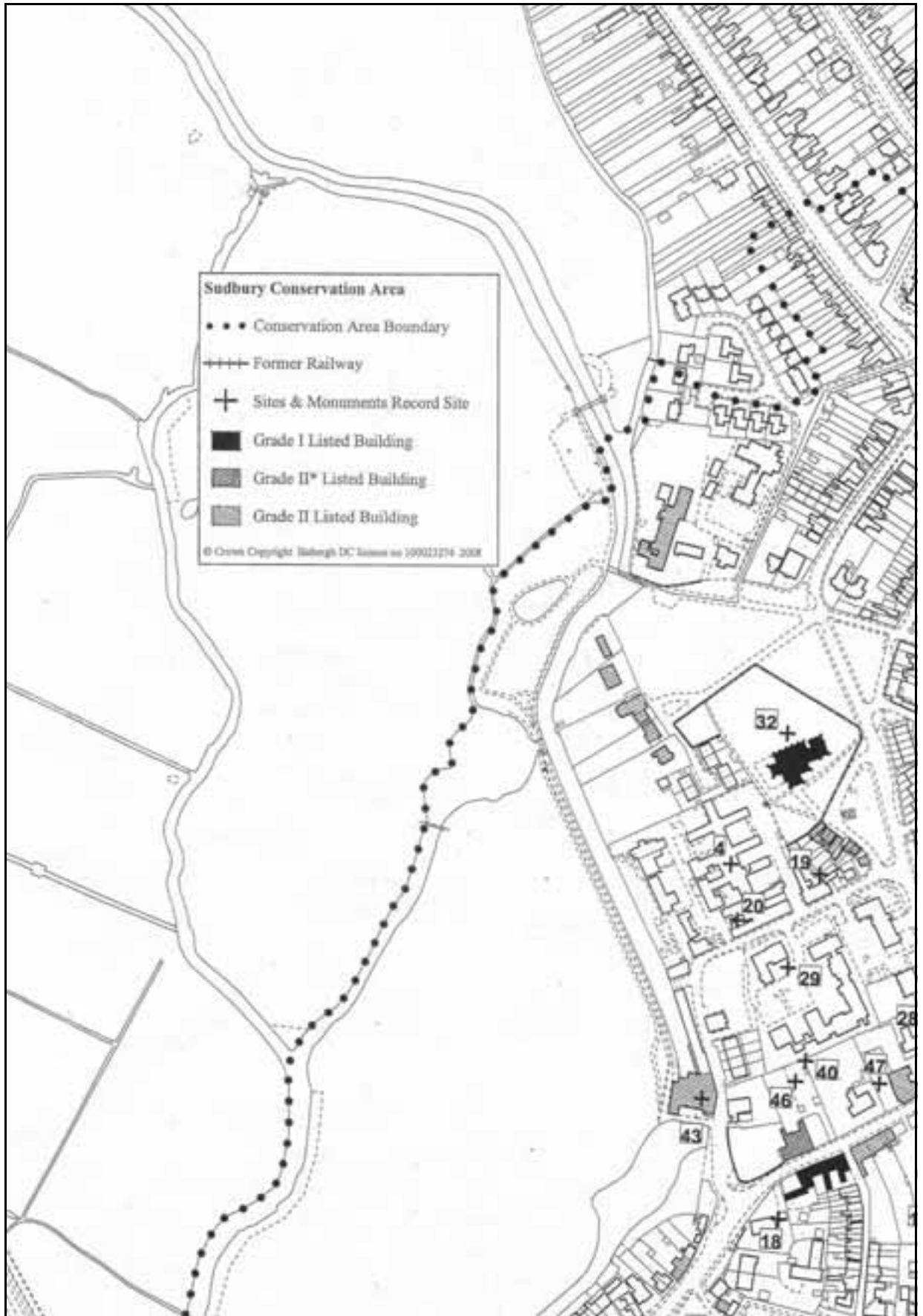




Sudbury

conservation area appraisal



Introduction

The conservation area in Sudbury was originally designated by West Suffolk County Council in 1973, and inherited by Babergh District Council at its inception in 1974. The boundary was revised by Babergh in both 1981 and 2003.

