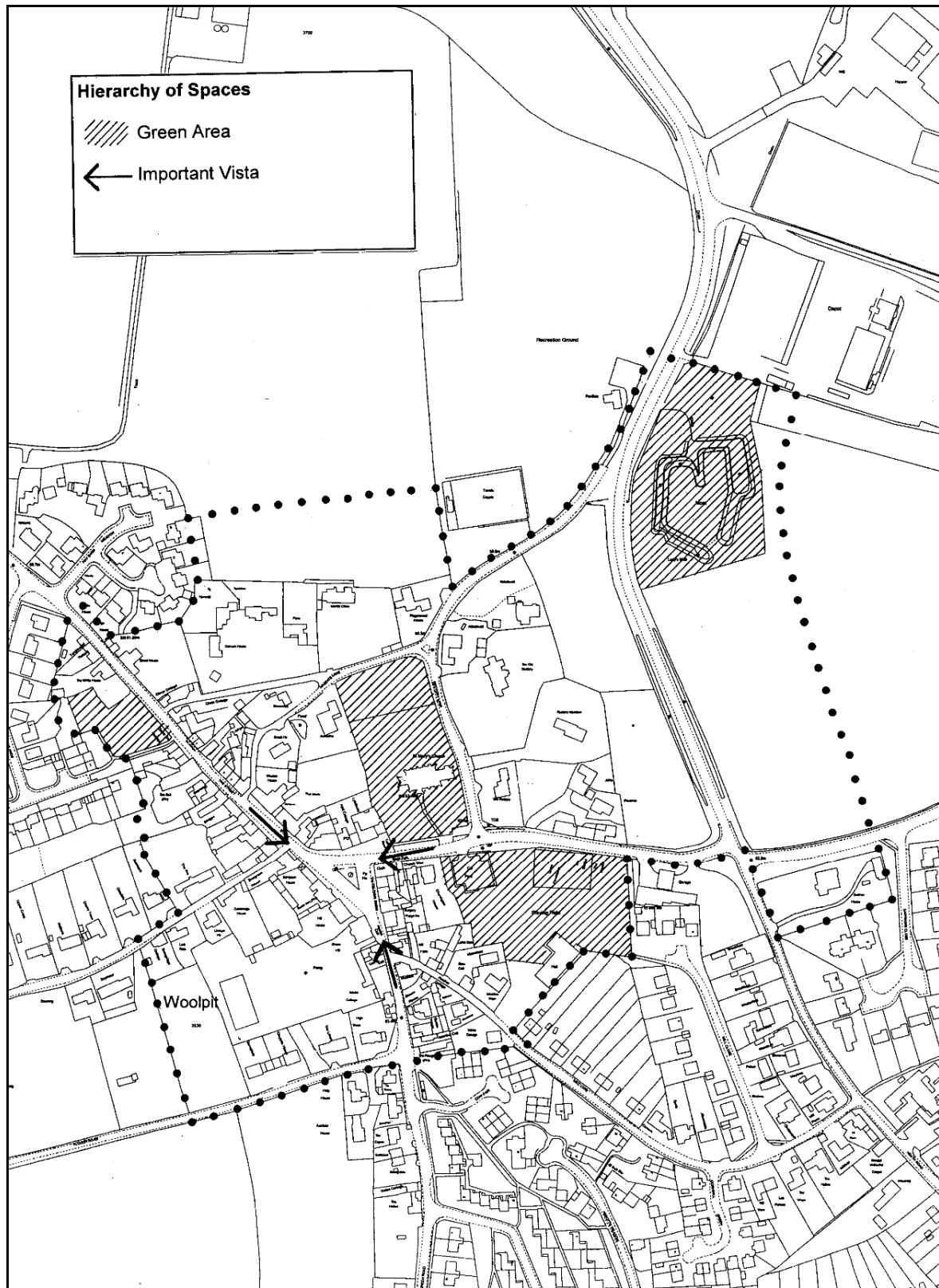
Roof finishes vary throughout the village; plaintiles are common, whilst many of the refronted Georgianised properties now have newer roofs in slate. Pantiles can also be found both in red and the black glazed variety, and there are examples of thatch.



