

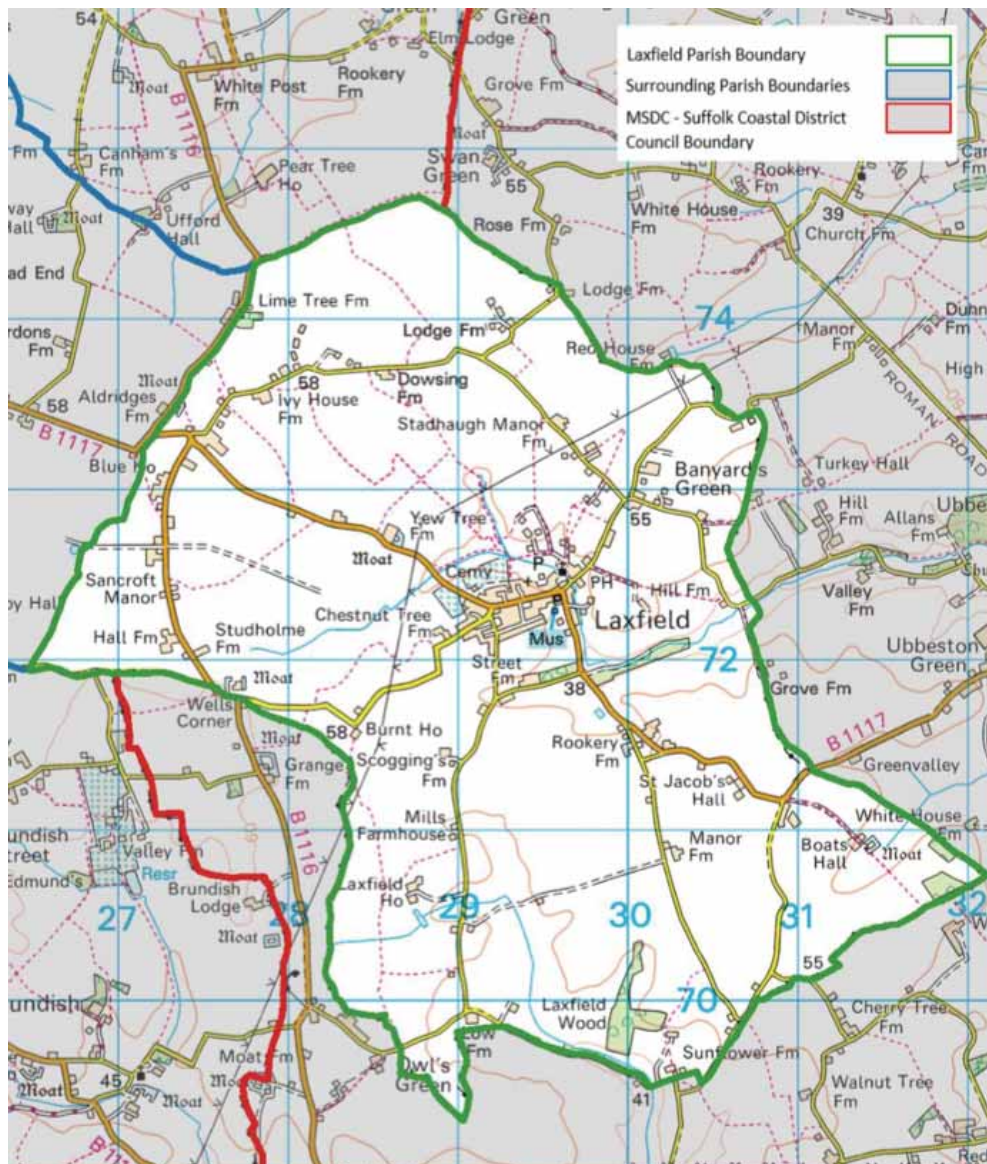
Built Environment Character Assessment:



Laxfield

Introduction

This Character Assessment aims to describe the distinctive features of the village of Laxfield and to set out the key characteristics which contribute to its appearance and 'sense of place'. It has been produced as part of the process underpinning the development of the parish Neighbourhood Plan, and will support the production of a design guide for the area.



