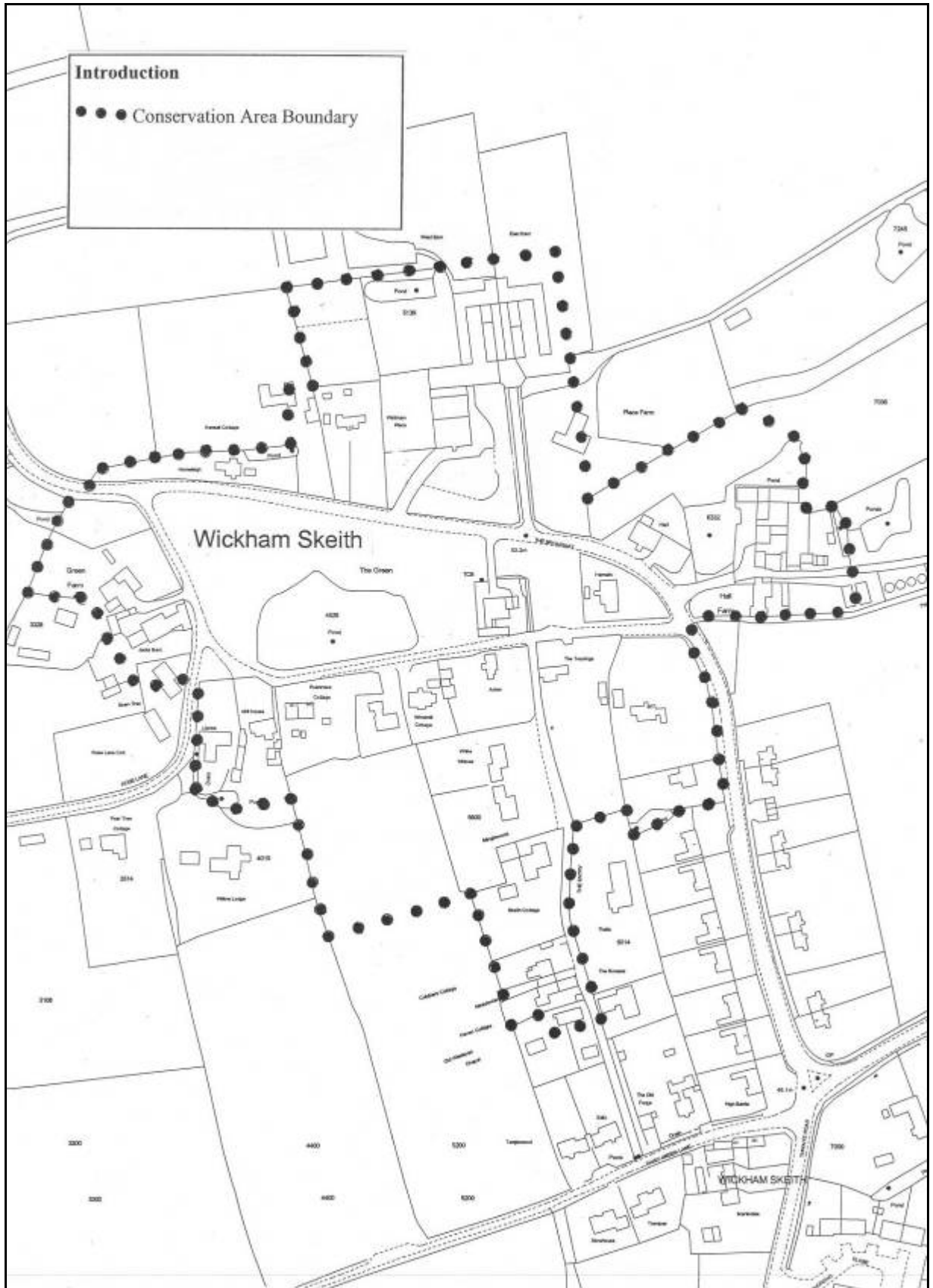


conservation area appraisal



Introduction

The conservation area in Wickham Skeith 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 Wickham Skeith under a number of different headings as set out in English Heritage's new 'Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals' (2006).