The Council has a duty to review its conservation area designations from time to time, and this appraisal examines Sudbury 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 Sudbury's built environment in conservation terms and is essentially an update on a document produced in 2002, when part of the town was the subject of a HERS grant scheme, promoting the reinstatement of many traditional details.

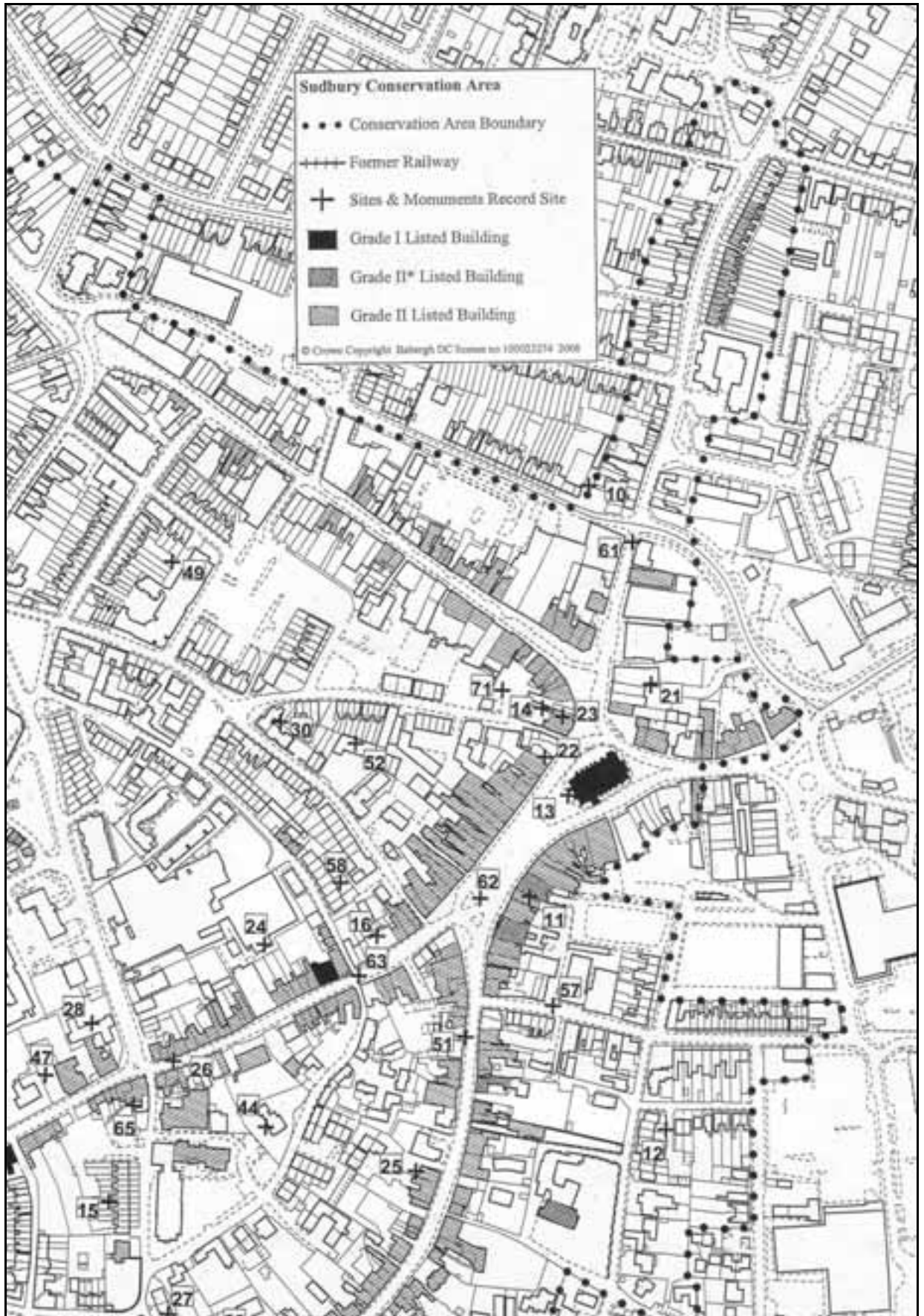


As a document it is neither prescriptive nor overly descriptive, but more a demonstration of 'quality of place', sufficient for the briefing of the Planning Officer when assessing proposed works in the area. The photographs and maps are thus intended to contribute as much as the text itself.

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 2008.





