



conservation area appraisal



Introduction

The conservation area in Walsham le Willows was originally designated by West Suffolk County Council in 1974, and inherited by Mid Suffolk District Council at its inception the same year.

The Council has a duty to review its conservation area designations from time to time, and this appraisal examines Walsham le Willows under a number of different headings as set out in English Heritage's new 'Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals' (2006).

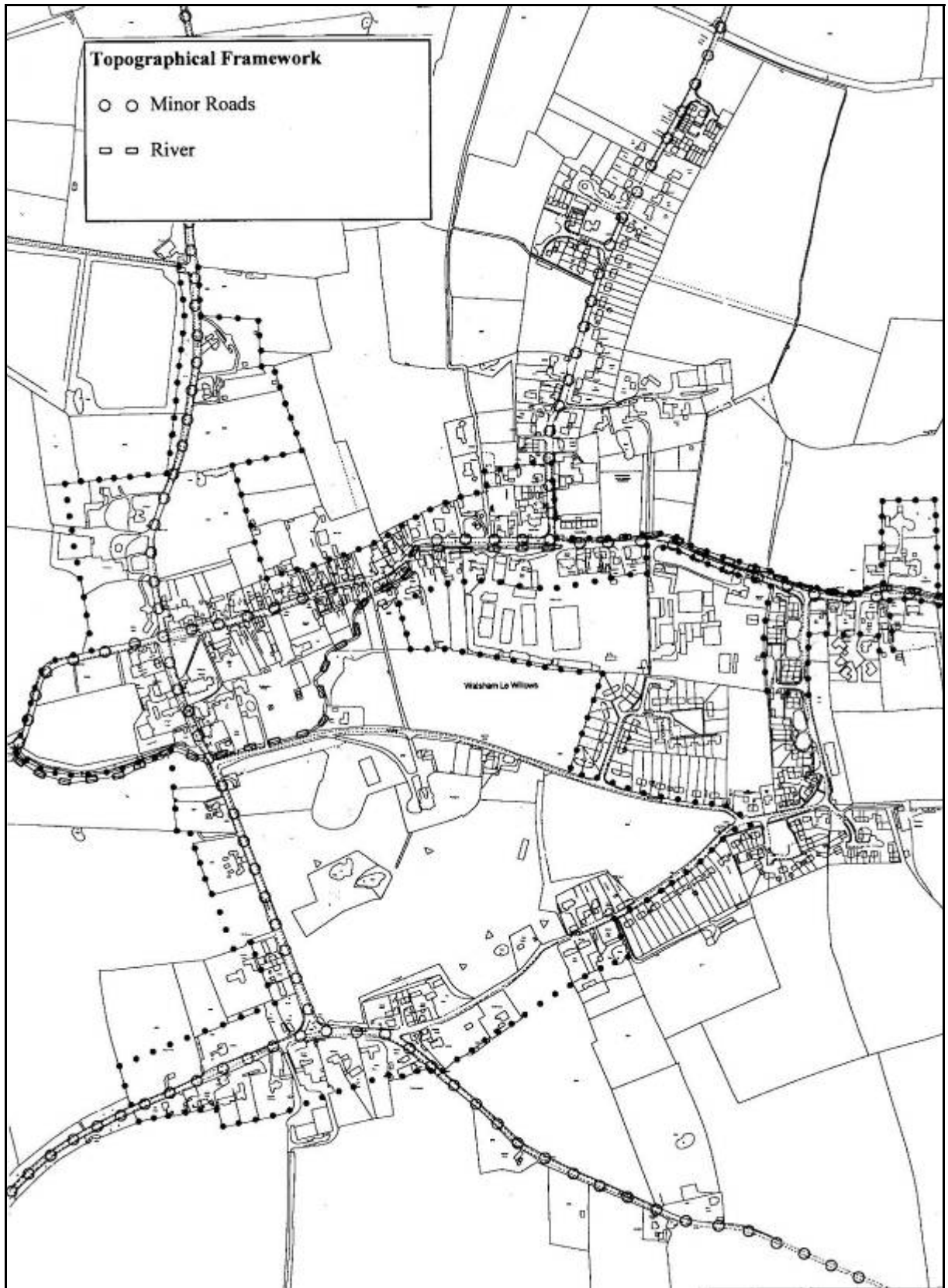
As such it is a straightforward appraisal of Walsham le Willows's built environment in conservation terms and is essentially an update on a draft document originally produced back in 2000.



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.