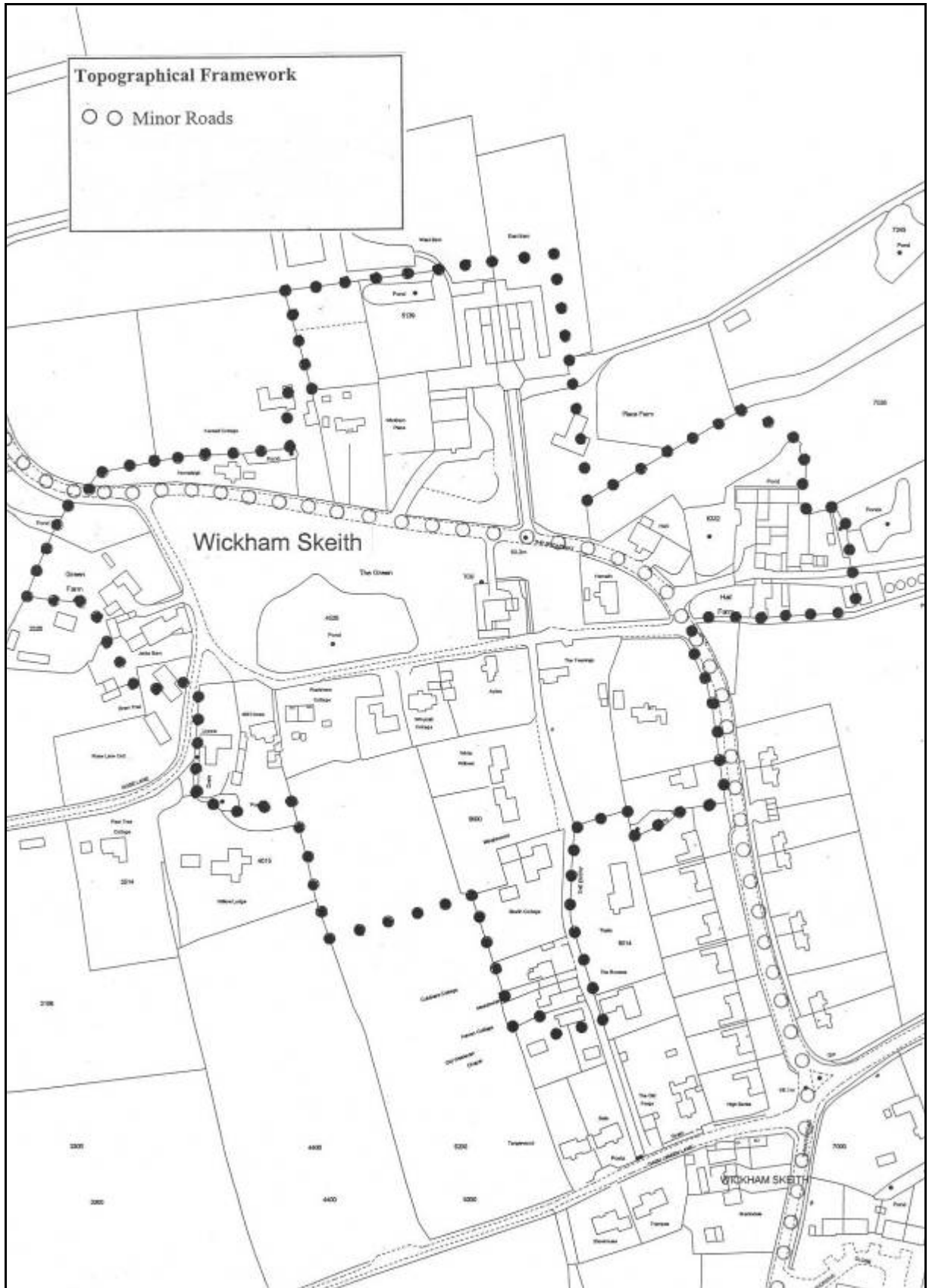
As such it is a straightforward appraisal of Wickham Skeith's built environment in conservation terms.



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.



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Topographical Framework

The village of Wickham Skeith is about seven miles north of the market town of Stowmarket and a similar distance south of Diss, thus lying near the centre of Mid Suffolk District.

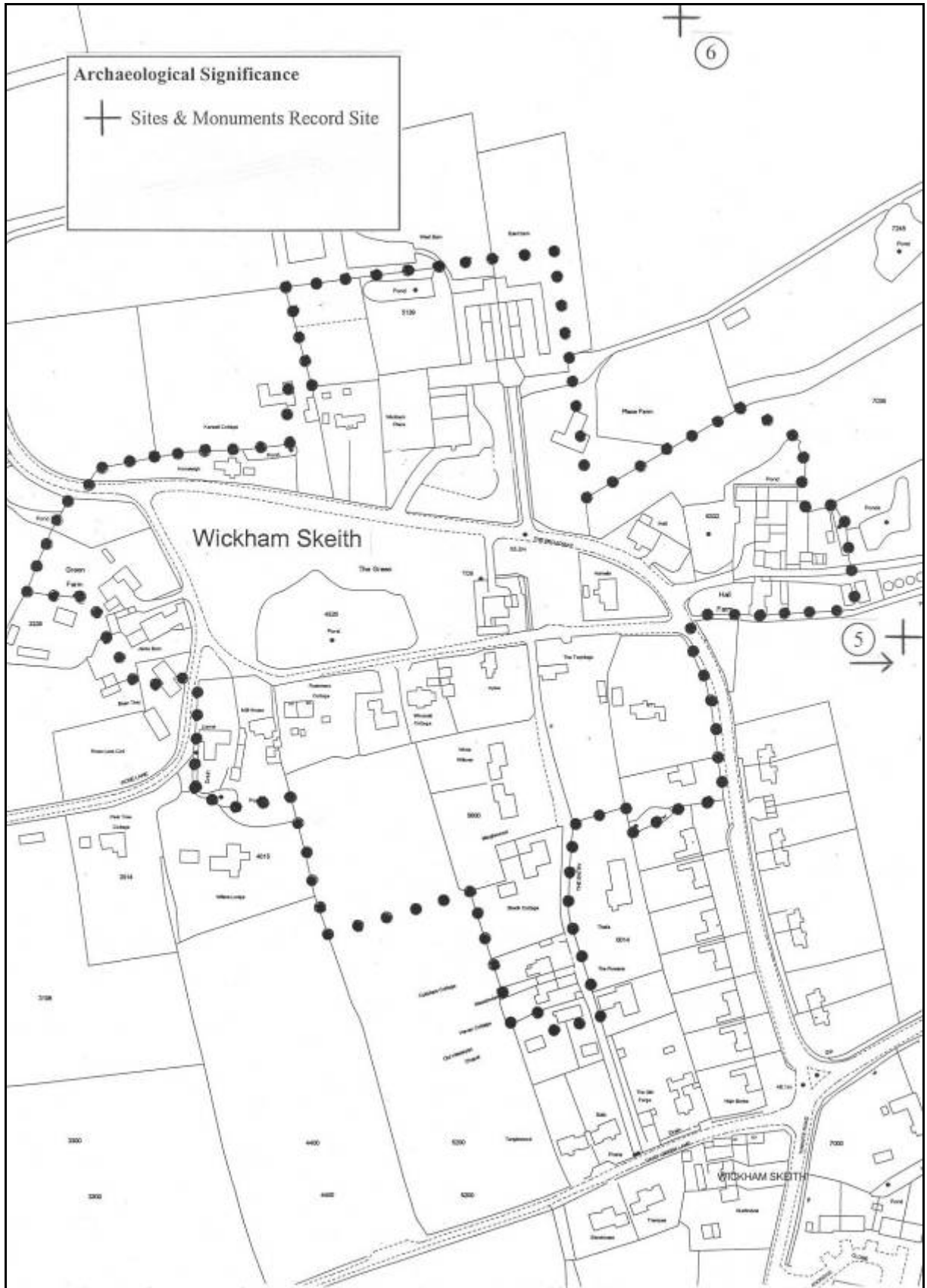
It sits on slightly higher ground adjoining a tributary of the River Dove that flows north-eastwards via Eye to join the river Waveney at the Norfolk border.