Topographical Framework

Sudbury is situated in south-west Suffolk adjoining the Essex border, mainly on the eastern bank of the River Stour where it makes a loop to the west. The river valley has cut through the overlying boulder clay of high Suffolk to reveal locally sands and gravels.

Immediately below the boulder clay and the sands and gravels of glacial origin lies the chalk to the north of Sudbury, whilst to the south there is an intervening layer of London clay here at the northern edge of its range.

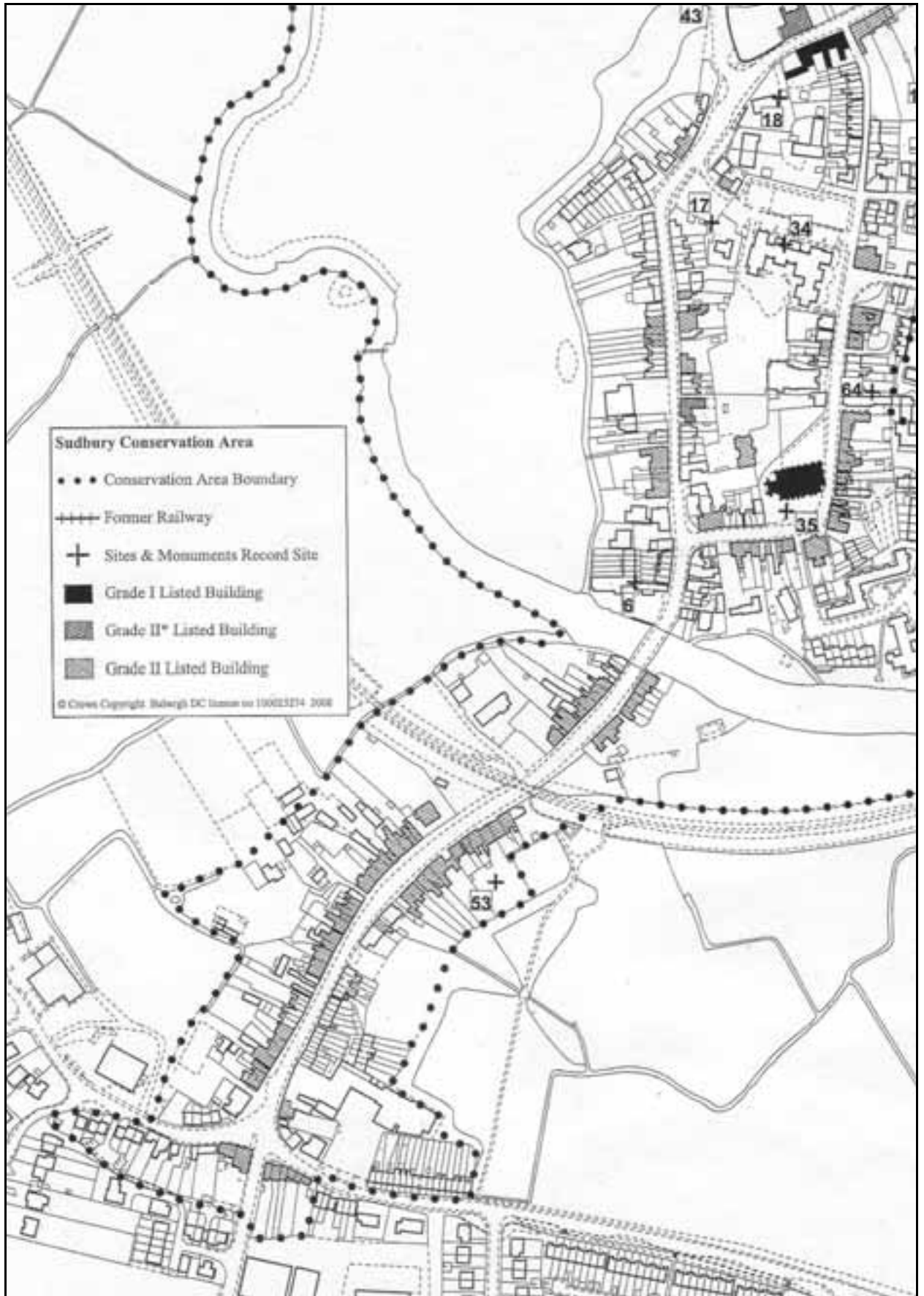
The town centre area sits on a platform of terraced valley gravels between 25 and 35 metres above Ordnance datum, whilst Ballingdon Street to the south-west actually spans the river valley on recent alluvial deposits.