Exposed Timber Frame, Plaintile



Red Brick, Pantile



HIERARCHY OF SPACES

The centre of Woolpit, with its triangular island and village pump shelter is a well defined focal point, which has three roads leading off to the north-west, to the south and to the east. This was presumably the original site of the medieval market place which remained in use until the 17th Century.

A tighter urban feel pervades the first two of these roads off with their timber-framed and brick buildings hard on the pavement edge.

To the east however vistas open out, firstly to the churchyard on the north side, and shortly afterwards to the playing field on the south.

Off these more important routes, smaller side roads for the most part maintain the intimate feel of the centre, before eventually yielding to more open modern development at the edges of the historic area.

Woolpit is fortunate in having been bypassed, not just once to the north by the main road, but again by the link road that feeds off this and passes to the east of the village and then heads off south-eastwards to Woolpit Heath.



Green Road



The Street



TREES AND PLANTING

At the eastern extremity of the parish is Woolpit Wood, a now much altered former medieval wood which adjoins the substantial remains of a medieval deer park in the next parish of Haughley.

The churchyard has some fine trees and a recently planted avenue of Hornbeams to the north is slowly becoming a major feature. The driveway to the former rectory across the road has a magnificent mature Sycamore at its entrance.

Other green spaces include the playing fields, south-west of the Church and an open space adjoining new housing, behind a fine old flint wall along The Street leading out north-westwards from the centre.

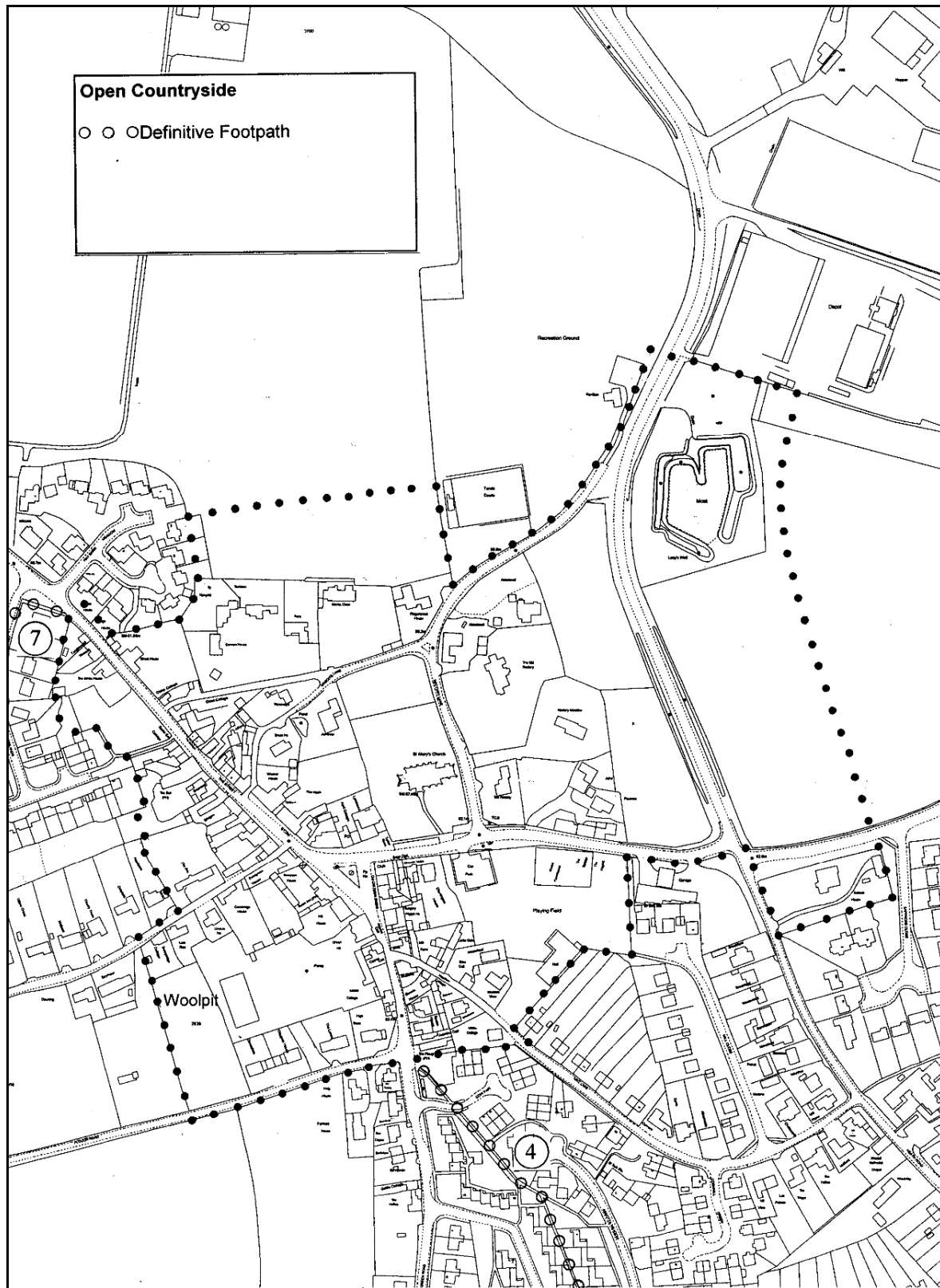
The parish as a whole has six Tree Preservation Orders on trees felt under threat. One of these (TPO 113) is the moated site at Lady's Well with its Beech, Ash, Oak and Field Maple trees, through which runs a circular pathway route.