Laxfield Neighbourhood Plan area

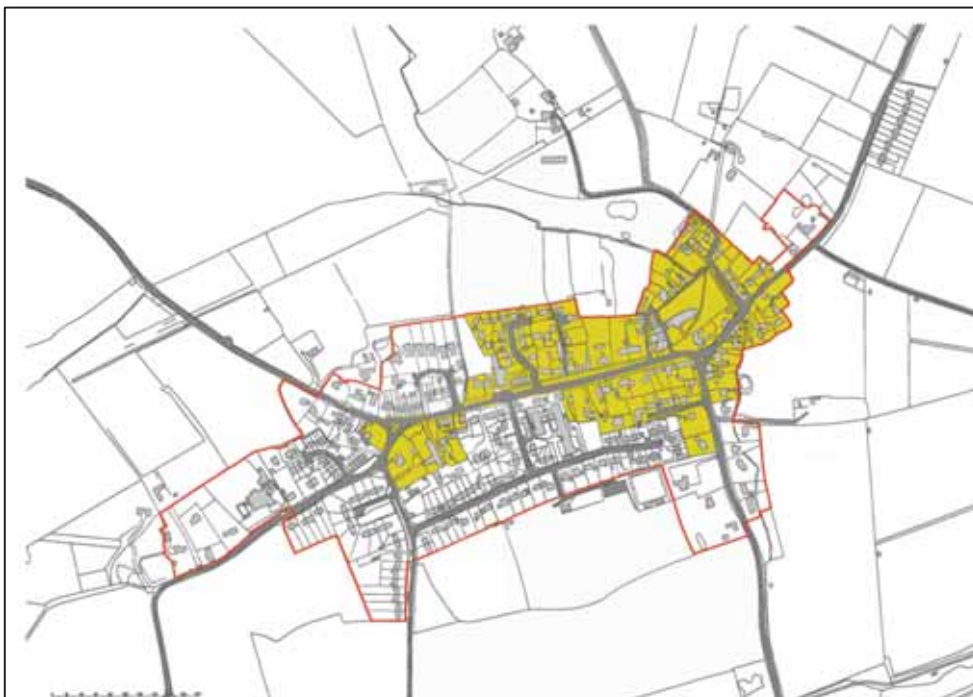
Overview of the area

Laxfield is a small, ancient village in Suffolk, close to the source of the river Blyth. The original settlement centres around the Church of All Saints, the Guildhall and the Marketplace; it was primarily a ribbon village, with further development clustered around the Church. There are dispersed farmsteads and a few clusters of houses along the main routes around the village itself. The main land use in the area is agricultural.

Historic development of the village

Laxfield arose in Saxon times, and it is known that a church existed before the construction of All Saints Church in the form that we see it today. The village appears in the Domesday Book; it was given charter to hold a market in 1226.

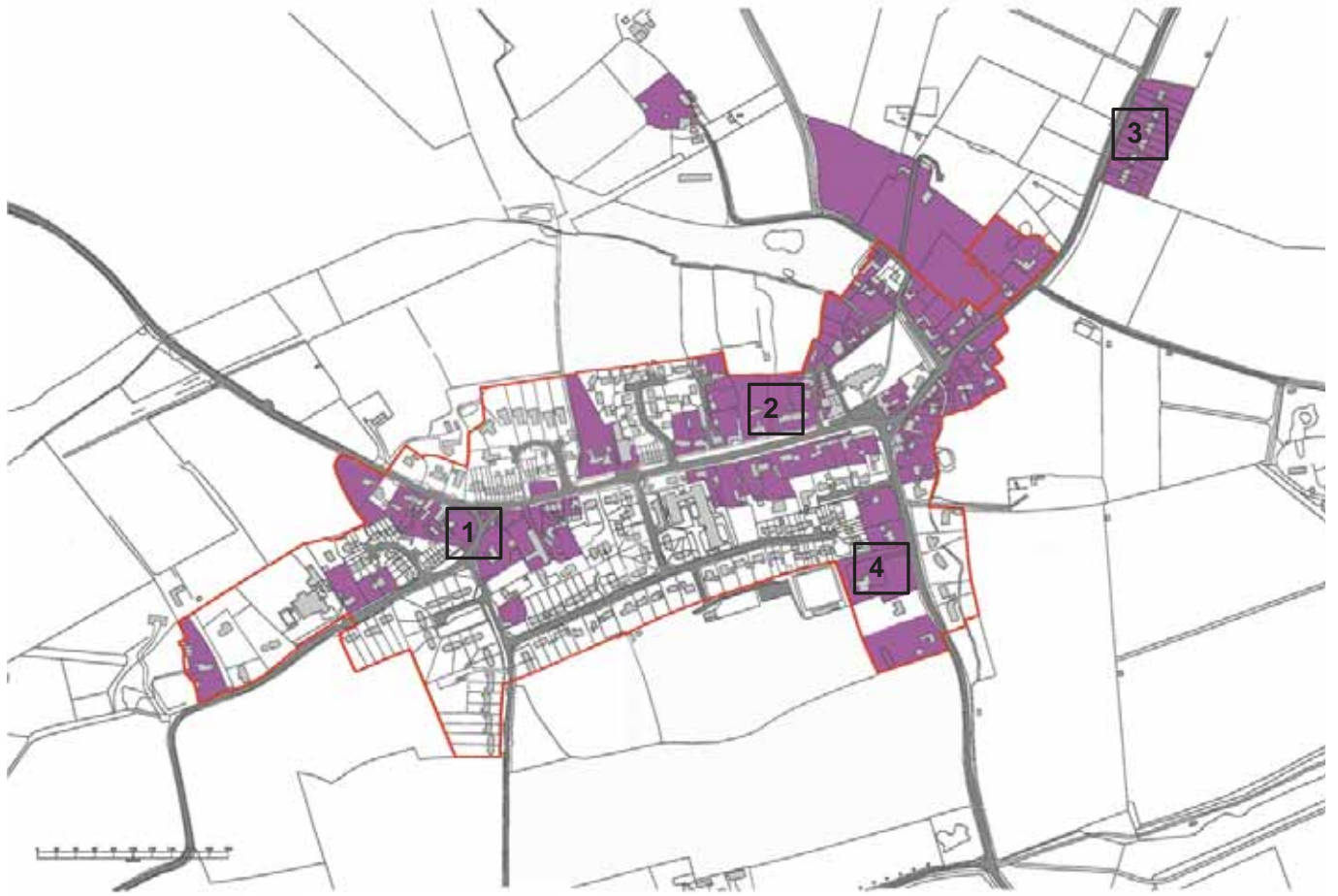
Until the 1950s Laxfield was a thriving agricultural village, with a range of shops and nine pubs. The village station was the last stop on the Mid Suffolk Light Railway, which was closed in 1952.