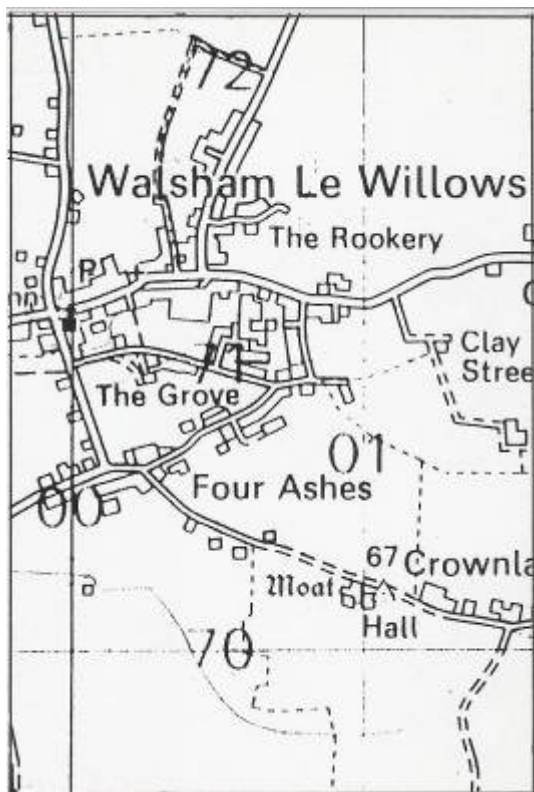


Topographical Framework

Walsham le Willows is a large village in central Suffolk, about twelve miles north-east of Bury St. Edmunds and ten miles north-west of Stowmarket, just inside the Mid Suffolk District boundary.

Its main street runs east to west, parallel to a stream to its south that is a tributary of the Black Bourn that eventually drains northwards to the Wash

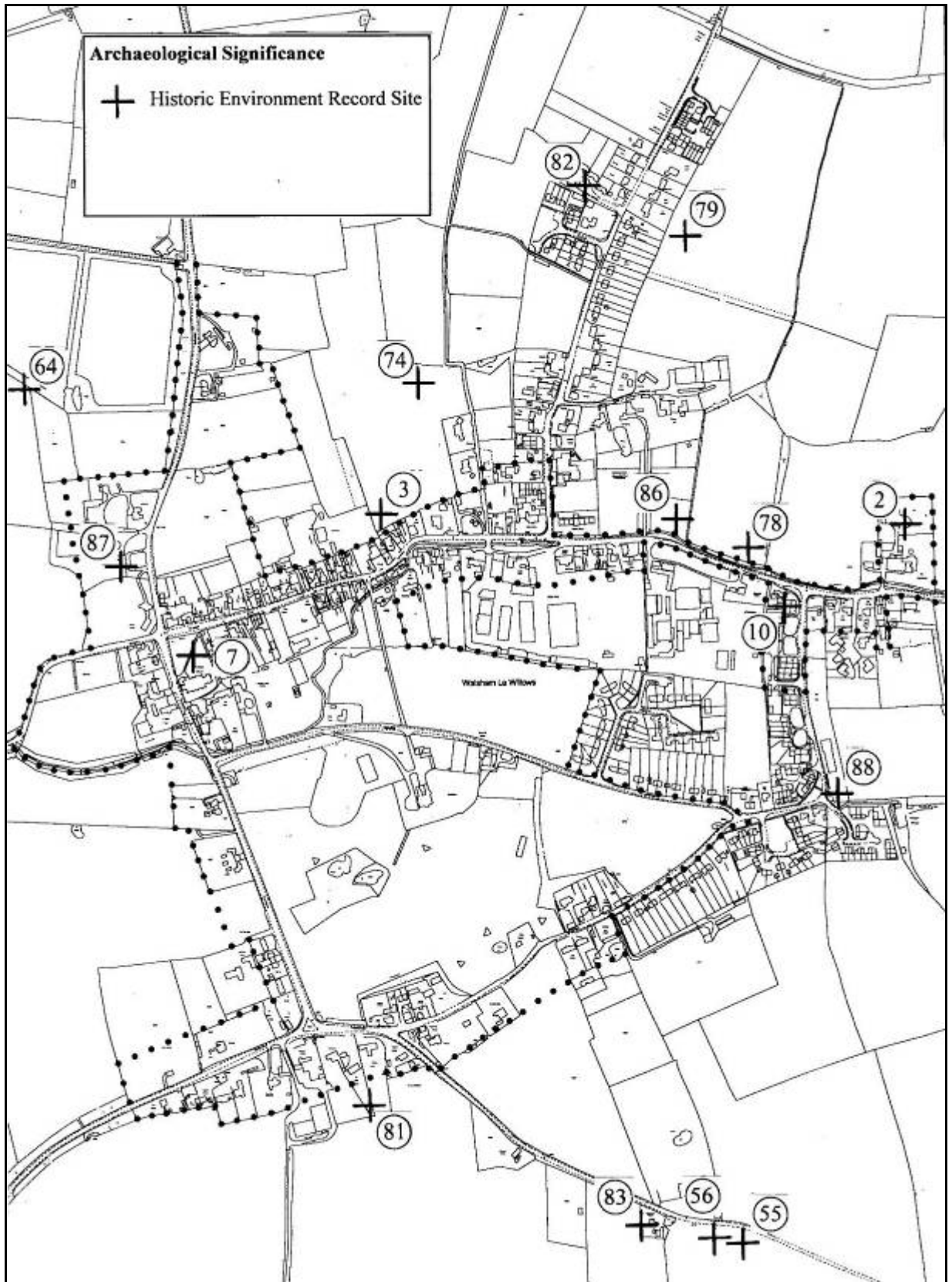
It is slightly north of, but still on the great watershed of East Anglia, the High Suffolk area of deep clays deposited during the ice ages over the underlying chalk.



The main village street settlement is supplemented by four outlying hamlets in the parish: West Street to the west, Four Ashes to the immediate south, Crownland south-east and Cranmer Green to the east.