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 from Ipswich, formerly controlled by the Ipswich to Scole Turnpike Trust of 1711, which continues from Scole onwards to Norwich.

Since 1849 the Ipswich to Norwich railway line has passed about a mile to the west of the village on its route northwards from Stowmarket to Diss.

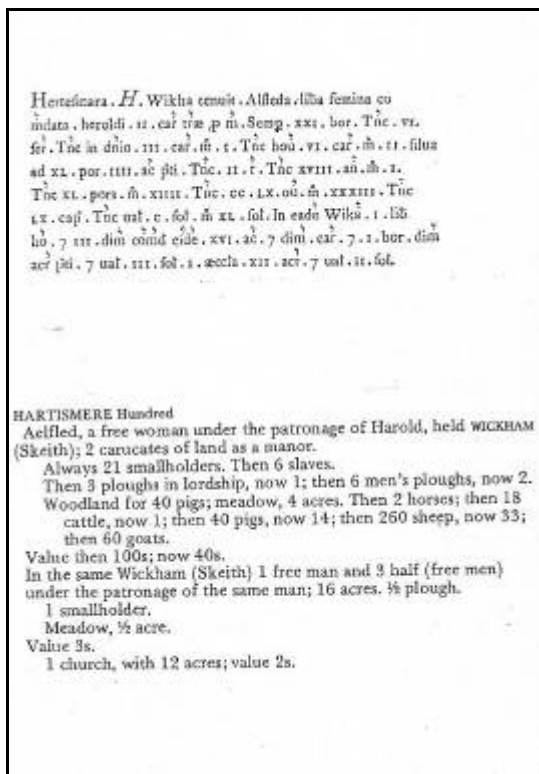


Archaeological Significance

The Suffolk County Sites and Monuments Record lists only seven sites of archaeological interest from various periods in the parish of Wickham Skeith.

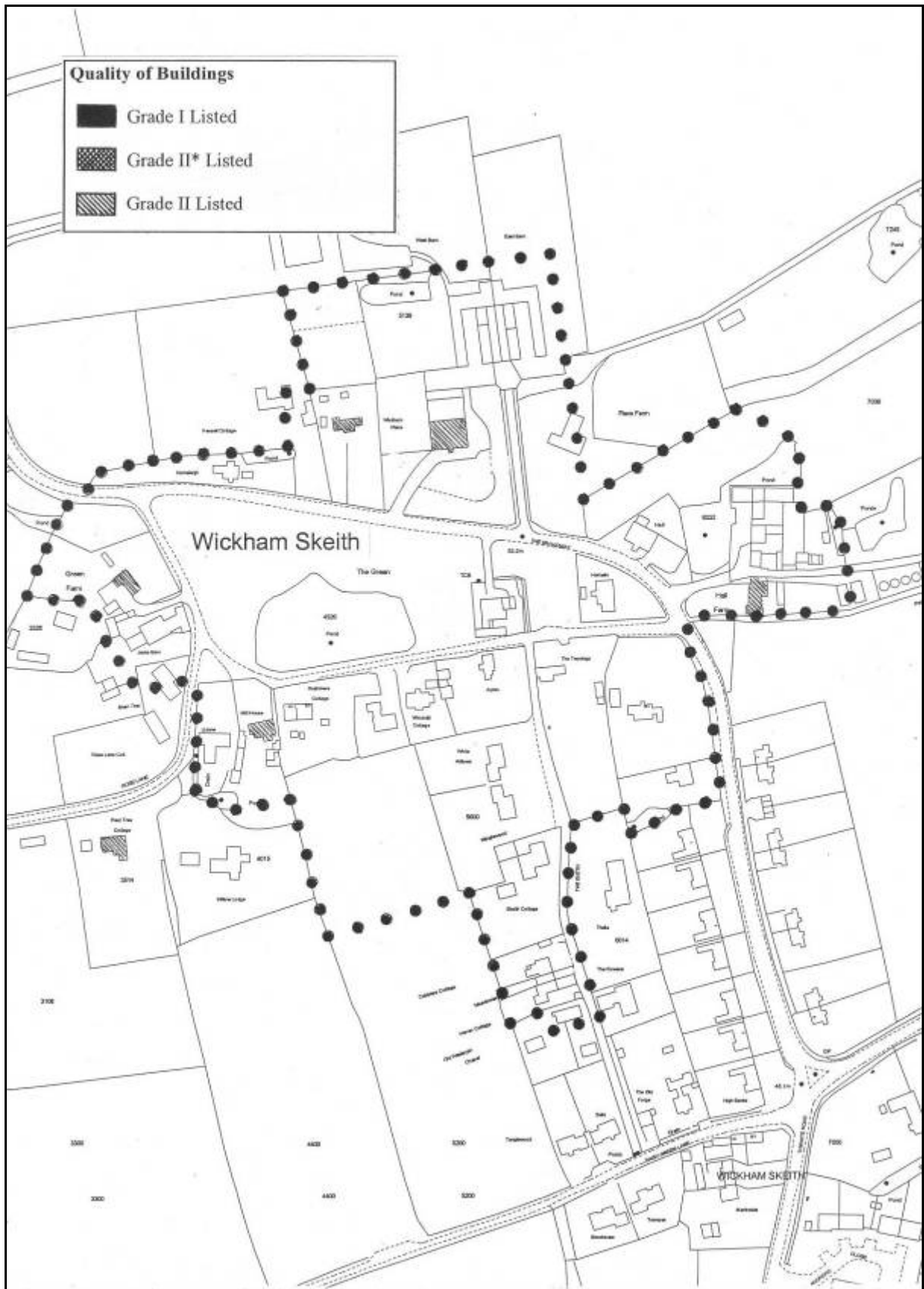
The A140 main road to the east of the parish runs along the line of a former Roman road, so the various scatter finds of coins, brooches and pottery of Roman date are to be expected.