Settlement boundary, with conservation area shown shaded yellow

Although there has been substantial growth in and around the village since the end of the Second World War, development has been organic and (for the most part) of a scale in keeping with the size of the settlement – since the 1980s, for example, no development parcel has been more than 15 units. As a result, the village has retained its rural character and its strong sense of community.

Character Areas Maps



Laxfield pre-1950s development (shaded) – showing character areas 1-4



Laxfield later development – showing character areas 5-11

Character Area 1: South side of Station Road/High Street around the War Memorial

General overview of character

Varied character, with a number of listed buildings amidst later (much still pre-1950s) development. Includes former orchards and the old station yard, as well as the Malt House and former maltings.

Topography

Flat at this point

Land use

Primarily residential; some buildings now converted from previous use to residential (eg the Maltings, now converted to flats). One retail unit - hardware shop and yard with workshop.

Layout

Irregular - primarily laid out along the main routes through the area, but with some buildings tucked in behind the main frontage. Buildings at different spacings from the road; no single building line.

Roads, streets, routes

Main streets are fairly standard two-way roads, not all with pavements (generally pavements to one side). Some narrower routes, still offering vehicular access, through to buildings behind the main street.

Spaces

Open spaces between buildings allow views of green space, whether gardens or wider landscape.

The old orchards and former station yard connect the village with and lead into the wider landscape.

The war memorial creates an important open space at the centre of this character area.

Buildings and details

Building types are very varied, from terraced to detached buildings, historic buildings generally closer to the roads and recent development grouped behind. Most are two storey.

Age, materials and general external appearance vary a great deal too in this

part of the village: Mount Pleasant (grade II listed), dating from around 1630, is timber framed and part rendered, while Beech House Cottages (terrace of three) are white brick. The Old Police House, the Malt House and the Maltings are of local historical interest.

Landmarks

The War Memorial is the key local feature in this part of the village.

Green and natural features

There are many mature trees in and around this area, including the old orchards and in the old cemetery; some, such as several around the Malt House, are subject to Tree Protection Orders (TPOs).

Grass verges in parts of this character area add to the green feel.

Streetscape features

Boundary treatments vary, with hedges, walls and metal railings apparent. The traditional water pump (still in use) outside Beech House Cottages is an important feature.

Lamp posts in this area are traditional in design; street lighting generally is kept to a minimum requirement in order to maintain dark skies as far as possible.

There is little signage, and this is important in not distracting from the character of the village.

Views

There are two main views from this area:

- Down the High Street towards the Church (from the War Memorial), showing its green and open character with trees and grass verges
- Down Station Road from the War Memorial, past the allotments, cemeteries and old orchards, which (although it has a much narrower feeling) is again important because of the trees and green spaces

Character Area 2: Historic core of the village

General overview of character

This is the main conservation area of the village, and has a high concentration of old and important buildings (both locally important and nationally listed). Development here is clustered around the Church, the Guildhall and the old Marketplace.

