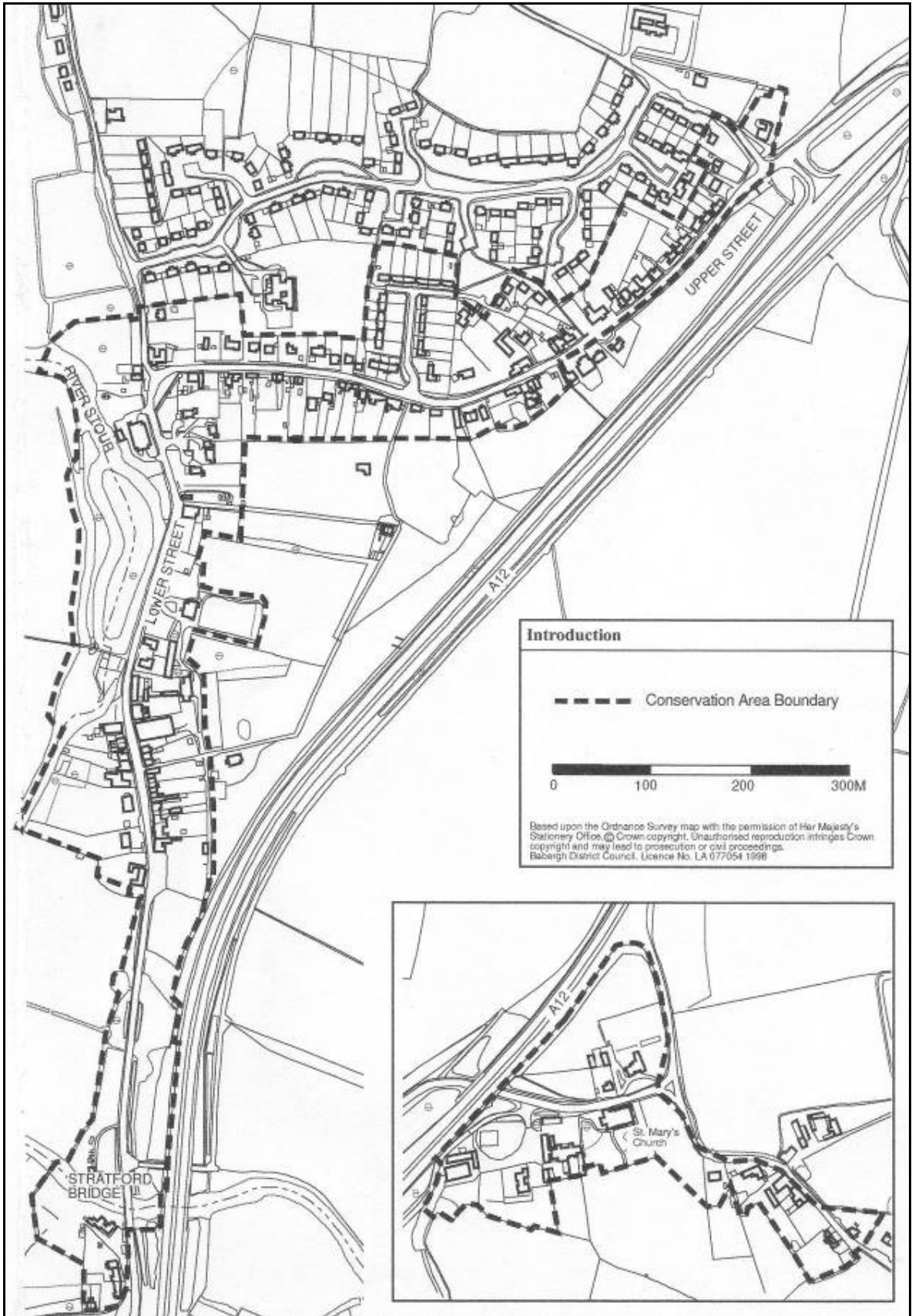




conservation area appraisal



Introduction

The conservation area in Stratford St Mary was originally designated by East Suffolk County Council in 1971, revised in 1973 and inherited by Babergh 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 Stratford St Mary under a number of different headings as set out in English Heritage's new 'Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals' (2006).