Lady's Well Beech



Old Rectory Sycamore



COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS

Now that it is by-passed, the village centre of Woolpit is quieter and only suffers limited local traffic.

The historic core is abutted by modern development only on the north-west and south-east sides, so that immediately to the north-east behind the church and the south-west along Rags Lane or Plough Road, it gives way to open countryside.

Rags Lane itself continues south-westwards as FP 5, joining at the parish boundary with Drinkstone FP 2, passing near the two mills en route.

Only two definitive footpaths within the parish come near the village centre, both passing through more modern development before reaching the fields.

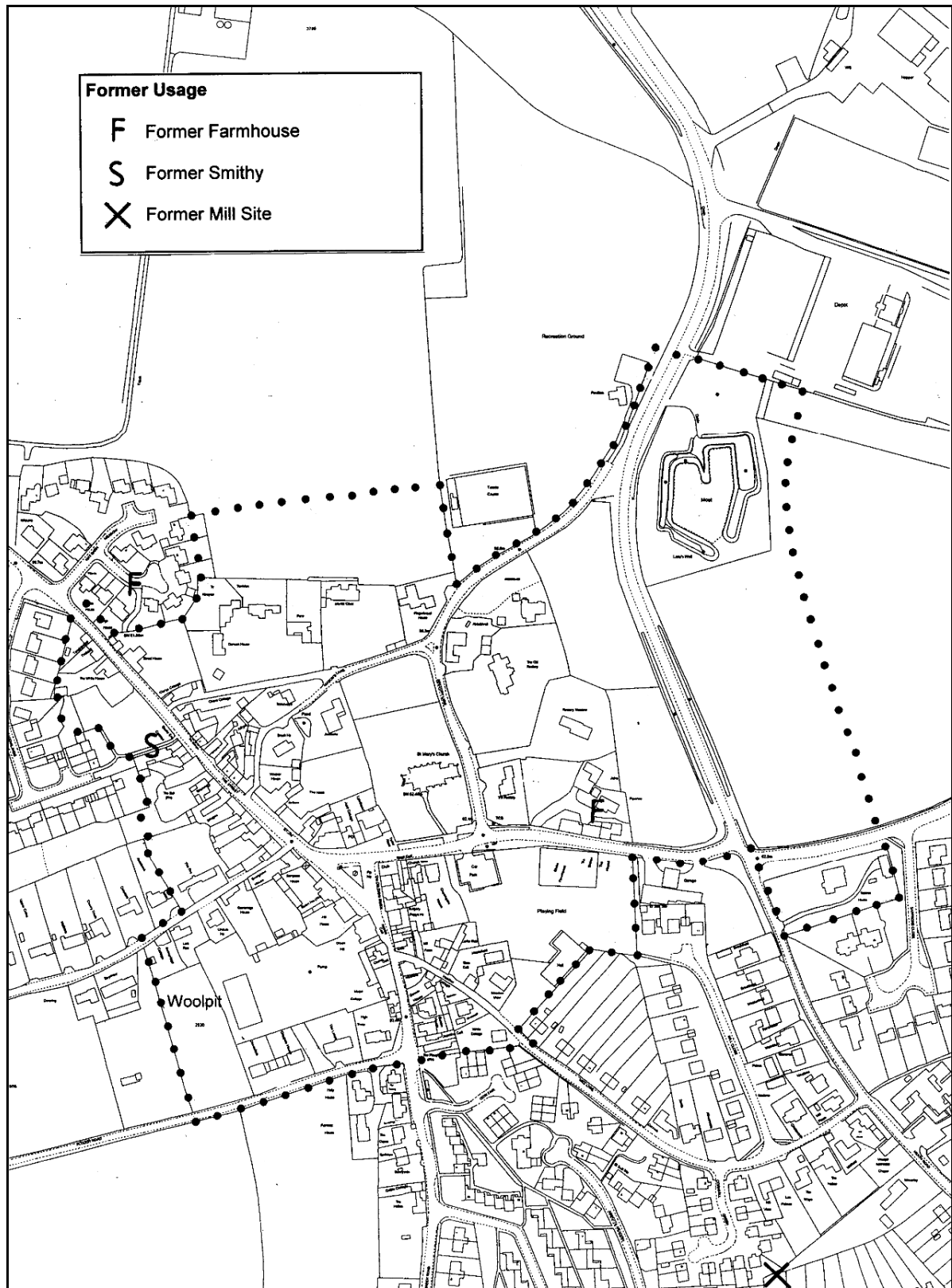
At the north end off The Street, FP 7 leads off westwards towards the old gravel pit in Broomhill Lane, whilst to the south, FP 4 goes from the inner end of Plough Road towards Woolpit Green.