Topography

Gently sloping down from east of the War Memorial towards the Church and the village centre. Much steeper slope down to the Marketplace and then up Bickers Hill, and to the northern part of Gorams Mill Lane. Flat along Gorams Mill Lane beside the River Blyth as far as Market Street.

Land use

Predominantly residential, but also includes the Church, a grocery store and the two historic pubs as well as the Guildhall, which houses Laxfield Museum. A number of former commercial premises (pubs and shops) have been converted to residential use, as have the two old schools

Layout

Buildings are set at irregular spacings from the roads, some direct onto the street but also some with front gardens and set further back. Much is still one plot deep, but there are also houses/streets set behind others, such as Church Walk, and the new development of Pump Lane set behind St Helens. As a result, density here is higher than in other older parts of the village

Many quite long gardens stretch back from larger houses; some smaller houses have very little garden or only courtyard space.

The High Street opens out into Church Plain (used predominantly for parking) at its junction with Market Street and Vicarage Road. Similarly, Market Street leads out into the old Marketplace.



High Street opening into Church Plain, with the Guildhall on the right of the picture

Market Street opening into the old market square (opposite the entrance to Gorams Mill Lane)



Roads, streets, routes

The main High Street is wide and tree-lined, with pavements on both sides. Grass verges, set between the road and the pavement, are an important feature. Several narrower streets lead off this road.

There are pedestrian-only routes around the Church and through the churchyard.



*Pedestrian routes
around the Church:
Church Terrace (top)
and Church Walk
(below)*



The main routes through this area are two-way at the centre of the village, although Bickers Hill and Gorams Mill Lane both narrow to single carriageway further along.

Spaces

Church Plain and the churchyard are key open spaces; sadly, the old market square is now not really recognisable for its former use. The open space in front of the Royal Oak and the King's Head (locally always known as the 'Low House') are important social spaces.

Equally important in establishing the character of this area of the village are the narrow spaces between buildings and the narrow lanes that lead off the High Street.

Buildings and details

The built character is again very varied here, from classic Suffolk vernacular rendered houses to Flemish tile elevations. Many are rendered, with some pargetting, but there are brick buildings too – both red brick and Suffolk White; the Old Boys' School is red brick with white brick banding.

The Guildhall (Grade II* listed) is a distinctive timber framed building with herringbone brickwork and a jettied first floor; it is in need of considerable renovation/conservation work. The Church (Grade I listed) is of flint rubble with a dressed stone tower.



All Saints Church tower, seen behind The Villa and the end of neighbouring St Helens. This photograph also gives an example of the range of materials in this character area.

Roof materials are mainly tiles – plain, red pantiles and black glazed pantiles are all evident – but there are some thatched properties too (the Low House being one example). Slate is unusual here.



The Low House with its thatched roof (Grade II listed. Listing text cites this as “A valuable example of an unmodernised public house”)

Landmarks

The Church and Guildhall are the principal landmarks, not only in this character area, but for the village (and parish) as a whole.

The grass verges and trees along the High Street are essential parts of the character of the village.

A number of buildings in this area are considered of local significance although they are not listed, and there are of course many listed buildings too.

Green and natural features

Grass verges and trees along the High Steet – the verges separating the pavement from the road on the north side – and the churchyard with its mature trees are the key green features of this area.



Grass verges and mature trees along the High Street, with Mobbs Meadow seen in the distance.

Mobbs Meadow rises up to the East of Character Area 2 and is visible along much of the High Street. Part of the meadow is a County Wildlife Site.

The early reaches of the River Blyth run along the flat part of Gorams Mill Lane, opposite the Low House.

Streetscape features

There is a mixture of boundary treatments; there are metal railings around the churchyard, St Helens and Suffolk House, while hedges and low fences are seen elsewhere. The metal bollards outside the Guildhall are important streetscape features, and lamp posts are of traditional design - as would be expected in a conservation area.