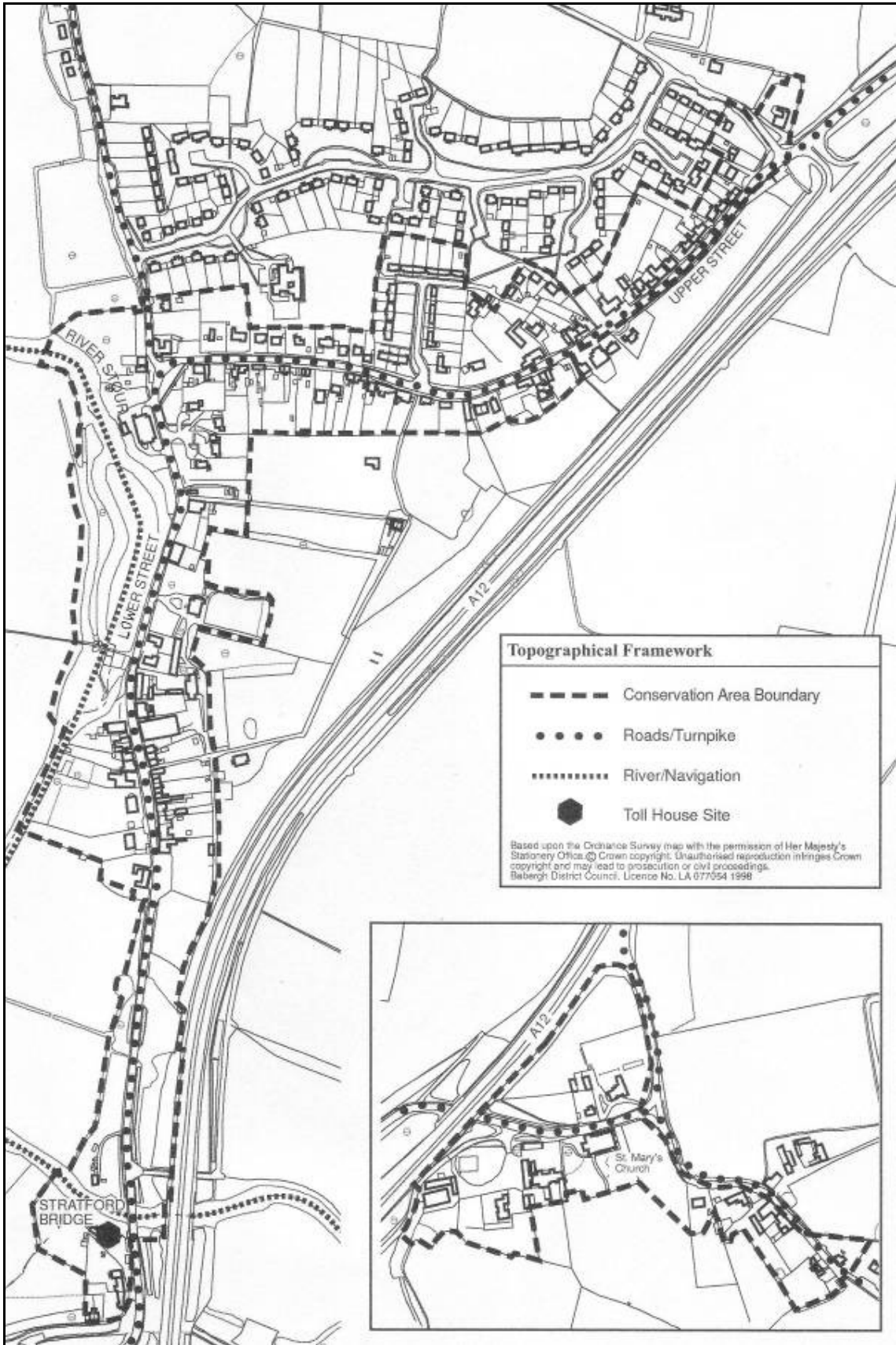
As such it is a straightforward appraisal of Stratford St Mary's built environment in conservation terms and is essentially an update on a draft document produced back in 1997, when the village was considered for a rural grant scheme that never came to fruition.



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, Babergh District Council 2007.



Topographical Framework

The village of Stratford St Mary lies in south Suffolk on the north-east bank of the river Stour, which here forms the county boundary with Essex.

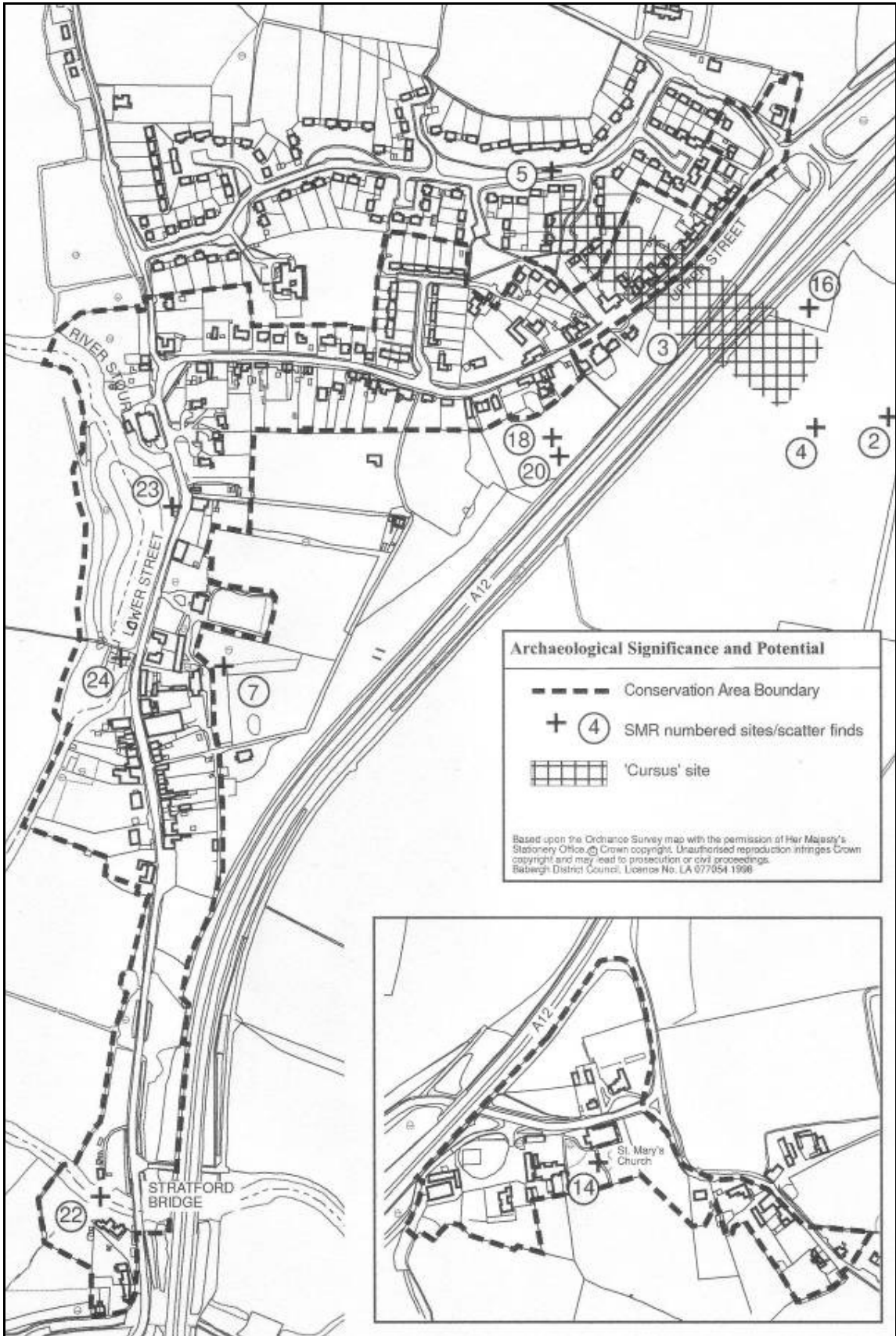
The Ipswich to Stratford turnpike road at one time passed through the village, meeting its Essex counterpart at a toll-house on the Essex side of a bridge 200 feet upstream from the current crossing. Both toll-house and bridge have now gone, but live on in the name of the adjacent 'Talbooth' restaurant.