A number of Saxon coins have also been found, but the remainder of the sites listed are of Medieval date.



The Medieval sites include the parish church and graveyard along with a Priory site and a moated site at Wickham Abbey Farm.

Wickham Skeith has two main entries listed in the Domesday survey of 1086. The main manor was held by a woman called Aelfled under the former patronage of Harold and included a church with 12 acres of land, valued at two shillings, and woodland for 40 pigs. The other entry was in the assessment of nearby Mendlesham.



Intrinsic Quality of Buildings

There are 18 listings covering the parish of Wickham Skeith, only five of which are actually within the conservation area.

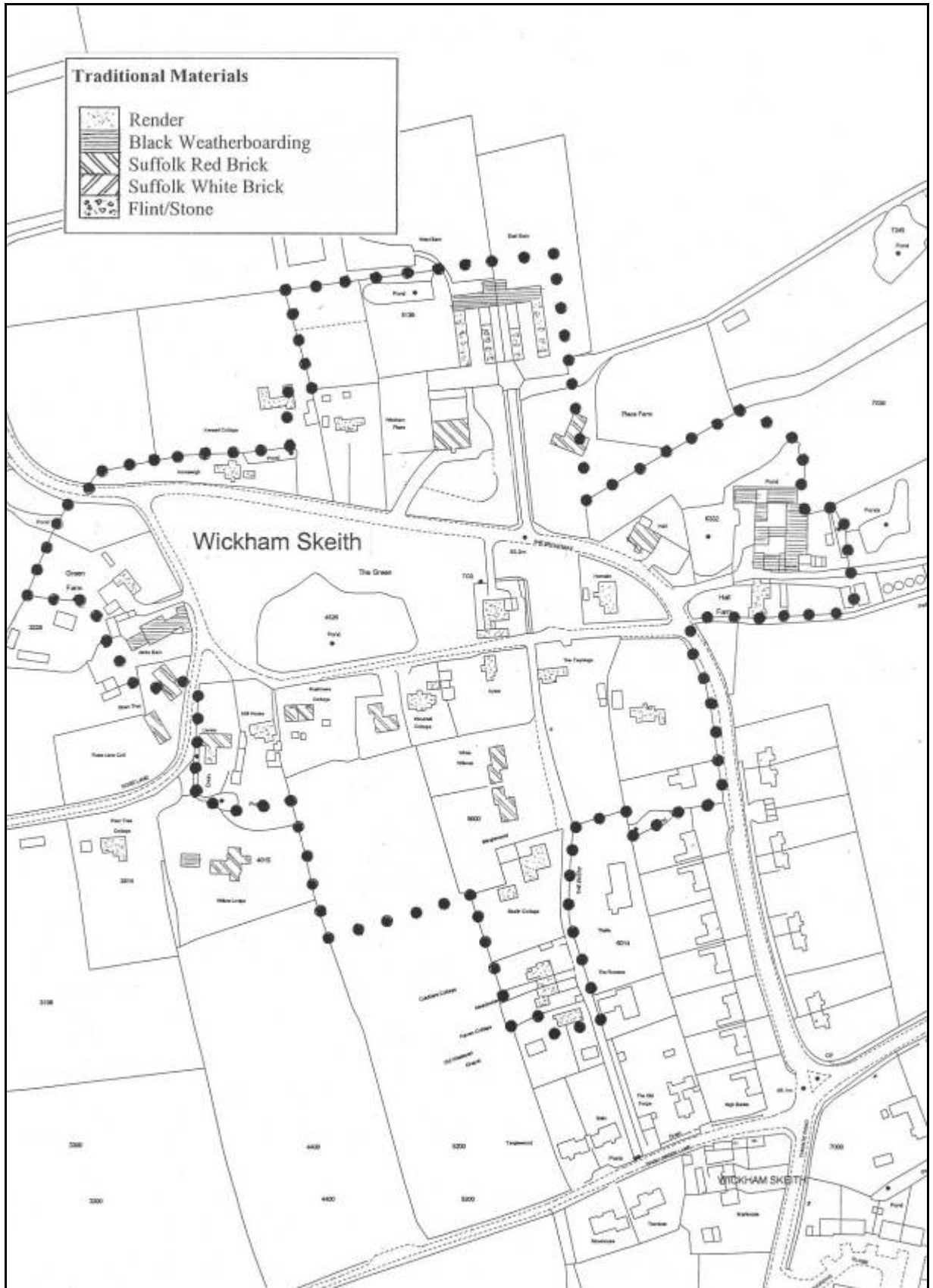
These older buildings are predominantly domestic in scale, and mostly timber-framed and plastered with roofs of thatch or pantiles.