Between The Street and Four Ashes lies an area of parkland, containing the river, and surrounding the Grove, Walsham's big house.

The village has no transportation connections by water or rail, and accessed only by minor roads remains distant from main road connections, the nearest being the A143, passing by about two miles north of the village, along the route of the former Bury St Edmunds to Scole turnpike.

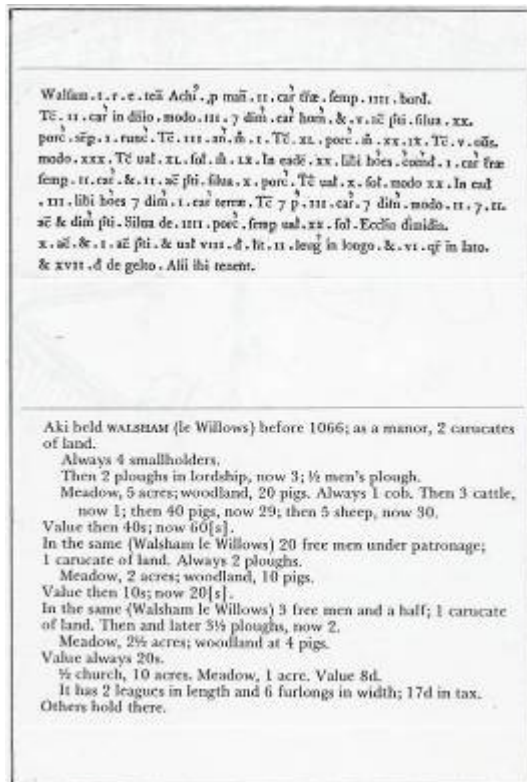


Archaeological Significance

Although Walsham le Willows' archaeology might seem extensive from the ninety or so entries in the Suffolk County Sites and Monuments Record, the majority of these are Medieval and Post-medieval scatter finds of significance but no great age.

The oldest records are for a Mesolithic flint axe and a Neolithic polished axe. Later we find an Iron Age bronze roundel and then several Roman scatter finds and a Saxon dress fitting, the remainder being Medieval or later.

These include two Medieval moated sites, as would be expected on the Suffolk claylands: Crownland Hall and High Hall.