The Town Centre plan has evolved around this one road coming in from the south-west whilst four other roads fan out between north-north-west and south-south-east from a point to the east of the centre.

The historic part of the town is very much sandwiched between these roads to the east and the loop of the river with its adjoining wet grazing marshes to the west and south.

The town centre today consists essentially of an elongated market square with shopping streets off to the north, east, west and south-west.



Archaeological Significance

The majority of Sudbury Town Centre is designated an area of archaeological interest in Babergh District Council's Local Plan and lies mainly within a medieval town boundary running in a semi-circle along Friars Street, Burkitts Lane and Croft Road, the river forming the western limit.

This 'old town' of probable Saxon origin was centred on St Gregory's Church and later augmented by two satellite areas to the south and east with their respective churches of All Saints and St Peter's.

The County Sites and Monuments record lists nearly 90 archaeological features in Sudbury, a third of which are excavated, mainly on development sites. The oldest find recorded is a Polished Axe of Neolithic date.

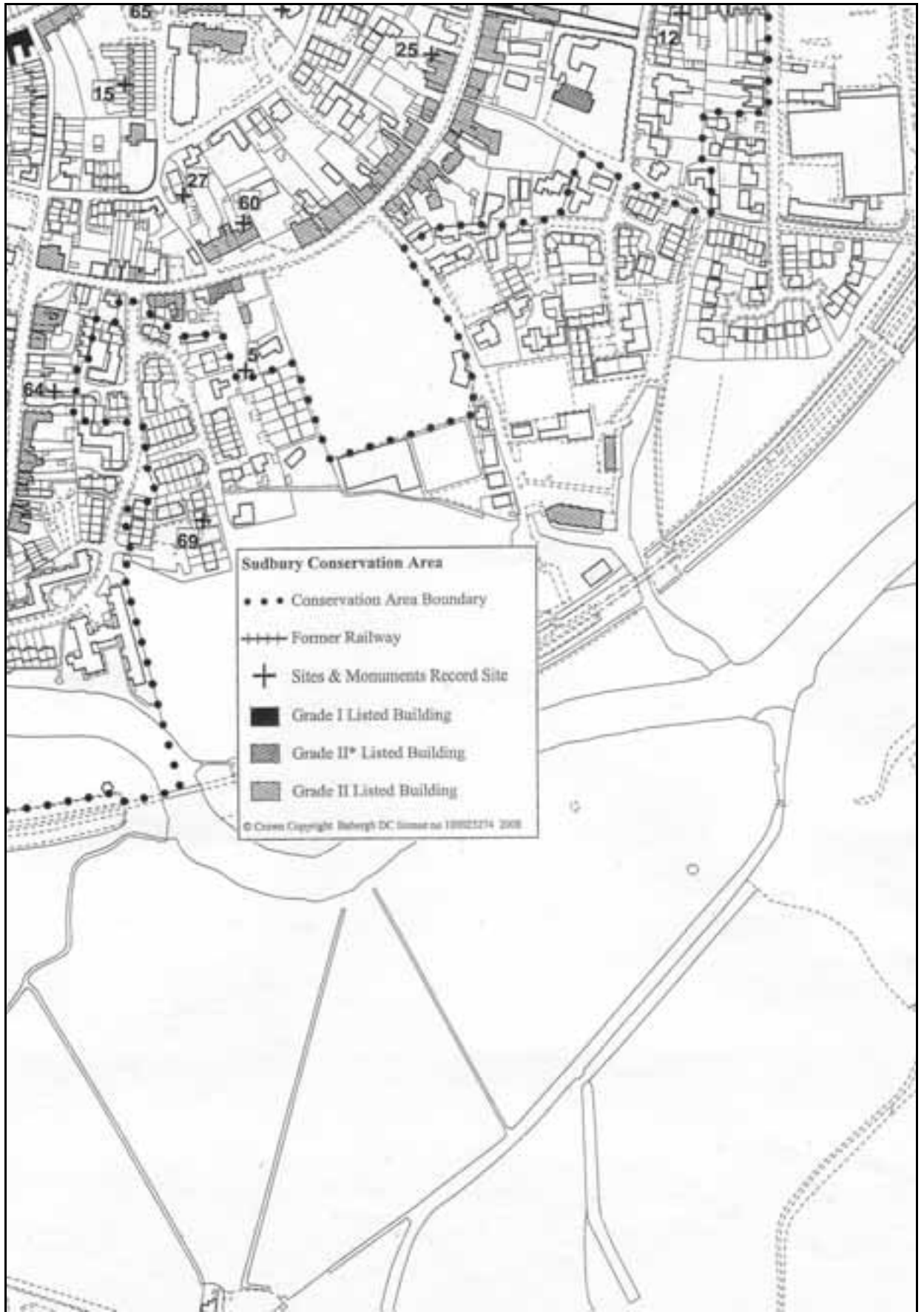


Later finds include Iron Age and Roman coins and Saxon brooches, pottery and early Town defences.

The town has two scheduled ancient monuments away to the north in the forms of St Bartholomew's Chapel and the Medieval moated site at Wood Hall.

Sudbury is listed in the Domesday survey of 1086 as a hall held by the King and St Gregory's Church with a mill, a market and approximately 70 residents, whilst the adjoining manor of Cornard now part of greater Sudbury, had a further church and mill. In the 11th Century Sudbury had its own mint and to this day continues as a thriving market town.





Intrinsic Quality of Buildings

Sudbury's buildings include a mix of many ages and styles. Although much of the town appears to be late Georgian and early Victorian, a significant number of earlier timber-framed buildings remain, often hidden behind brick facades.

The majority of buildings in Market Hill and Friars Street, together with many in other streets are listed grade II and II.*

Grade I status is reserved for the three 15th Century flint and stone churches plus the mainly 15th Century timber-framed Chantry and Salters Hall complex in Stour Street along with Gainsborough's House with its 18th Century red brick front hiding a 17th Century timber frame.



The predominant building form is therefore of Georgian nature in Suffolk white brick with low pitched slate roofs punctuated every now and then with the steep pitched plain tiled gables and rendered timber frames of the earlier Suffolk vernacular. A few 'hybrids' are sprinkled amongst these where the steep pitched plain tiled roof of a timber-framed building has been hidden behind a parapet of brick, often rendered, to comply with Georgian taste.