The grade I listed Church of St Andrew lies just outside the conservation area and provides the usual village exception to this pattern of building with its flint rubble, stone-dressed walls, and its slate and plaintiled roof. It has some good chequered flushwork to the Decorated west tower and a Perpendicular north porch. Without any aisles, the simple whitewashed nave has a fine 8 bay hammerbeam roof structure, now sadly lacking its former 'angels'.



The other top quality building within the parish is the grade II listed Street Farmhouse in the outlying hamlet of Wickham Street. This is timber-framed and plastered with a first floor jettied one side. Inside there is a good heavily sooted crown post roof structure to the former open hall.*

Curiously not listed but of interest is the Victorian Wickham Hall adjoining the church. This is of red brick and plaintile, with elaborate Tudor style twisted chimney stacks in groups.



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Traditional Building Materials

A first glance around the older buildings fronting the Green would seem to indicate an abundance of rendered buildings in Wickham Skeith.

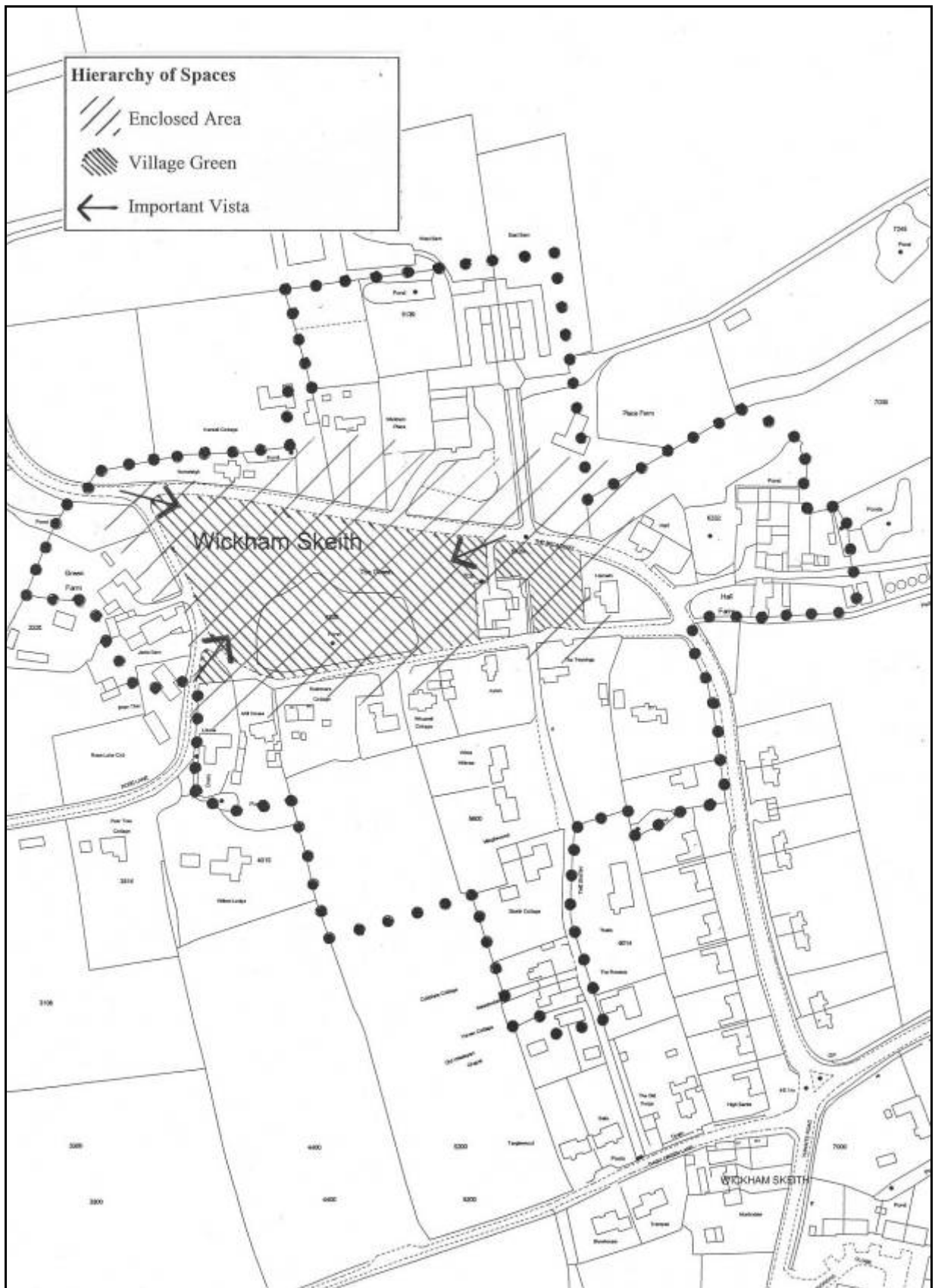
However the local red brick features on many chimney stacks and more grandly at Wickham Place, a large early 19th Century house, listed grade II. South of the Green a short terrace of Victorian cottages is also red brick, built in rat-trap bond.