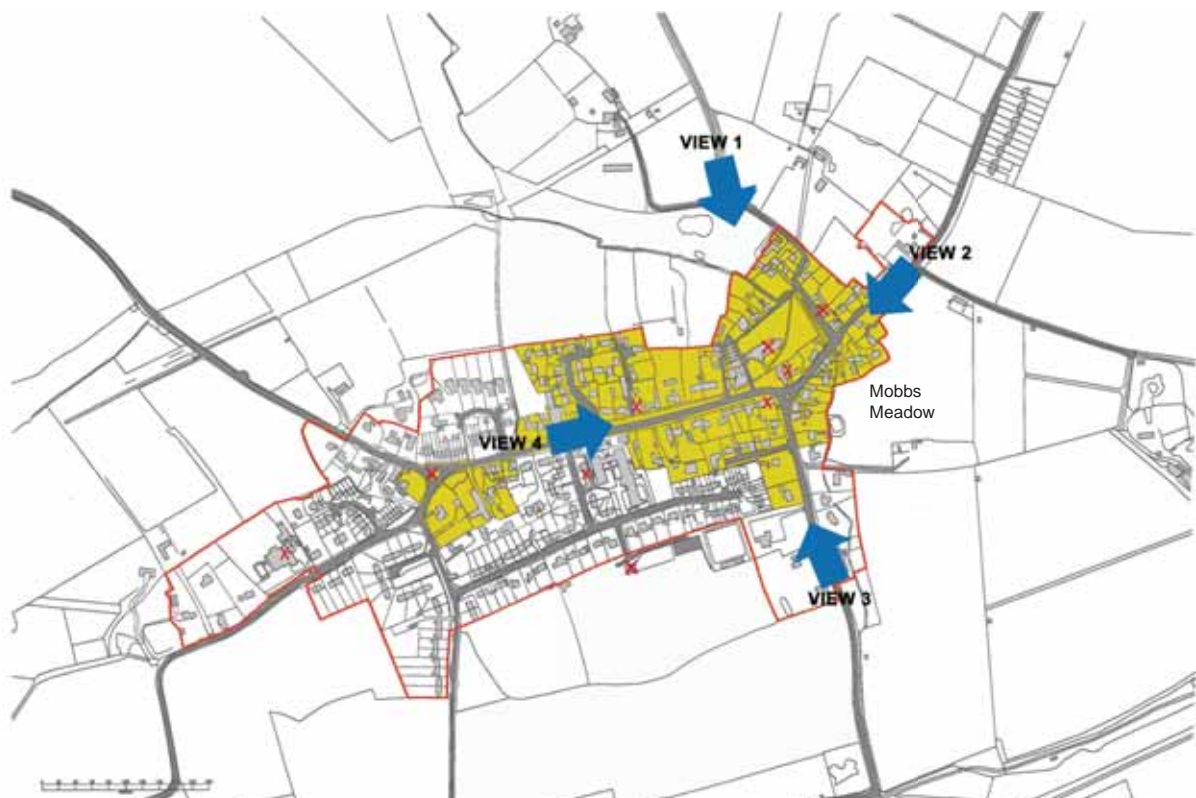
There is a footbridge over the River Blyth, linking the pedestrian Church Walk and the route through the churchyard to Gorams Mill Lane.

Views

There are several important views into this area, shown on the map below:

- From Gorams Mill Lane towards the Church (view 1)
- From Bickers Hill towards the Church (view 2)
- From Vicarage Road towards the Church (view 3)

The main view out of this area is to Mobbs Meadow from the High Street and Church Plain (view 4).



Character Area 3: Bickers Hill

General overview of character

1940s former council housing, and a new development (planning permission granted in 2019) opposite and slightly to the south-west.

Allotments and open fields around the cluster of houses, with important settlement gaps to both north and south.

Topography

Sloping down (steeply in parts) towards the village centre.

Land use

Residential buildings. Allotments and open fields (arable and grazing land) behind and around housing.

Layout

The original housing on Bickers Hill is at regular spacing, set back along the line of the road with gardens to front and rear.

The new-build development is arranged as a terrace of three houses along the road, with a close of houses (Felgate Close) opening up behind.

Roads, streets, routes

Bickers Hill is a two-way road at this point, narrowing to single carriageway as it leads towards the village. Felgate Close is a cul-de-sac, again for two-way traffic.

A layby provides off-road parking outside several of the original houses along Bickers Hill.

Spaces

Allotments and open fields.

Layby for parking

Buildings and details

The ex-council housing consists of semi-detached properties of red brick with tiled roofs (1940s construction).

The new development, begun in 2019, is a mixture of terraced, semi-detached and detached houses; brick and timber (stained black) elevations with pantile roofs and dark-stained timber windows.

Streetscape features

Hedges predominate, both as field and garden boundaries, although there are also some low fences, and metal railings to the front of the new development.

Views

Open countryside views to both sides of the road between the clusters of houses and the village, and beyond the housing towards the junction of Bickers Hill with Cratfield Lane and Cake Street.

Character Area 4: Vicarage Road

General overview of character

Varied character, with houses of mixed ages and designs; narrower street views than the High Street, but still very green because of woodland and mature trees in gardens.