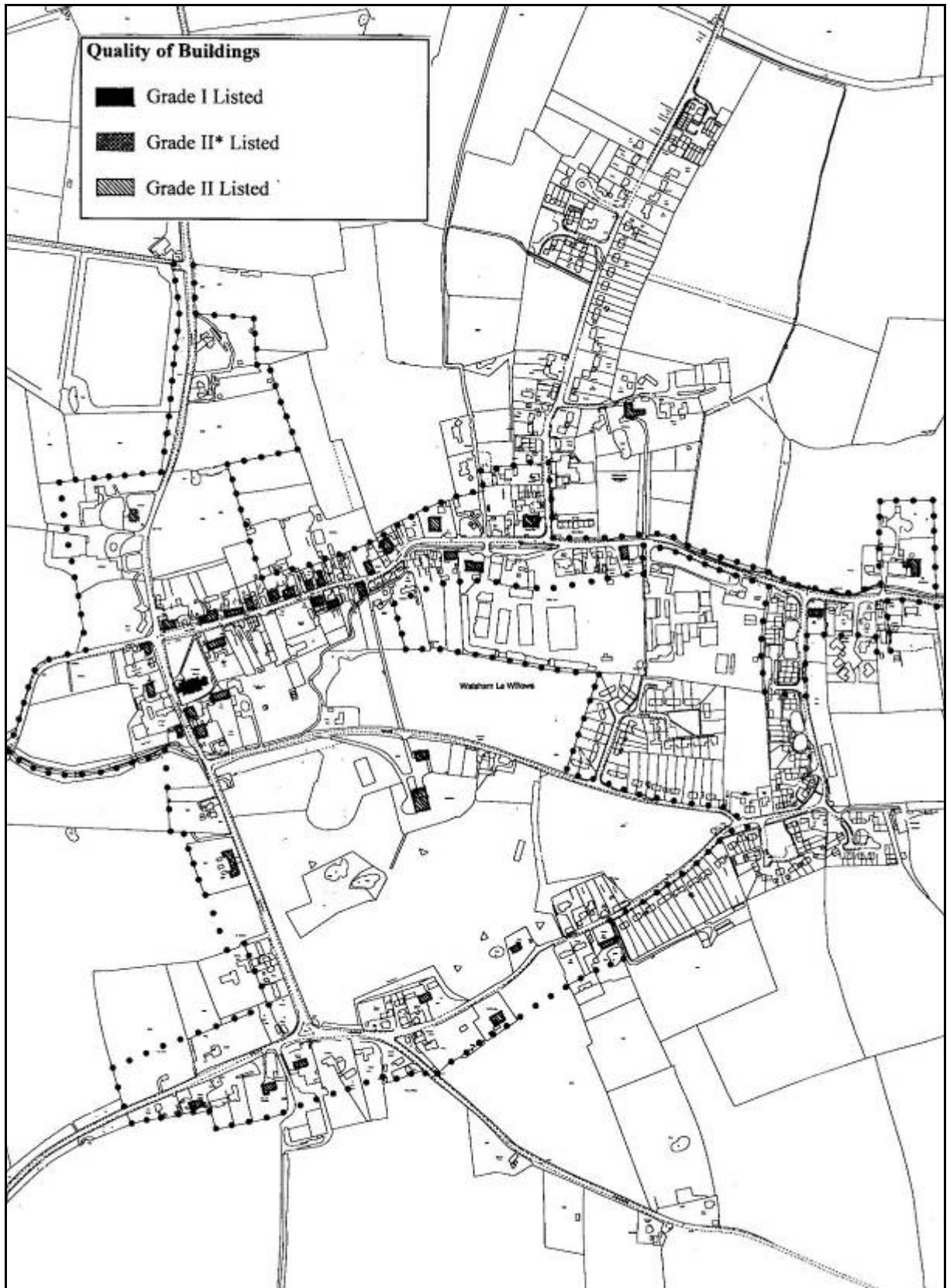


Also included are the sites of the Church, the Guildhall, an Elizabethan theatre and several windmills.

The Domesday survey of 1086 records the village as having 'half a church with 10 acres' and 'a wood for 68 pigs'.

Three gilds are known to have existed there: St Trinity and St John the Baptist (both recorded in 1446) and St Catherine's (1521), and a Guildhall does survive, now divided into three houses.

The village is recorded as having its own market in 1384, however this was out of use by the 17th Century.



Intrinsic Quality of Buildings

Whilst the village has a large number of listed buildings, they are all grade II and mostly houses except for the Church of St Mary, which is grade I.

The church itself is mostly 14th and 15th Century, Perpendicular throughout, although restored internally in 1878. It has good lozenge pattern flushwork to the north porch and at low level along the north aisle. Pevsner praises the 'Beautiful roof of low pitch with alternating tie beams and short hammer beams, both very delicately ornamented.'

Also listed, grade II, the United Reformed Church of 1844, formerly a Wesleyan chapel, is built in red and white brick with a slate roof.



The other grade II listed buildings are for the most part timber-framed and rendered houses, with thatched or tiled roofs, dating from the 16th and 17th Centuries.

South of the Church, on the Causeway, there is an interesting parish room of 1902 and several estate cottages of the late 19th Century in brick and timber frame, all attributed to John Martineau.

The village also boasts a Townhouse, now one house but originally tenements for the poor, as well as the former Guildhall, now converted to three cottages. This last is unusually of timber frame construction with white weather-boarding and a pantile roof.





Traditional Building Materials

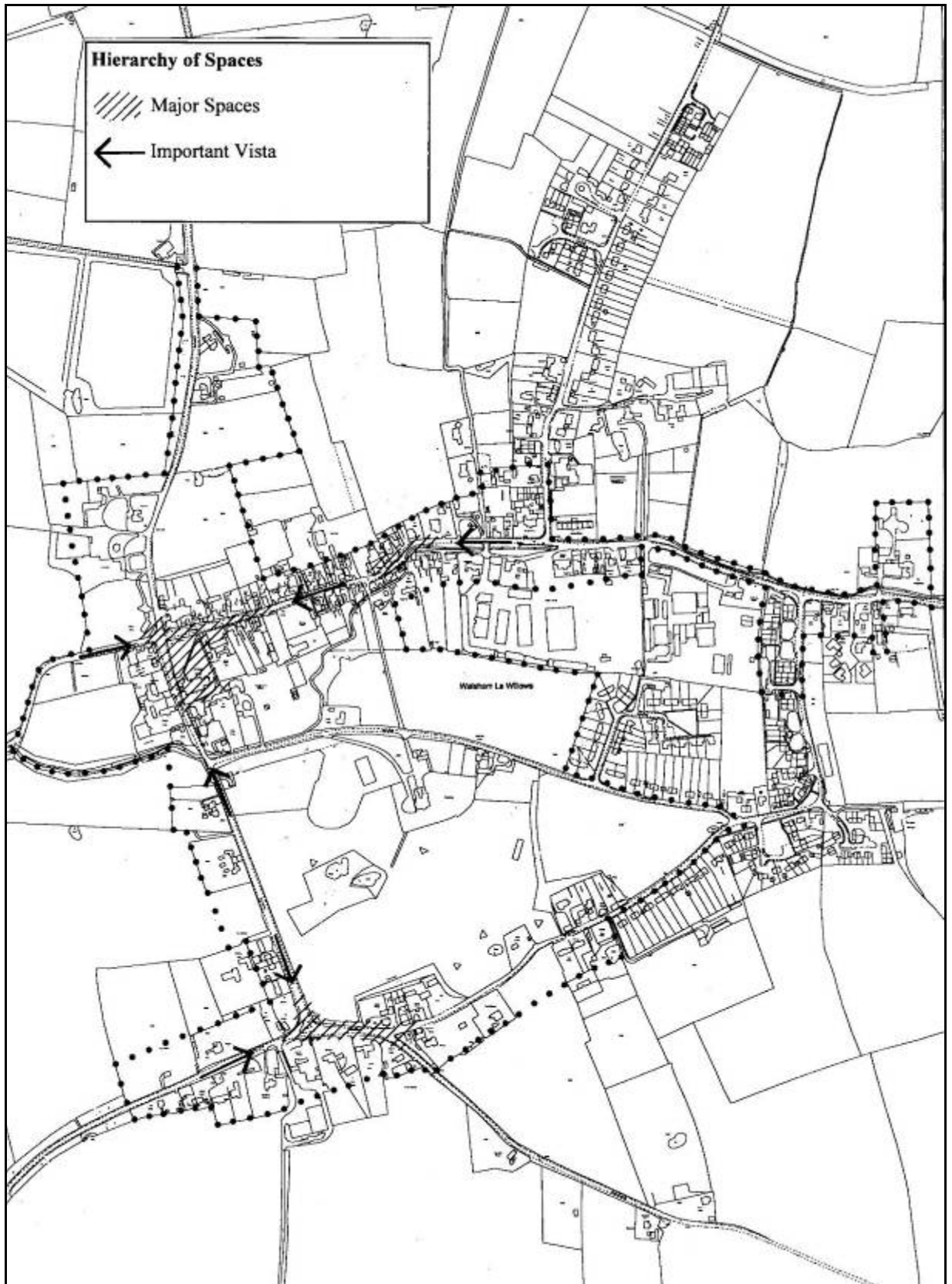
Walsham le Willows exhibits a great diversity in its buildings, employing the full palette of Suffolk's vernacular materials. For the most part these are randomly scattered through the village, one material juxtaposed against another without a second thought.