Other 'Suffolk' materials such as the white brick are notably absent, and flint only occurs on the Church and a few outbuildings.



The prevalent roofing material was thatch on the older listed buildings, but some are now pantile or plaintile replacements. Slate can be found on some of the Victorian cottages and Wickham Place.

Modern infill buildings generally respect the local vernacular using render and red brick, although a couple of houses south-west of the green use a rather mixed palette of bricks, not to very good effect. Most of the infill has plaintile or pantile roofs, although some of the latter are concrete.



Hierarchy of Spaces

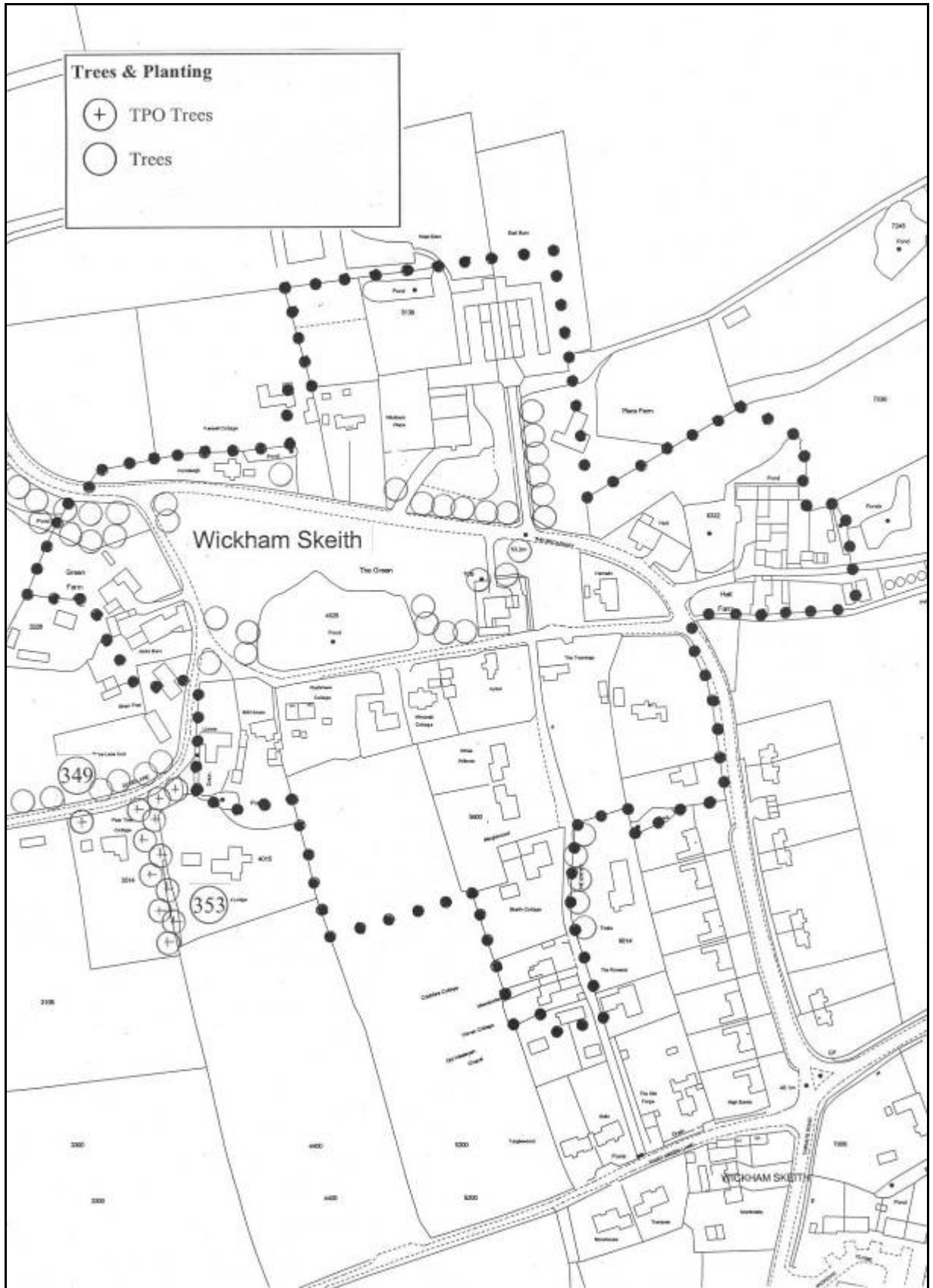
The conservation area in Wickham Skeith is centred around The Green. This is roughly triangular in shape with a large pond on the southern side.

The north-eastern side is bounded by the single minor road passing through the village. This turns northwards at the western end of the green and continues as The Broadway towards Wickham Street, before heading off westwards to Finningham. The road through similarly turns south at the eastern end of the green as Grange Road before branching east towards Thwaite on the A140.



Surrounded by houses set within a backdrop of trees, the Green provides a hidden oasis within the larger more open Suffolk countryside. There is little in the way of views out of the area, but many views across the green within.

Such a collection of dwellings clustered around a green and pond is not untypical in this part of 'High' Suffolk.



Trees & Planting

The most striking trees in Wickham Skeith are a line of mature Oaks fronting Wickham Place immediately north of the Green. Here there are also Lime and Yew trees. Further west beyond this frontage there are Walnut, Field Maple and Ash in a group, unfortunately dominated by two overgrown Leylandii-type conifers.