Topography

Sloping down from the village centre towards Halesworth.

Land use

Residential.

Layout

Very varied. Some houses closer to the road, others set further back behind hedges and gardens. Gardens to the bungalows on the left-hand side of Vicarage Road (heading away from the village centre) are generally smaller and shallower than gardens of the older houses opposite.

Newer houses are more regularly positioned in relation to roads than the older dwellings, with a more defined building line.

Generally single plot deep, apart from houses on Elm Lodge Road – a 1999/2000 development set at right angles to Vicarage Road.

Roads, streets, routes

Two-way standard road with narrow street (cul-de-sac) leading off it. Pavement only to part of Vicarage Road.

Buildings and details

Mainly detached bungalows and dormer bungalows to the left of Viacarage Road (heading away from the village centre), of 1960s/70s construction.

Most development to the right hand side is two-storey, detached properties, pre-1950; Elm Lodge Road is a small development of detached houses built around 2000.

Construction materials are varied: brick or brick and render for the most part, with pargetting to Flax House and black-stained timber cladding to Hemp Barn; roofing generally tiled (pantiles or plain tiles).

Landmarks

Trees and hedges are the predominant features. The road starts off fairly open at the village end, then becomes more enclosed by thick hedges and mature trees towards Halesworth.

Green and natural features

Trees and hedges dominate, with little visible beyond them at this point. The River Blyth emerges behind the hedgerow to the left of Vicarage Road, past the housing to that side.

Views

The view towards the Church and village centre contrasts sharply with the view in the other direction, towards Halesworth, of woodland arching over the road.

Character Area 5: Mill Road

General overview of character

Mainly 1950s ex-council housing, with new development in a compact well-defined area to the east of this. Green open space, and mature trees along the main route through the area

Topography

Flat.

Land use

Residential (part of new development on former allotment site).

Layout

Regular layout of former council housing – two-storey houses set around shared parking and green space; bungalows to the right-hand side of Mill Road (as it leads away from the main village). All set on large plots.

Older houses to the left-hand side less regularly spaced and on smaller plots.

New development to the left of Mill Road on two sites: a smaller group of four houses immediately off Mill Road, with a larger development behind laid out to a cul-de-sac. Smaller plots than the first two housing types.

Development to the right-hand side of Mill Road is principally single plot thickness, denser to the left-hand side.

Roads, streets, routes

Two-way street, not all with pavement.

Shared parking and green space, Mill Close and Cullingford Close all lead off Mill Road, the main route through this area.

Noyes Avenue (Character Area 8) leads off at right angles to Mill Road, running almost parallel to High Street.

Spaces

Shared green space and parking for former council houses, opening off Mill Road.

Open fields beyond.

Buildings and details

Mostly two-storey, detached and semi-detached, along Mill Road to both sides; several bungalows at the end of the housing on the right-hand side (towards Owls Green). Development behind (Cullingford Close) more mixed, with bungalows and terraced houses as well.

Former council properties are 1950s construction, of red brick with tiled roofs. Much of the development opposite is 1960s/70s, with some older properties towards the junction with Framlingham Road.

Cullingford Close and the smaller development are recent (2017 and 2020). Predominant materials here are red brick and tile roofs, with some render.

Landmarks

Green shared space and grass verges; mature trees lining the road.

Green and natural features

Green shared space and grass verges. Mature trees along Mill Road itself (with open fields beyond) and on the green shared space. Hedges both to gardens and to fields further along Mill Rad, past the housing.



Shared green space with mature trees, and shared parking

Streetscape features

Boundary treatments predominantly hedges; some wooden fencing. Limited street lighting.

Character Area 6: Framlingham Road

General overview of character

Wide street with grass verges to some parts, lined with houses before the Primary School; houses further back, to the right-hand side only and largely hidden from the road, beyond the school.

Topography

Flat

Land use

Residential; primary school and pre-school.

Agricultural land (arable use) beyond.

Layout

Mixed layout. Former council houses at regular spacing from the road, with gardens to front and long plots to rear.

School set back from the road with parking, hard surface playground and grass/trees in front, and green space behind.

Spacing of houses to right-hand side of the road beyond the school becomes wider and less regular as it moves out to open countryside away from the main village.

Roads, streets, routes

Two-way roads; Home Meadow (Character Area 9) leads off to the right of Framlingham Road and is much narrower. There is pavement along Framlingham Road as far as the school; no pavement to housing beyond this point.

Spaces

School playground and green space beyond.

Layby parking in front of the school and to the left-hand side of Framlingham Road in front of the houses.