There are of course many traditional Suffolk timber-framed buildings with rendered walls rather than exposed framing. Some of these have panels of pargetting and there seems to be an odd local variety of this employing decorative patches of roughcast render, probably the work of just one craftsman. A number of white lap-boarded buildings can also be found, including the former Guildhall, plus many outbuildings with black stained boarding.



In addition to the Church there is an abundance of flint, both in cottages and in many boundary walls, usually used with red brick dressings and quoins. On top of all this there is an abundance of local brick, both of the red and white varieties, often used together in the 19th Century buildings. There is one example in red employing rat-trap bond.

Roofing materials are equally diverse with a number of thatched buildings (usually on rendered timber frames). There are also many plaintiled roofs and a scattering of pantiles, both red and the black glazed variety. The Guildhall has a mix of plaintiles on the hip ends and a flattened Roman style pantile on the main slope. Slate can also be found on many of the red brick cottages and grander white brick buildings of the early 19th Century.



Hierarchy of Spaces

The main space in the village is that formed by The Street that runs eastwards from the junction adjoining the churchyard. Enclosed by houses at back of pavement for most of its northern side, this has quite a formal urban feel compared to the rest of the village.

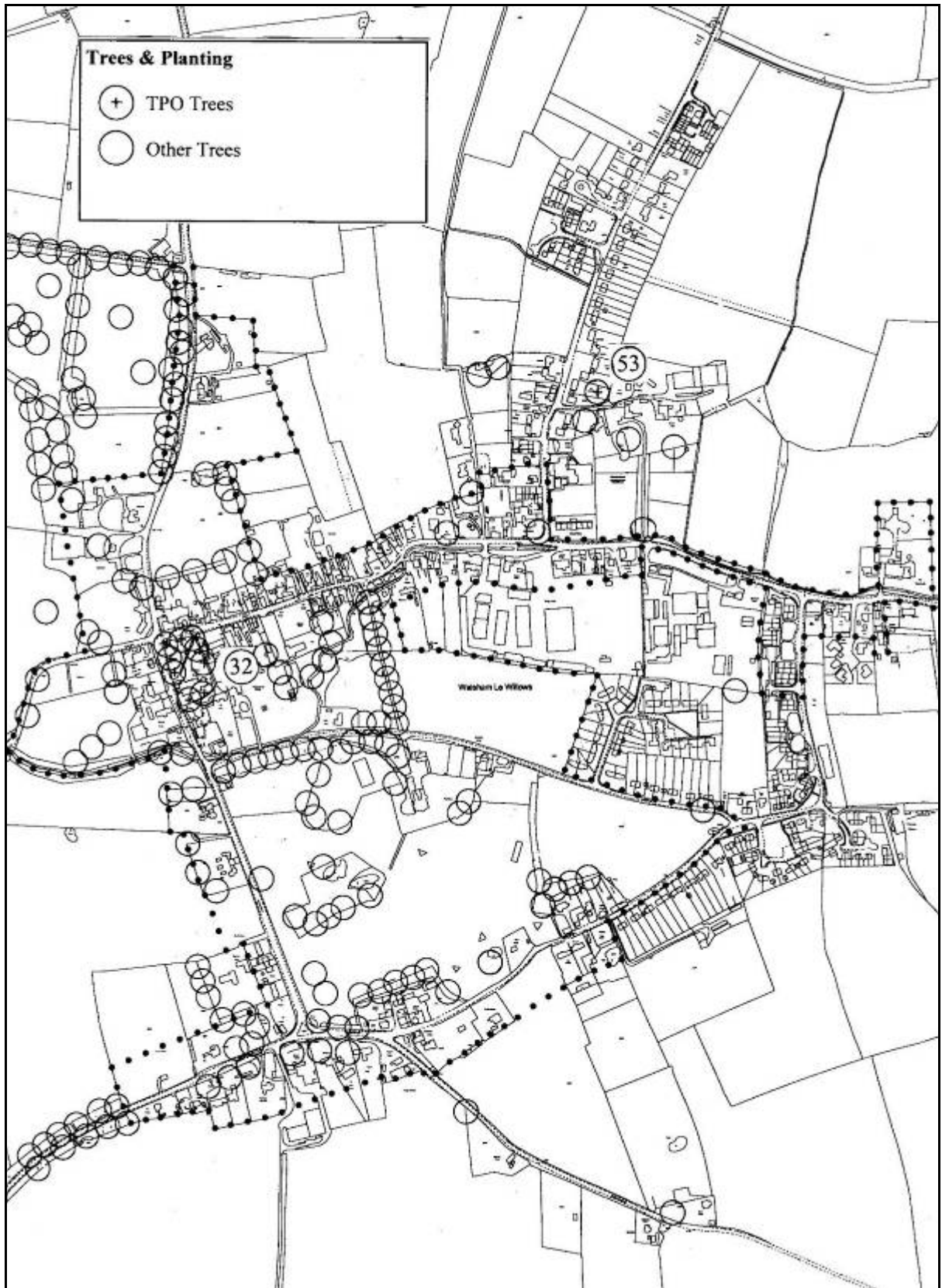
At its eastern end The Street drops gently and kinks northwards where it meets and then crosses the stream. Here there is a much less formal feel with the road winding left then right, alongside the stream running through the space between buildings. This is guarded by railings and surrounded by Willow pollards. The crossroads at its western end sees this space open out somewhat, with the churchyard on the southern side and Willows House set diagonally opposite enclosing the junction.