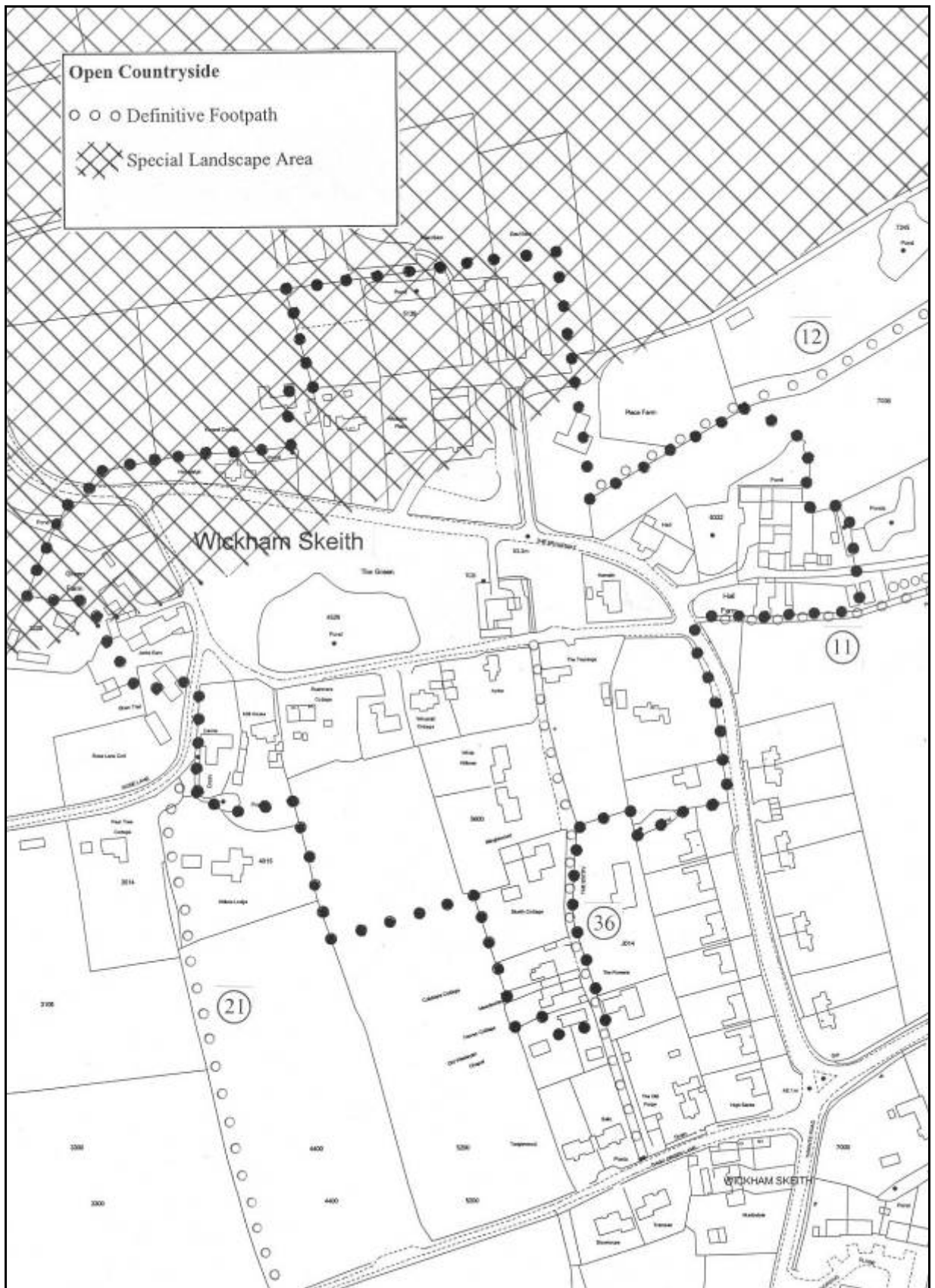
To the south of the open area of green there are Weeping Willow, Ash and Lombardy Poplar edging the large pond, with two as yet young Horse Chestnuts further east. The houses around the green are thus mostly set within a backdrop of trees.



At the far eastern end of the Green a fine Beech adjoins the footpath heading towards the distant church.



Wickham Skeith's trees are important but appear not to have been under any threat significant enough to warrant a Tree Preservation Order until very recently. In 2006 TPOs nos. 349 and 353 were made to protect a solitary Oak and a group of trees of varying species to the west and east respectively of Pear Tree Cottage on Rose Lane, just south-west of the Green. The lane here is particularly pleasant with its tree lined edging.



Relationship to Open Countryside

The settlement pattern in Wickham Skeith, with houses clustered around the green and along the approach roads is mostly one plot deep. This means that, although rarely visible, the countryside is never far away.

The through road system serving the village with its single minor road allows easy access on foot out into the countryside to both north-west and south-east.