This road has now been replaced by the modern dual carriageway of the A12, which by-passes the village but slices off the portion containing the church, now reached via an underpass.



The river was made navigable in 1709 as the Stour Navigation and took barge traffic from Mistley, at the head of the estuary above Harwich, some 25 miles further upstream to Sudbury. A disused lock adjoining the river to the west of the village is but one remnant of this waterway, which was essentially out of use by 1928.

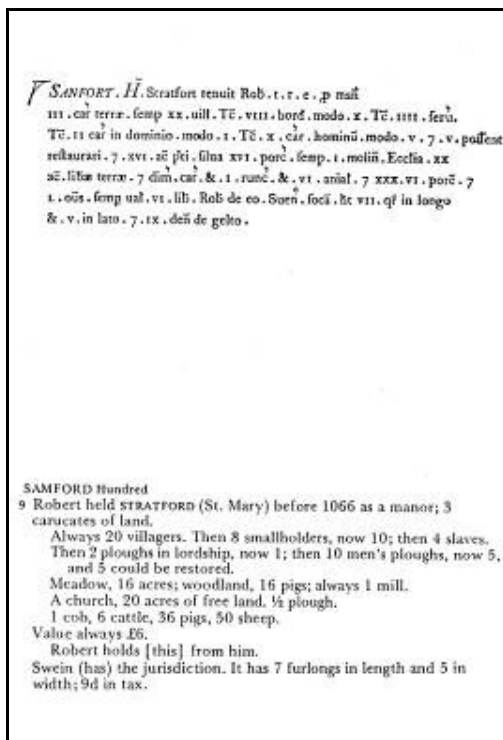
Stratford is for the most part sited on the alluvial deposits laid down by the river since the ice ages. During that time the river itself has cut down through the overlying boulder clay of High Suffolk, and the glacial sands and gravels immediately beneath, into the underlying strata of London clay.



Archaeological Significance

Stratford St Mary would seem to be more a place of archaeological potential than of archaeological results. The majority of evidence listed in the County Sites and Monuments Record is from cropmarks, indicating a large number of ring ditches, mostly clustered around a 'cursus' type monument (3) which has been sliced in two by the A12's dual carriageway.

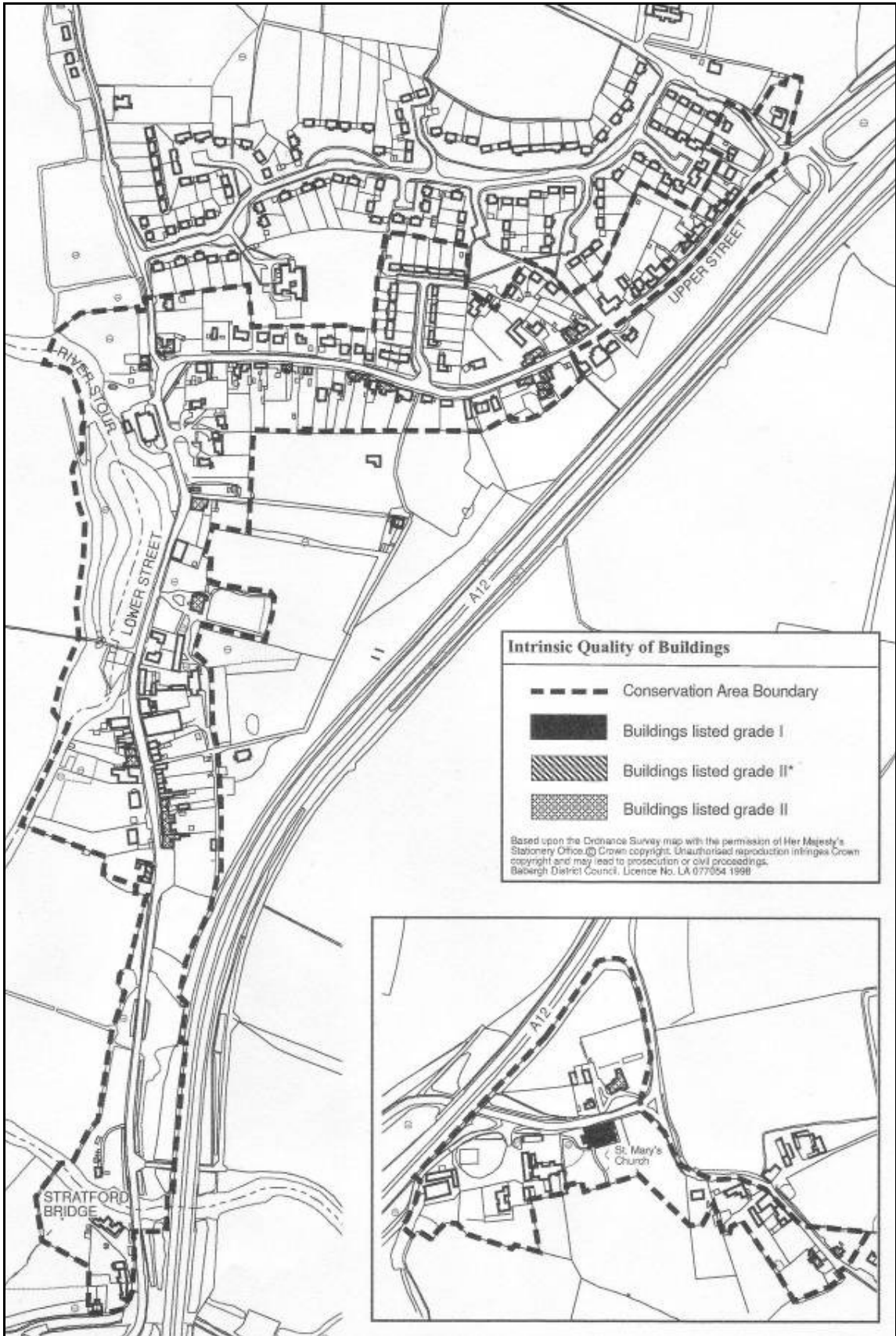
Apart from these ring ditches, which are of unknown date, there is evidence from scatter finds of Roman occupation and also possible Roman road remains near the river (7).