Another linear space runs southwards from this crossroads and is known as the Causeway. This links the church to the hamlet of Four Ashes with its small cluster of buildings set back around a triangular green.

To the east of the Causeway the village is decidedly more rural in appearance consisting mostly of the parkland surrounding the Grove, a large early 19th Century white brick house. This has a formal approach in the form of an avenue of Lime trees that runs southward to the house from the eastern end of The Street, but the parkland is visible through various other gaps in the street frontage.



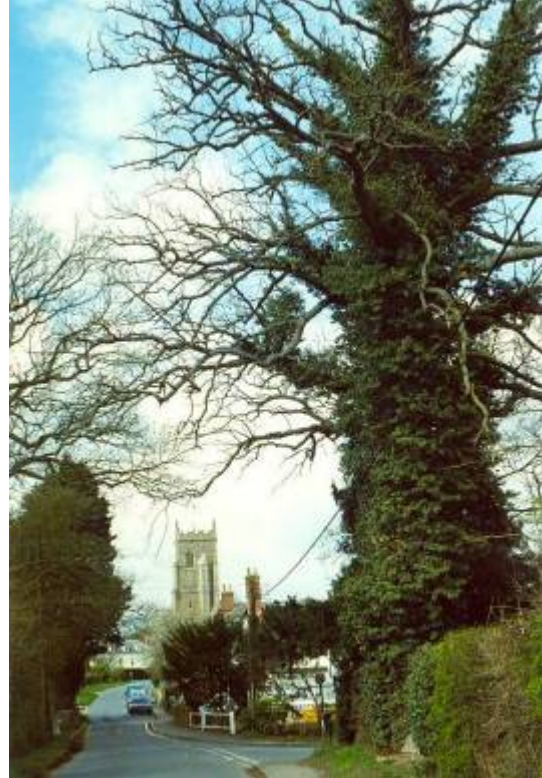


Trees & Planting

Apart from the central portion of The Street where buildings predominate, Walsham le Willows is relatively well endowed with trees. This is particularly noticeable from any approach road where the village can be seen to be more heavily tree covered than the surrounding countryside.