The numerous unlisted buildings, which nevertheless contribute to making Sudbury what it is, are generally of the later Victorian period, either in red or white brick with slate roofs. In recognition of their local importance, some 300, as identified in 'Sudbury, Suffolk: The Unlisted Heritage', have been included in a Local List.



Traditional Building Materials

The majority of buildings in central Sudbury are constructed of Suffolk White brick from the local factories at Ballingdon, sometimes with red brick string courses and detailing in the more recent examples.

Wholly red brick buildings are less common and some brick buildings are now rendered. The bulk of the remaining buildings are plastered timber frame usually with plaintiled roofs and in some instances with exposed timbers although this may well not have been their original condition.

Steep plaintiled roofs also occur on a number of apparently brick buildings often indicating a timber framed structure internally, whilst lower pitched slate roofs occur almost universally on white brick buildings.

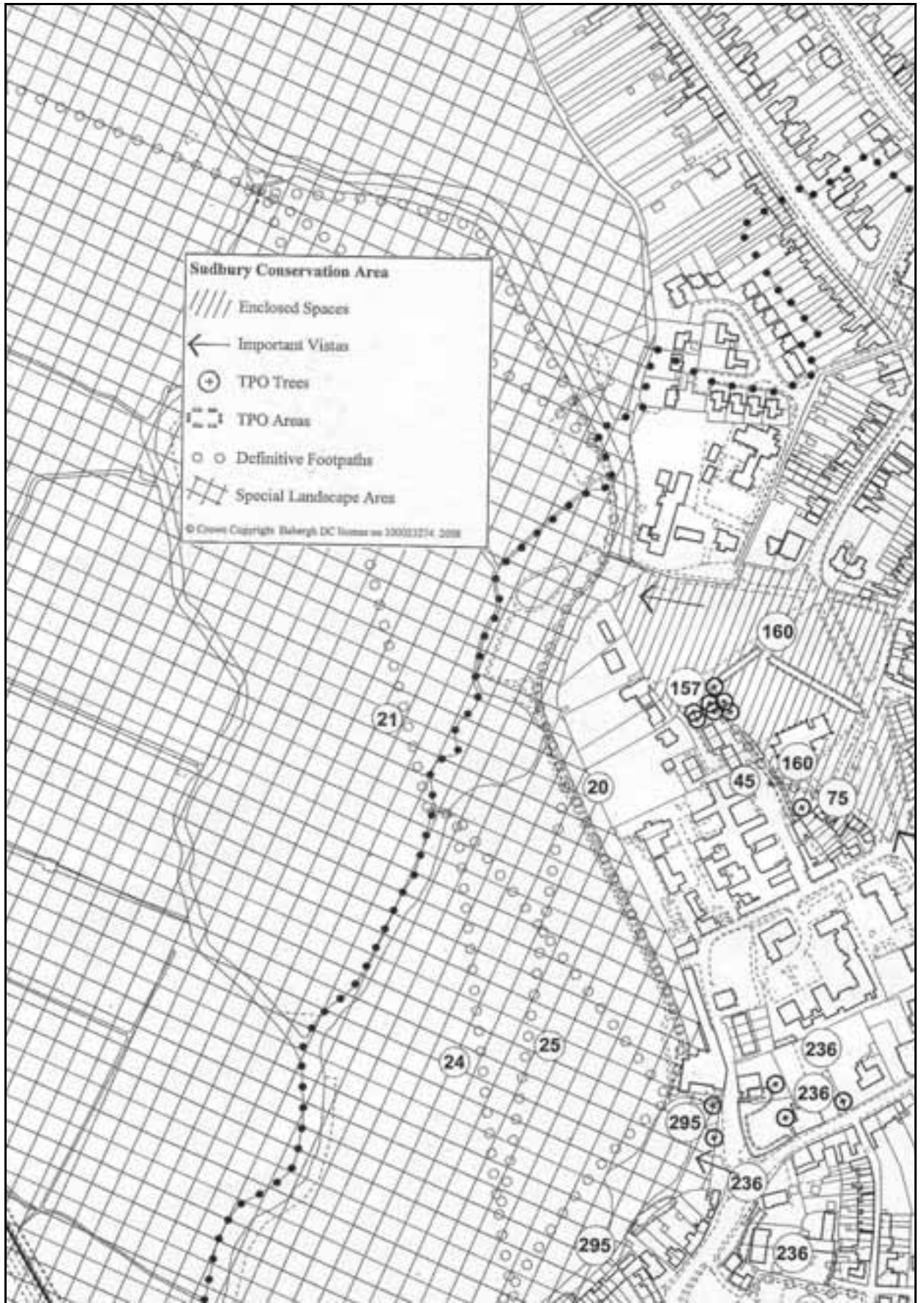


Of the brick buildings, one type is fairly common, of three storeys and generally in terraces of three or more with one window per floor and the first floor windows unusually wide and very un-Georgian in their proportions. These were weavers' houses serving the local silk industry in the 19th Century.

Sudbury's churches differ from the other buildings in the area, being constructed of flint with stone dressings with lead or copper clad roofs, although there are instances of stone detailing to some of the larger brick buildings in the town.

Sudbury has a number of modern buildings occurring more to the north and east of the main centre which unfortunately pay little heed to the historic materials and do not blend in.





Hierarchy of Spaces

The present focal point of the town centre is Market Hill and the adjoining church of St Peter, originally a chapel of ease.

The commercial town centre has effectively moved from its historic position around St Gregory's, eastwards into one of the satellite areas.

Whilst this commercial area still thrives in parts of Friars Street and Gainsborough Street and eastwards up Market Hill, it has also now ventured northwards along North Street, one of the original roads into Sudbury.

This means that much of the old centre and the southern satellite area, although much improved in the 18th and 19th centuries, have not been further disfigured by modern development.



They remain today much as they were complete with the surviving medieval street pattern with many small lanes and tight corners. This can be seen to good effect on Friars Street, where the Priory Lodge gateway aligns directly with a narrow lane opposite heading straight into the old town.

Across the river to the south-west the ribbon development along Ballingdon Street is of much the same pedigree and remains essentially domestic in nature. Originally the separate village of Ballingdon, this area maintains to this day a more rural quality than Sudbury, which absorbed it in the 1830s. Recent street enhancement works here have sought to maintain that difference, using a softer chipping finish, rather than the more urban York Stone paving adopted in the town centre.