The domesday survey of 1086 lists a manor with a mill, as well as the church with 20 acres of free land.

Medieval remains comprise 14th Century tiling found outside the Church, whilst from 1384 there are records of a medieval market and fair, which fell out of use by the 17th Century.

Post Medieval remains include the old bridge footings (22), further upstream from the current bridge, and two different watermill sites (23, 24).



Intrinsic Quality of Buildings

Stratford St Mary's listed buildings consist mainly of grade II houses, mostly timber-framed and not confined just to the main village centre, but scattered across the wider parish as a whole.

Two such houses are considered of better quality and given grade II status. One lies to the north of the village proper, whilst the other is within: the 'Weaver's House' in Lower Street with its exposed timber-framing.*

Also in Lower Street, near the corner with Upper Street, is a grade II listed milepost in cast iron: 11 miles from Ipswich, 7 from Colchester, and made by J. Garrett, Ironfounder of Ipswich.



The jewel in the parish, however, is the grade I listed Church of St Mary, dating mainly from the 15th and 16th Centuries.

This is a large Perpendicular church, indicative of the area's wool wealth in that period. It appears in a painting by John Constable, from about 1798.

Pevsner says 'The show front of the church is to the N: Ormate chancel chapel and N Aisle, ormate N porch. Everywhere here flushwork decoration.' He also refers to the curious feature of an alphabet on the walls and buttresses.

The church was restored in the late 1870s by Woodyer, many of its stone details being renewed at that time.



Traditional Building Materials

Stratford St Mary's older buildings are for the most part rendered timber frames with plaintile roofs, very much in the Suffolk vernacular.

A number of striking instances occur where the close studded timber-framing is exposed.

Steep plaintile roofs are also found on other buildings, giving a clue to the presence of timber-framed construction hidden behind more recent brick fronts.

Brick is however more commonly found on the more recent buildings with slate roofs. These are predominantly in local soft 'Suffolk red' brick, some of which have now been painted or rendered.