Lady's Well Moat



Churchyard Hornbeams



PREVAILING AND FORMER USAGE

Somewhere in the village there was once a shrine to the Virgin Mary, a popular destination for pilgrimages in medieval times. Its exact location is currently not known, although it was not at Lady's Well as might be expected.

The wealth of fine timber-framed houses substantiates early evidence that Woolpit had its share of clothiers and tailors and was a minor centre for Suffolk's 17th Century cloth industry. Indeed, it is far enough away from the more important centres of Bury St Edmunds or Lavenham not to simply be an outlier.

Tithe apportionment records for the 1840's yield field names such as Mill Field and Kiln Field, which point to other early activities.

Apart from the two remaining mills at nearby Drinkstone, there were at least two other windmills locally, both within Woolpit parish and of the post and round-house type: Pyke's Mill stood at the southern end of Mill Lane and was demolished in 1924, whilst Elmer's Mill was near the gravel pits off Broomhill Lane, west of the village and collapsed in 1963.

The other major local industry was of course the brickworks, situated to the east of the village. The Woolpit Brick Company of 1844 was liquidated in 1905, only one of several brick making concerns in the village, which were all closed by the 1950's.



Drinkstone Lower Mill



Rat-trap Bond Woolpit Brick

LOSSES AND POSSIBLE GAINS

The Street and its adjoining central historic areas remain essentially intact, having escaped the usual rash of modern window replacements and still retaining most of its historic shopfronts.

There has however been some erosion at the edges by modern developments. The Meadowlands and Haybarn Meadow estates in the north-west and some houses in Plough Road adjoin the conservation area boundary.

The former garage site on the corner of the link road, with its extensive car lot, did not contribute positively to the conservation area and it was therefore excluded. Its future redevelopment has the potential to recreate a more traditional built up street frontage here with vehicles screened off to the rear.

The adjacent playing field is at last benefitting from the growth of better hedge screening along its road frontage. Adequate screening and boundary treatments are also lacking at some infill sites and there remain a number of untidy areas around the village, including a flint wall in poor repair at the west end of The Street.

Within the village centre a recent undergrounding and resurfacing scheme has been successful in removing unsightly overhead wiring, now extended to include the western side of The Street and central area.



Former Used Car Lot



Wide Modern Driveway

REFERENCES & FURTHER READING

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