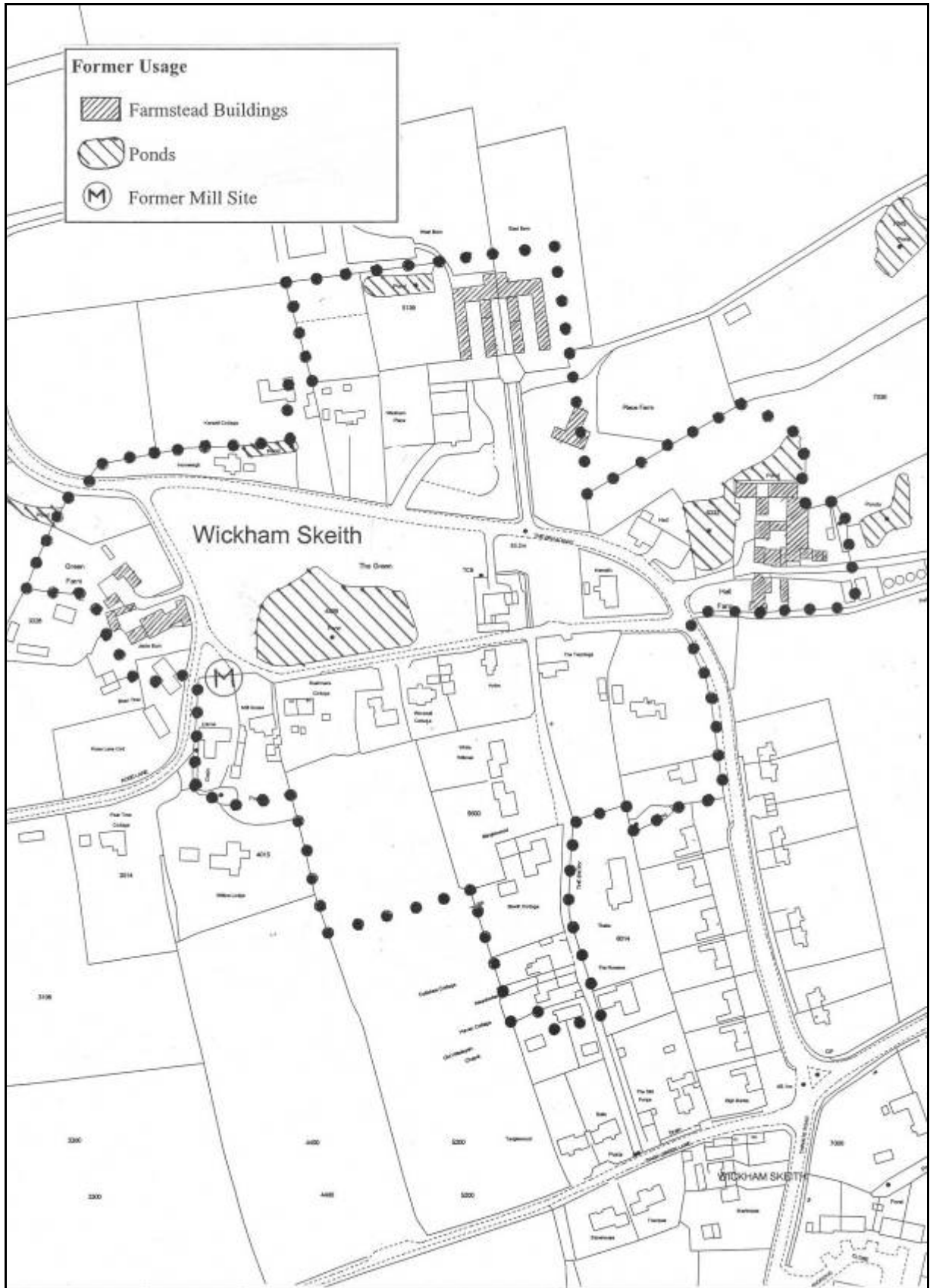
To the south of Wickham Street and west of Wickham Green, there is a good network of tracks and paths linking the two, and serving the outlying hamlet of Daisy Green and Wickham Abbey Farm beyond.



A similar cluster of tracks and paths exists to the east serving the church and Wickham Hall before heading off into Stoke Ash parish.

The area immediately to the north of the Green is however strangely devoid of paths, but forms part of a Special Landscape Area encompassing the Thornhams, Magna and Parva, to the north.





Prevailing & Former Usage

Wickham Skeith has its origins as an agricultural community partly involved in the growing of hemp.

Some distance from the large linen market in Diss, it lies on the periphery of the Waveney valley where this was the primary local industry. A single linen weaver, two tailors, a cordwainer and a spinster were recorded in the village in the late 17th Century.

There are three farmsteads ranged around the Green: Hall Farm to the east, Place Farm to the north and Green Farm to the west. Each of these has left the landscape with ranges of outbuildings and a number of ponds.



In the mid 19th Century, directories for the village list a wheelwright/blacksmith, a victualler, a miller, a shopkeeper and 9 farmers.

This general agricultural picture is not borne out in detail by field names in the Tithe Map Apportionment of 1839, as most holdings were simply listed as 'field' or 'meadow'.

There is a tithe entry for 'Mill Yard', there having been three mill sites recorded in the parish. One of these was up at Wickham Street, one near Green Farm to the west, demolished in 1881, and one near Mill House, on the southern corner of the Green demolished in 1925.



Losses & Possible Gains

Overall Wickham Skeith seems to have resisted too much modern intrusion. There are a few infill houses dotted around the Green, 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.

There are still a few possible infill sites around the green, which should be treated with great care if developed, as the present balance of old and new could easily be upset. Historically one house has already intruded onto the Green, the former Post Office and its driveway in from the north effectively cut the area into two rather unequal halves.



Like many small villages, Wickham Skeith suffers from a surfeit of overhead wiring carrying the village's telephone and electricity supplies. This is particularly intrusive along the northern edge of the green and the undergrounding of these utility supply lines would greatly improve the appearance of the village.

With no major routes passing through the village, traffic is not at present a problem in Wickham Skeith. However the motor car is having a detrimental effect, with dumped cars, informal parking areas, driveways and fencing overrunning the green in places leading to erosion of the grassed areas. Any control of this needs to be carried out in a restrained and low key manner.

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*This Appraisal adopted as
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Environmental Policy Panel
22 July 2008*