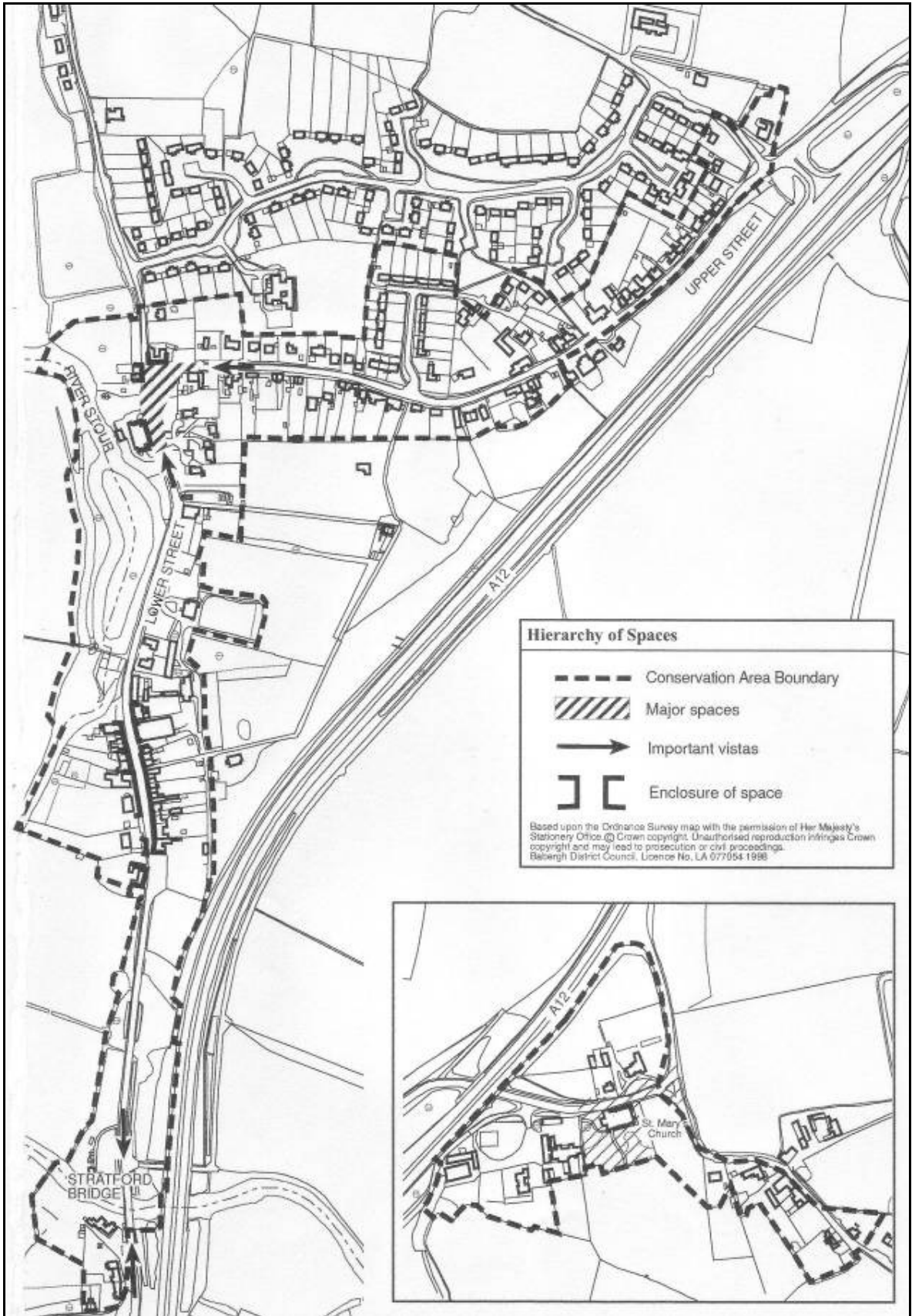


There are also a few buildings in the local 'Suffolk white' brick, probably from nearby Sudbury, which was very fashionable in the early 19th Century.

Other local materials in the village include one example of a thatched roof, one of corrugated iron for both walls and roof, and a fair scattering of clay pantile roofs, all of the unglazed type, including several with a treble roll design.

Traditional windows feature widely around the village, and where they occur on unlisted buildings, they must be considered under threat from the attentions of uPVC salesmen.

Footpaths in the village are generally blacktop with modern concrete kerbs.



Hierarchy of Spaces

The village arose near an important crossing point where the old coast road, between London and the furthest reaches of East Suffolk, negotiated the river Stour. Although the A12 now rumbles by a short distance to the east of most of the village, the now apparent lack of traffic does not take away the impression of the village having grown up essentially strung out along a road.

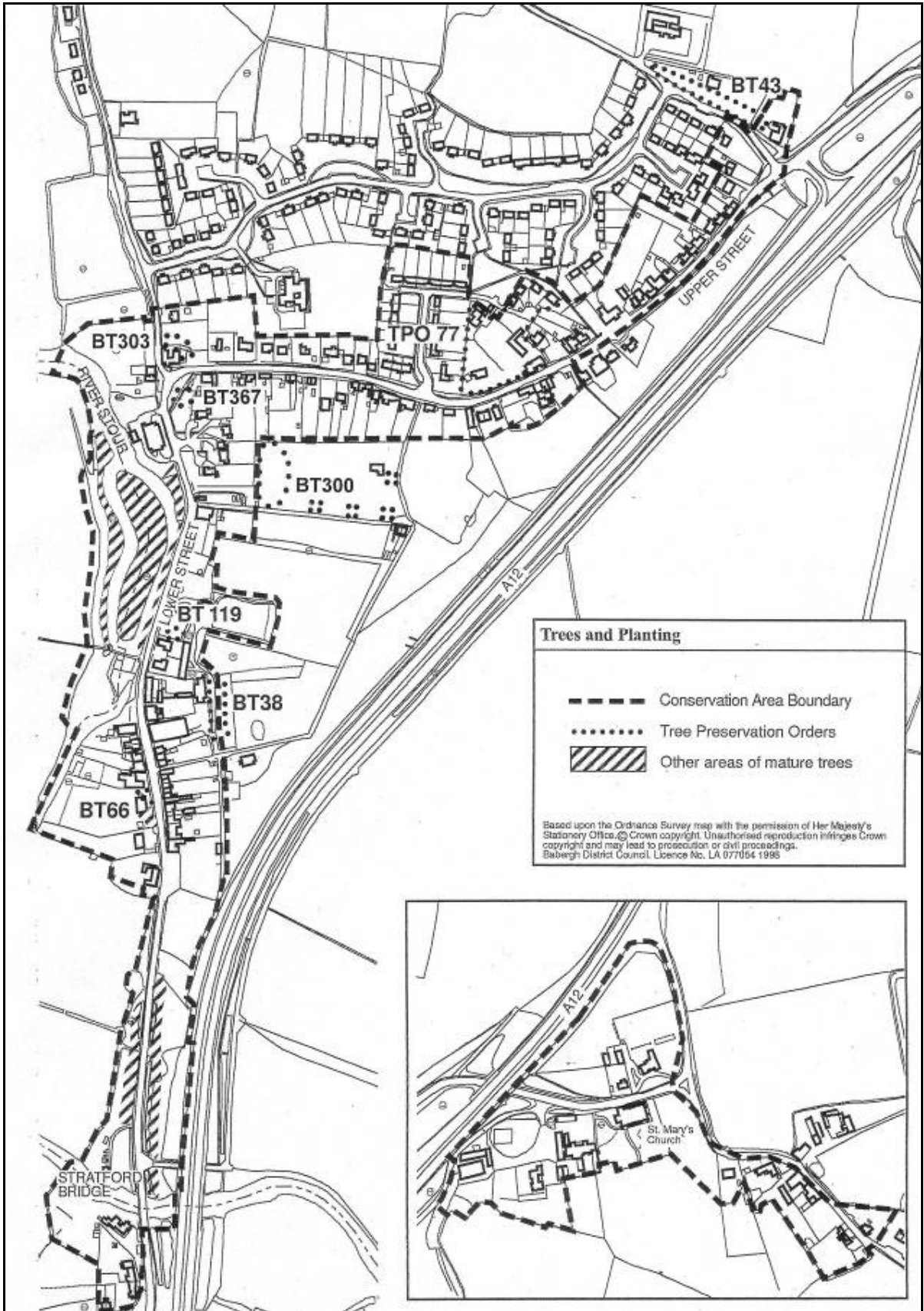
There are three main centres of attraction within the village. To the east, the other side of the A12, away from the main village and now approached via the underpass, lie the Church and a small cluster of mainly agricultural buildings. To the south around the river crossing lies another cluster of buildings, mainly on the Essex side of the border and including the Talbooth restaurant.