Buildings and details

Former council houses (mostly 1960s and 70s) are two-storey buildings of red brick with tiled roofs. The primary school is of the same era and is single storey with a flat roof; separate changing rooms and swimming pool, now disused. The pre-school building behind the school is timber clad and recently built.

The houses immediately around and beyond the school are detached, two-storey dwellings of different ages, from mid C16 to 1980s.

There is one small new infill to the right-hand side, immediately after the ex-council houses on that side.

Landmarks

Primary school.

Green and natural features

Hedges, and a wide grass verge near the junction with Mill Road. Narrower areas to the right-hand side, originally grass, are now bare of cover. Grass areas between laybys to left-hand side.

Open fields opposite the primary school and beyond/behind housing.

Streetscape features

The streetscape features that stands out most are the road markings and the railings outside the primary school. Boundaries to the fields and gardens are mainly hedges, with some wooden fencing.



Framlingham Road looking towards the primary school (with road markings outside the school clearly visible)

Views

Views out to open countryside:

- Opposite the primary school
- From the junction of Home Meadow and Framlingham Road in the direction of Chestnut Tree Farm

Character Area 7: Station Road (left-hand side) at entrance to village from Stradbroke direction

General overview of character

Standard two-way street edged with mature trees, opening into the High Street. Village gateway, with old and new cemeteries and allotments followed by housing. Overgrown former orchards opposite, and former station yard.

Topography

Gently rising towards the built-up area.

Land use

Residential; cemeteries and allotments.

Layout

Buildings set back from the road, with gardens in front – Little Klabang Farm set much further back and gable end to main road (hardly visible behind trees).

Detached houses and bungalows in generous plots.

Roads, streets, routes

Two-way road with pavement to one side as far as the old cemetery.

Spaces

Allotments and two cemeteries (old and new).

Buildings and details

Detached two-storey houses and bungalows; one dormer bungalow. 1960s/70s construction. Mainly rendered elevations with tile roofs; Little Klabang Farm is unusually of brown brick.

Landmarks

Allotments and the old cemetery (new cemetery not yet sufficiently established to be counted as a landmark).

Trees/woodland and green character.

Green and natural features

Mature trees around the old cemetery and opposite; hedges to fields and around the new cemetery. The old cemetery is a County Wildlife site.

Overgrown orchards opposite continue the green space which leads into open fields (arable crops).

Streetscape features

Hedges to most gardens and fields; timber fencing to allotments and some gardens.

Views

Along Station Road past the allotment and cemeteries (towards Stradbroke from beside the entrance to Little Klabang Farm).

Character Area 8: Noyes Avenue

General overview of character

Classic 1960/s/70s housing development along a single street, with sheltered housing and the village hall off The Link to the left (from Mill Road direction) and the village playing field off to the right, behind houses.

Topography

Gently sloping down towards the eastern end of Noyes Avenue.

Land use

Residential area, with standard and sheltered housing. Village Hall situated on The Link. Playing field with sports pavilion and bowls club.

Layout

Houses fronting onto Noyes Avenue in character area 8 are spaced fairly regularly; the bungalows to the left-hand side are set in narrower and generally smaller plots than the larger houses to the right.

The bungalows on The Link are set along the road at each end, opening out into unfenced gardens with other bungalows set back around them.

Hartismere House (sheltered housing arranged as flats) opens off Noyes Avenue, set around a garden and shared facilities.



Hartismere House – sheltered housing arranged as flats, with shared gardens and facilities

Roads, streets, routes

Two-way streets; narrower access road (still vehicular as well as pedestrian access) from Noyes Avenue to the playing field.

Spaces

Large (approx. 8 acres) playing field off Noyes Avenue.

Gardens to sheltered housing off The Link and Noyes Avenue.

Buildings and details

A mixture of two-storey detached and semi-detached houses, and single-storey sheltered accommodation – flats and detached bungalows.

1960s and 70s construction, predominantly rendered or brick and render with tiled roofs. Overall very characteristic of their era.

Flat roofed porches supported by a single metal pole to the front door of a number of the properties.



The western end of Noyes Avenue, showing typical two-storey houses at this end of the street

The Village Hall is a single-storey, black stained timber clad building. The sports pavilion and bowls club are also both single-storey, sited on the playing field; the sports pavilion is very much in need of updating.

Landmarks

Hartismere House – sheltered housing complex.

Village Hall.

Playing field.

Green and natural features

Hedge, trees and grass verges (trees mainly to the western end of Noyes Avenue).

Playing field, surrounded by hedges and trees to the far boundary, but otherwise rather bleak and open.

Streetscape features

More modern lamp posts than in the conservation area. Seats – timber benches – at the junction between The Link and High Street.