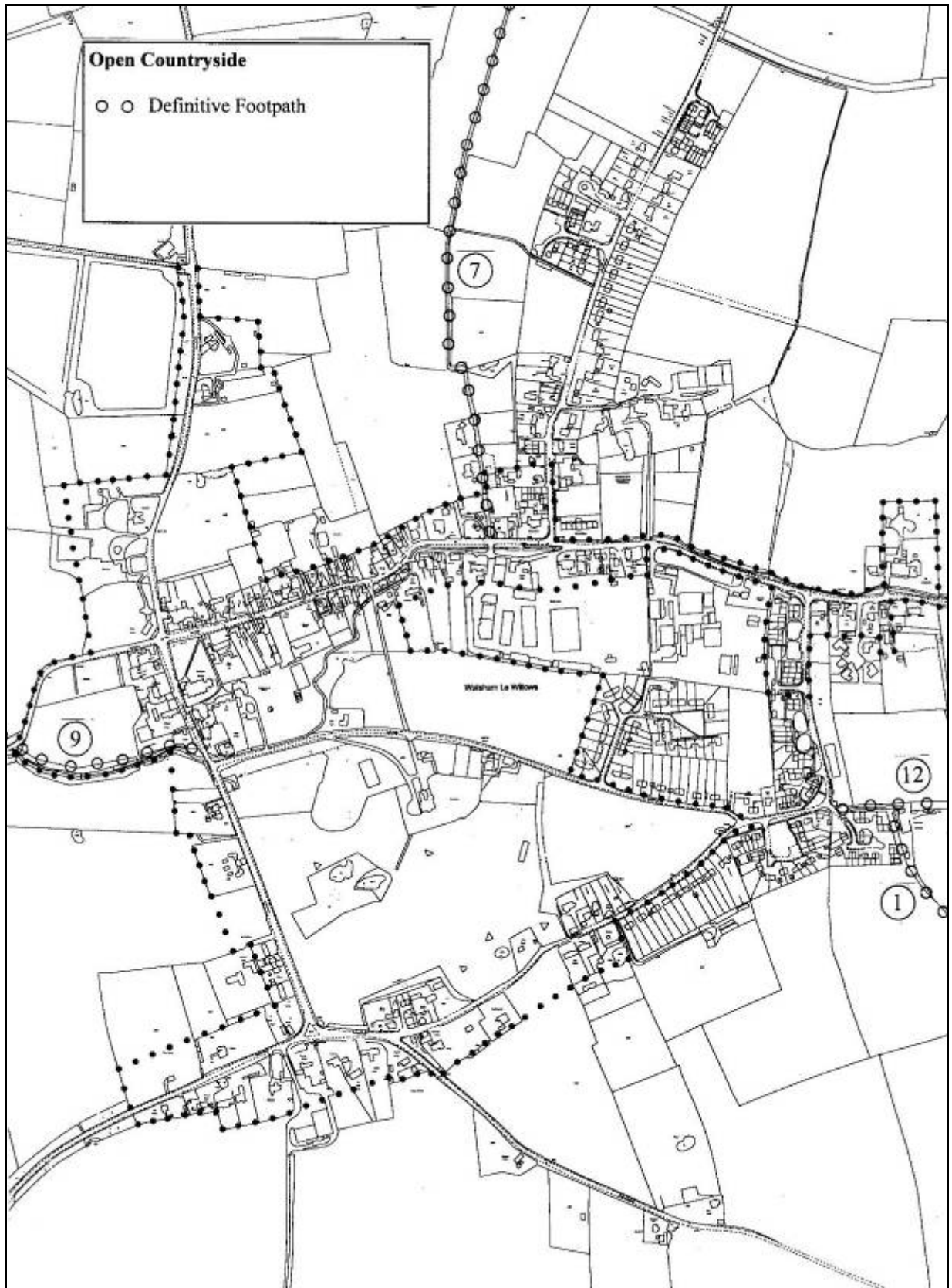
There are pollarded Limes surrounding the churchyard and forming the avenue leading to The Grove, plus many other individual Limes around the village.

There are also large specimen Oaks, Beech, such as that fronting Maltings House and Horse Chestnut such as that outside The Rosary at Four Ashes.



The river area at the east end of The Street has many Willows lining the banks. All of the above is in addition to the parkland landscape surrounding The Grove, which contains many fine specimen trees including Cedars and Wellingtonia.

In spite of this relative abundance of trees it has still been necessary to impose several Tree Preservation Orders within the parish. The churchyard Limes were under threat and protected by TPO 32 in 1973. An extensive area of green lanes in the far east of the parish, along the boundary with Westhorpe known as Hundred Lane, was protected by TPO 233 in 1996.



Relationship to Open Countryside

Other than in The Street, Walsham le Willows gives the general impression of being fairly spread out with much intervening countryside between its outlying hamlets.

Even within The Street, there are occasional views and access to both the north and south into countryside or parkland.

A number of roads were stopped up during the early 19th Century enclosures and remain to this day as useful footpath links around the parish. One such heads off northwards from The Street as FP7 until it meets FP6 which joins between Sumner Road and the Wattisfield road.