The main focus of the village, however, is centred around the bend where Lower Street literally turns into Upper Street, and The Row heads off to the north. Here stands the huge cathedral-like 1930s pumping station, a large Ash tree and a village sign on a patch of green.

The views of this junction from either branch of the Street are closed off by two well placed large grade II listed buildings, Gooseacre (formerly Corner House) to the west and the former King's Arms coaching inn to the north.

To the east of this focus, development is fairly mixed, old with new infill, some on the street some set back. To the south there is at first a more open area with trees on the riverbank, then a more urban enclosed street-like area.



Trees & Planting

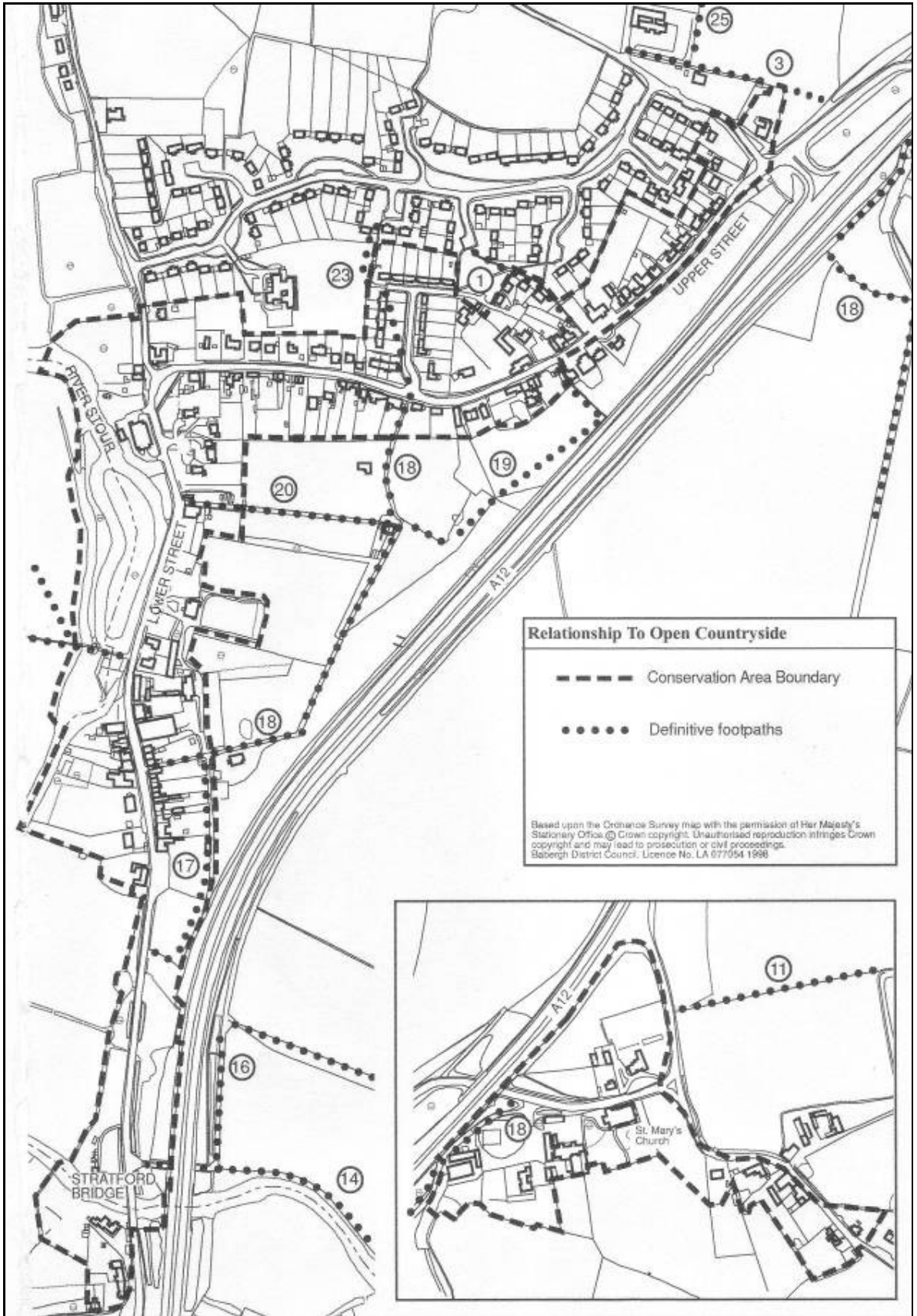
Stratford St Mary is relatively well provided with trees, a huge spreading Ash presiding over the 'green', now protected by a recent Tree Preservation Order, as are two nearby Ash behind the former King's Arms..