Most gardens either open or bounded by hedges; a few low brick walls or wooden fences

Views

Towards the Chapel on the High Street, from The Link.

Character Area 9: Home Meadow

General overview of character

1980s/90s development of mostly semi-detached houses, set off Framlingham Road close to the junction with Mill Road.

Topography

Flat

Land use

Residential.

Layout

The main area is in the form of a narrow street off Framlingham Road, opening into a cul-de-sac. There is a small amount of housing fronting onto Framlingham Road; this is set back from and higher than the road, with a grass verge between the pavement and the road.

The houses to the left of Home Meadow (from the Framlingham Road junction) have driveways that provide off-road parking, and a separate garage area opens up further down Home Meadow on the right-hand side.



Home Meadow showing garage area opposite houses

Roads, streets, routes

Home Meadow is a two-way street, but much narrower than Framlingham Road. It is also constrained to some extent by on-street parking.

Spaces

Garaging separate from the houses is set to the right-hand side of the street, off Home Meadow itself.

Buildings and details

Mostly semi-detached houses; 1980s construction. Elevations brick or brick and render. Tile roofs. The windows are now a mixture of white and the original dark stain. Most houses have open porches.

Green and natural features

Some maturing trees and hedges but not as green as other areas of the village.

Character Area 10: The Orchards and Jubilee Close

General overview of character

Two 1980s/90s cul-de-sac developments, with some housing fronting onto the High Street, set to either side of the historic Baptist Chapel and the Old Manse.

Terraced and semi-detached houses at higher density than the bungalows set behind them. Open-plan gardens to most of the bungalows.

Topography

Flat

Land use

Residential; Baptist Chapel set between The Orchards and Jubilee Close.

Layout

Terraced houses set along the High Street and semi-detached houses behind the village pond, with shared garaging and vehicular access leading off The Orchards – a cul-de-sac with seven larger bungalows set around it.

Jubilee Close has a similar layout, but on a larger scale, with more bungalows around the Close.

The houses have small, narrow gardens while the bungalows have larger plots, particularly on The Orchards.

Roads, streets, routes

Two-way streets each ending in a cul-de-sac. Pedestrian routes behind and in front of the pond, separate from the main pavement.



Pedestrian route and planting behind the village pond, in front of houses that form part of The Orchards

There is a layby to provide off-street parking in front of the Chapel.

There is a public right of way (PROW) between The Orchards and the Chapel, leading through woodland to the Tank Pond and fields behind the development.

Buildings and details

The majority of this character area is 1980s and 90s construction, with brick or brick and render elevations and tiled roofs. Most windows are still dark stained, with a few exceptions.



Entrance to Jubilee Close – two-storey terraced houses with brick and render elevations and tiled roofs; predominantly dark-stained windows

The bungalows are detached, and the two-storey houses are either terraced or semi-detached.

The Old Manse is Grade II listed, pink render with tile roof; the Baptist Chapel, also Grade II listed, is red brick with a white brick façade. The listing text sets out great detail about the front elevation, as well as about the interior of the Chapel. Its railings are also listed.

Landmarks

The Old Manse and the Baptist Chapel.

Green and natural features

The village pond and planting behind, between the pond and houses.

Woodland along the PROW and visible behind the bungalows, as well as some mature trees in front gardens of the development.

Hedges to some enclosed gardens.



Mature trees in gardens of The Orchards, with woodland visible behind the development

Streetscape features

Houses set behind hedges or timber fences (railings to the Old Manse and the Baptist Chapel).

Views

From High Street towards the village centre, with Mobbs Meadow rising behind (from Jubilee Close).

Character Area 11: Noyes Avenue (eastern end)

General overview of character

A 1990s development of semi-detached and terraced two-storey houses, with a 'harder' feel than most areas of Laxfield – not as softened by mature trees and planting. A more suburban feel than most other parts of the village.

Topography

Gently sloping down towards the east.

Land use

Residential.

Layout

Houses fronting on to the road and set around the cul-de-sac. Mainly open-plan front gardens. Density higher than in the 1960s/70s development further west along Noyes Avenue.

Roads, streets, routes

A two-way street ending in a cul-de-sac. Pavements most of the way along both sides of the road.

Buildings and details

Semi-detached and terraced two-storey houses; mostly brick elevations with a small amount of render. Tiled roofs. Most houses have enclosed porches. Many have integral garages, some converted to residential use.

Green and natural features

Few trees in this area; no grass verges.

Streetscape features

Mostly open-plan front gardens. A little hedging at the far end of the cul-de-sac; one curved brick wall bounding a garden. Fairly modern lamp posts.