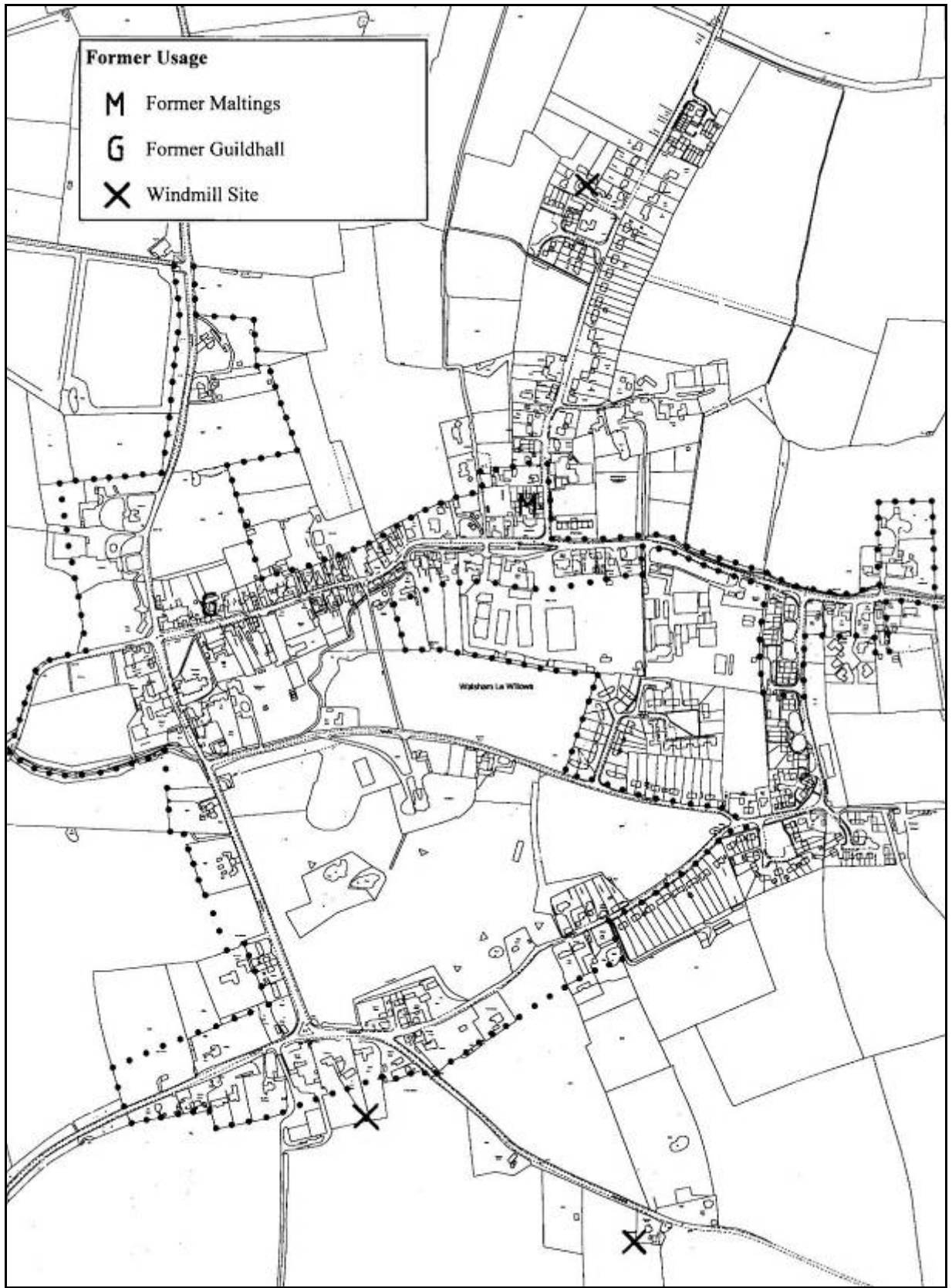


FP 9 similarly heads westwards off The Causeway until it meets The Ixworth road and FP10 joining just south of the cemetery from the Badwell Ash road.

Another radial route is FP1 which stretches from the south end of Townhouse Road about a mile and a half eastwards towards Westhorpe along a route known as Hartshall Lane.

The village is therefore fairly well served by footpaths giving access to the adjacent countryside, as well as by rural lanes, which for the most part provide links between the hamlets. The other aspect of the village is its extensive tree cover and the river, which flows through the heart, both of which make the area feel more natural than the semi-industrial farmland surrounding it.





Prevailing & Former Usage

The main remaining reminder of the village's former uses is the old maltings complex, just off the Wattisfield road. This now converted flint and white brick built range includes a former kiln tower, the complex being completed by the owner's grand white brick 'Maltings House' fronting The Street.

Other agriculturally based industries were also carried on in the village, there being references to several windmill sites. One along the Wattisfield road still has the remains of a roundhouse incorporated into a power mill when the windmill machinery was dismantled in 1917. Another postmill stood at Crownland and was still standing in 1884.



Tithe map references confirm the presence of a local brick industry with such field names as 'Brick Meadow', 'Clay Pit Close' and 'Kiln Field'.

Other records indicate more general rural industries showing the presence in the village of such as a blacksmith, husbandmen, wool combers, a baker, thatchers, ropemakers, a malster, saddlers, milliners and a linen weaver.

Overall the village appears to have prospered in the past, one other remaining sign of this being the former Guildhall on The Street, which is believed to have been shared between three gilds, those of St Trinity, St John the Baptist and St Catherine.

Losses & Possible Gains

The spread out nature of Walsham le Willows means that the quality of the conservation area is nowhere particularly concentrated other than in The Street, where the village achieves a more built-up urban feel.

Within this there is not a great deal of modern infill development and any further should be discouraged to protect the remaining views out to nearby green spaces. Older but unlisted buildings can suffer from modern intrusions such as uPVC windows, but again this is not much of a problem at present.

Elmside Lea, a new large estate under construction adjoining the village to the east has been designed with the local vernacular in mind and will hopefully in time blend in.



Some overhead wiring is visually intrusive and would better benefit the village by being underground, although most of this is of the lighter telecommunication type, rather than the heavier overhead power lines.

Perhaps a little too brightly coloured for a conservation area, the railings surrounding the Clarke's builders yard at the eastern end of The Street certainly provide interest here.

There are also a few slightly untidy corners, but the village does not warrant being overly smart.

References & Further Reading

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Supplementary Planning Guidance
by Mid Suffolk District Council
Environment Policy Panel
29 March 2011*