The wet areas adjoining the river, both near the bridge and around the old mill pool, have over the years reverted to tree cover, mainly through lack of management. Here can be found the usual wetland trees, Willow, Alder and Poplar, together with opportunist Sycamore, Ash and Oak.



Other trees in the village have also been felt sufficiently at risk in recent times to warrant protection by Tree Preservation Orders.

These are usually nearer houses and include two Copper Beech, a group of three Limes and three Horse Chestnuts, a strip with Oak and Holly near the school, the entire grounds of The Kennels with a mixture of trees and another mixed group in behind Matthews Close.



Relationship to Open Countryside

Stratford St Mary is situated in the heart of the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and yet in its wide valley setting one is still somewhat hemmed in by the A12 to the east and the river Stour to the west.

Within the triangular wedge between these two, footpath links abound both within the village itself and in the fields to the north.

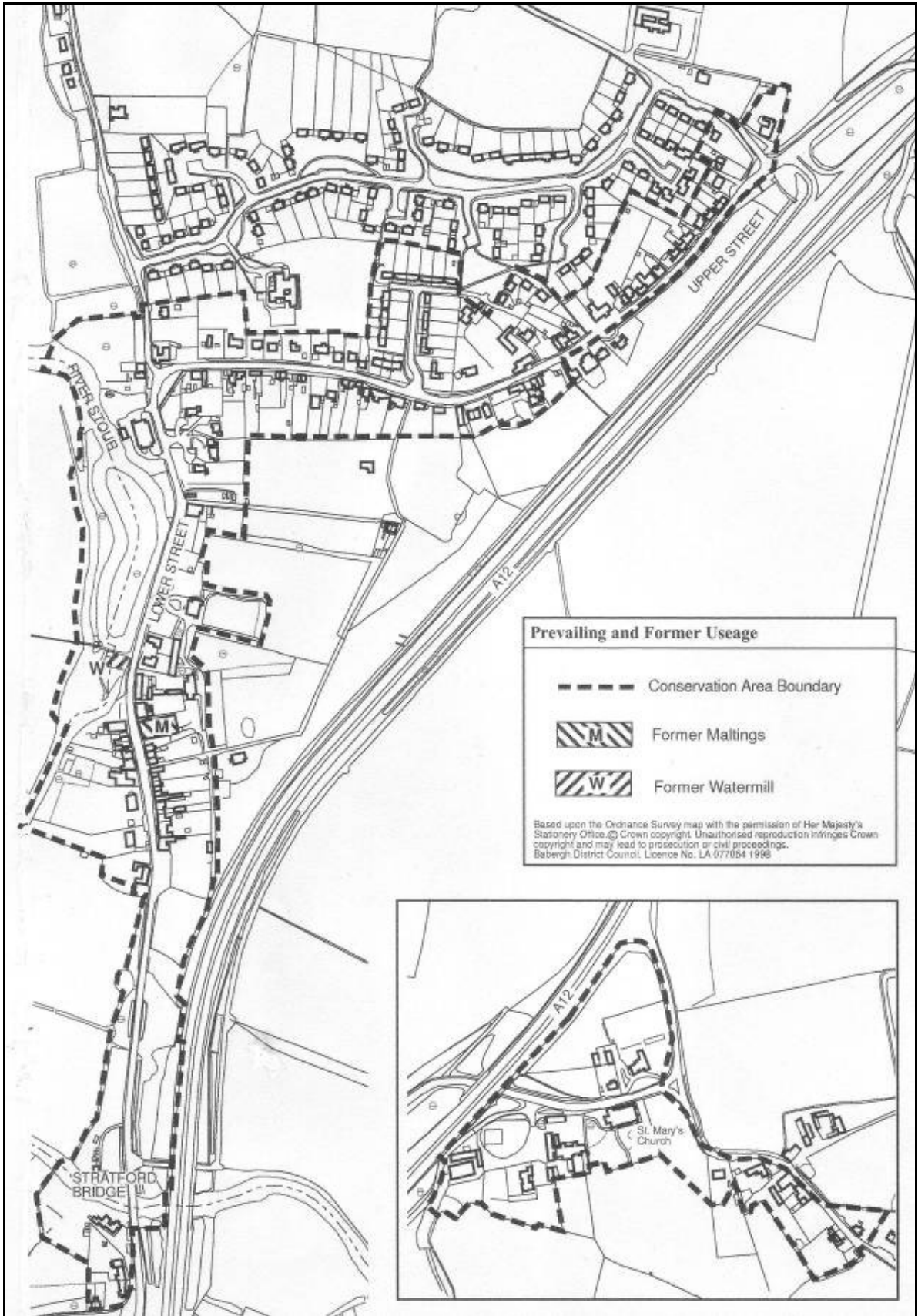


Links to the greater countryside east and west are however constrained by limited crossing points.

One footbridge near the former mill site crosses the river into Essex and branches into two footpaths.

The A12 is only breached to the east in two places: at the south end of the village near the bridge crossing the river, and in the far east where the underpass links through to the Church.





Prevailing & Former Usage

Whilst Stratford St Mary played some part in Suffolk's woollen cloth industry of the 15th to 17th Centuries, as testified to by the grand Perpendicular Church, the village was mainly an outlier to the more important local centre at East Bergholt.

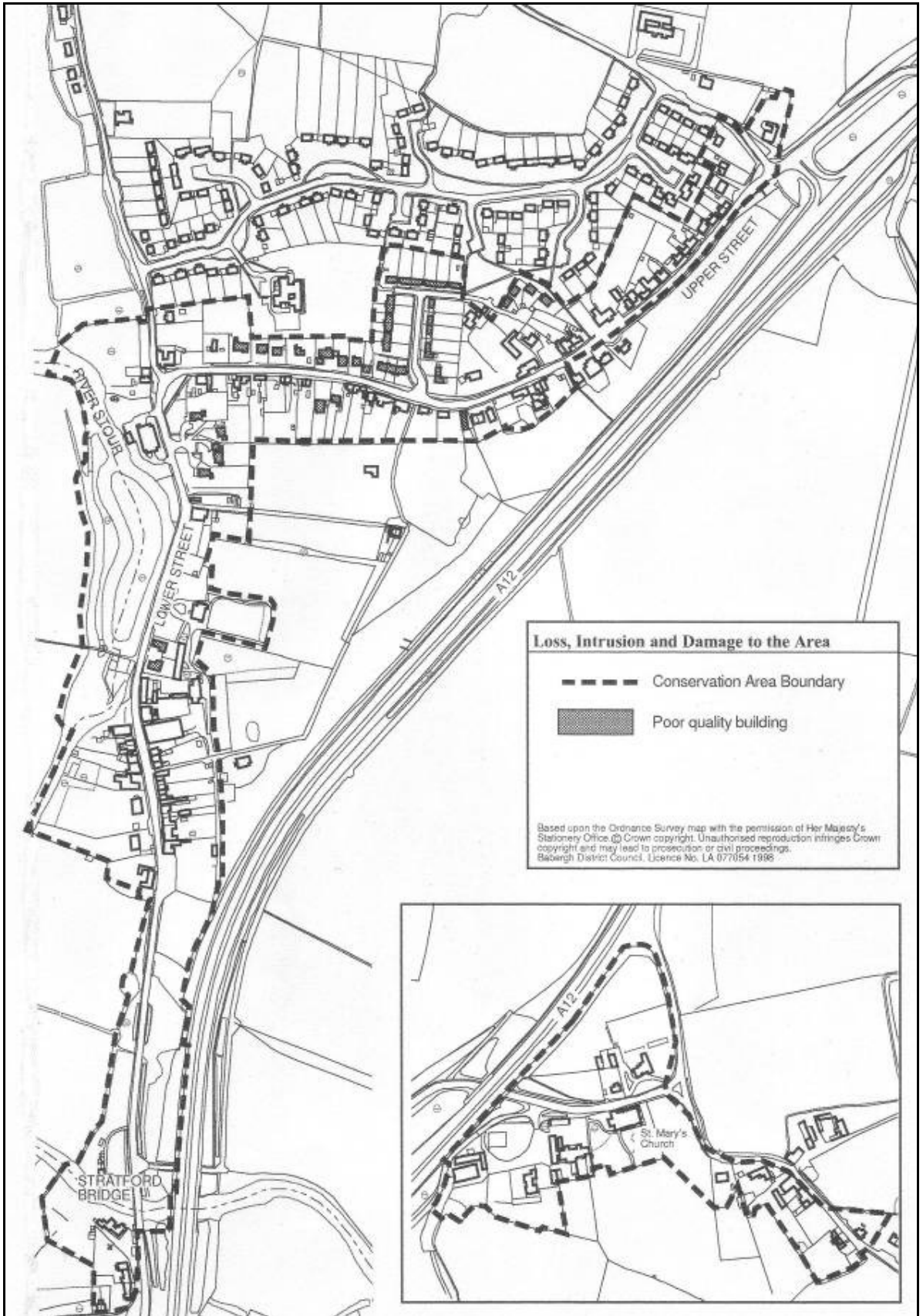
Nevertheless it still has its 'Weaver's House' and several other timber-framed properties from that period, such as Gatemans, another weaver's house, and the adjoining Priest's House.

Later prosperity seems more centred on the river. The disused lock on the Stour Navigation is being restored by the River Stour Trust's volunteers and the sound of rushing water can still be heard from the street.



Nearby, there remains one large white brick maltings building on Lower Street, but the mill has now gone, having been captured on canvas by Constable before ending its days as a macaroni mill. Across the road the early 19th Century mill owner's Valley House is still very dominant in its formal setting, behind a high garden wall.

Today the village serves more as a dormitory and commuter outpost, being near both Ipswich and Colchester, with their easy links to London.



Losses & Possible Gains

From the old lock southwards to the old mill, the river and trees are at their best and most accessible to the village, with the footpath heading off westwards. The few remaining walls of the old mill site could perhaps be built up and re-roofed in places, or subject to public agreement, be taken down lower and left as boundaries to a riverside picnic area.

Overall Stratford has suffered relatively little from intrusive infill, particularly when one considers the sheer length of the settlement spread out along the old main road. On Upper Street, the corrugated iron Parish Room, not unacceptable in itself, is however currently painted a rather intrusive light green.



There has been some inevitable modern infill through the years, fortunately much of this screened behind high walls that maintain the street frontage line.

Matthews Close, near the central Pumping Station, is one particular exception to this and could perhaps benefit from similar screening, rendering the adjoining village 'green' more a focus for the village centre and less suburban in character.

The A12 is ever present as background rumble (which could be reduced with a low noise surface), but overall the village must be environmentally better off, even sliced in two, than with the traffic running right through the centre.



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