Trees & Planting

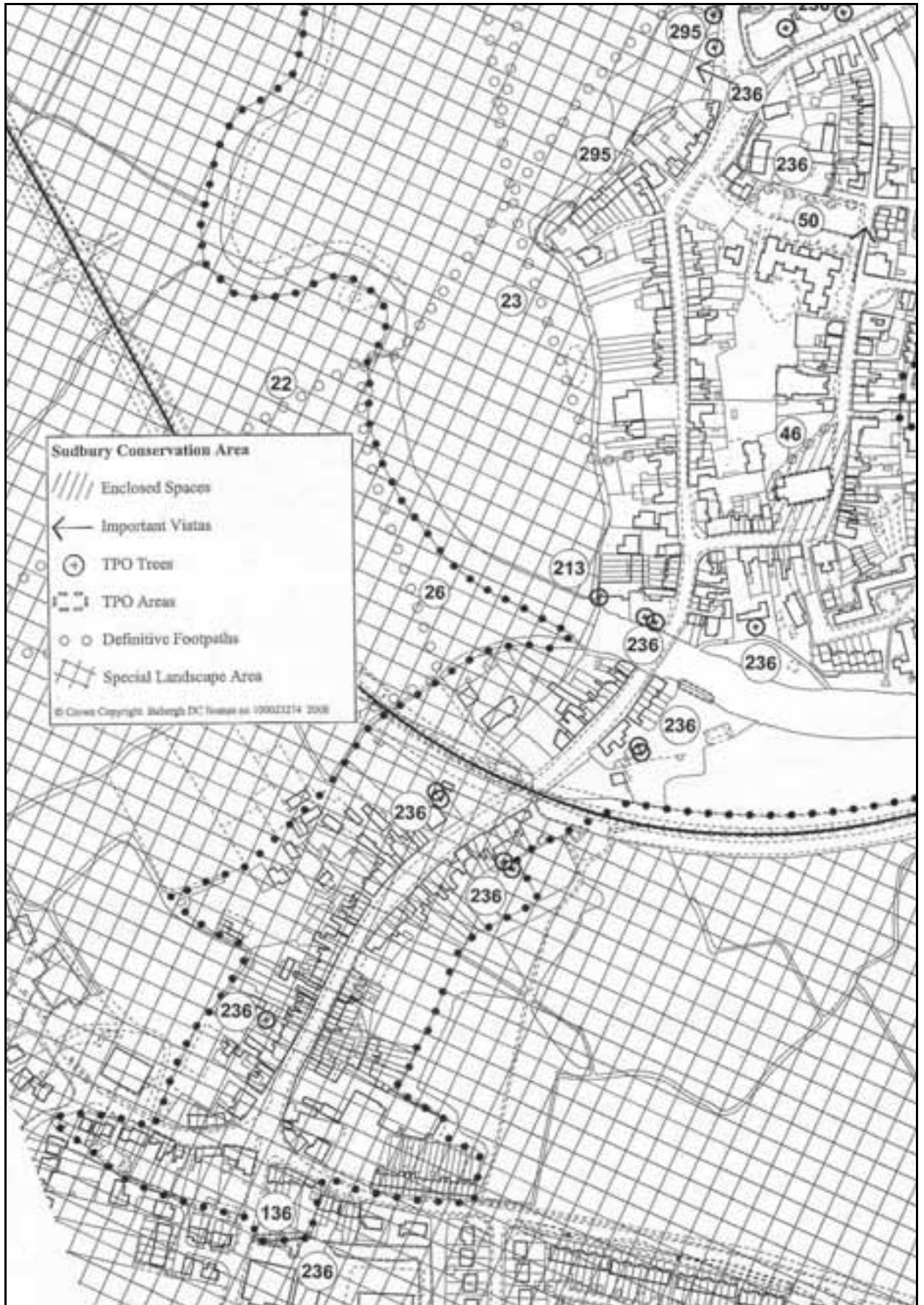
Other than on the sector occupied by Ballingdon Street, to the west and south, Sudbury is encircled by the extensive historic grazing marshes of the Stour valley which are easily accessed from the town and are overseen by Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Countryside Project.

Within the town itself, green space is at more of a premium. St. Peter's Church is very central and urban, its traffic island location only marginally softened by planting. The other two churches however, have larger enclosed green areas which form small oases a little distance from the centre.



All Saints has a small churchyard off Church Street with Horse Chestnut, Sycamore and Holm Oak trees. St. Gregory's has a churchyard containing Lime and Sycamore trees set in the midst of a larger green area with Oak trees called The Croft, which leads down to the river and the adjoining marshes.

Two other areas also deserve mention; the sports ground off Friars Street has a cricket pitch and a row of pollarded Lime trees along the frontage, whilst some way to the east of the main centre, and very much cut off from it by the traffic system, Belle Vue Park contains the more common trees here augmented by some fine Copper Beech, Bhutan Pine, Holm Oak, Cedar and Corsican Pine trees.



Relationship to Open Countryside

To the north and east Sudbury peters out through progressively younger developments and peripheral industrial estates in the usual market town manner.

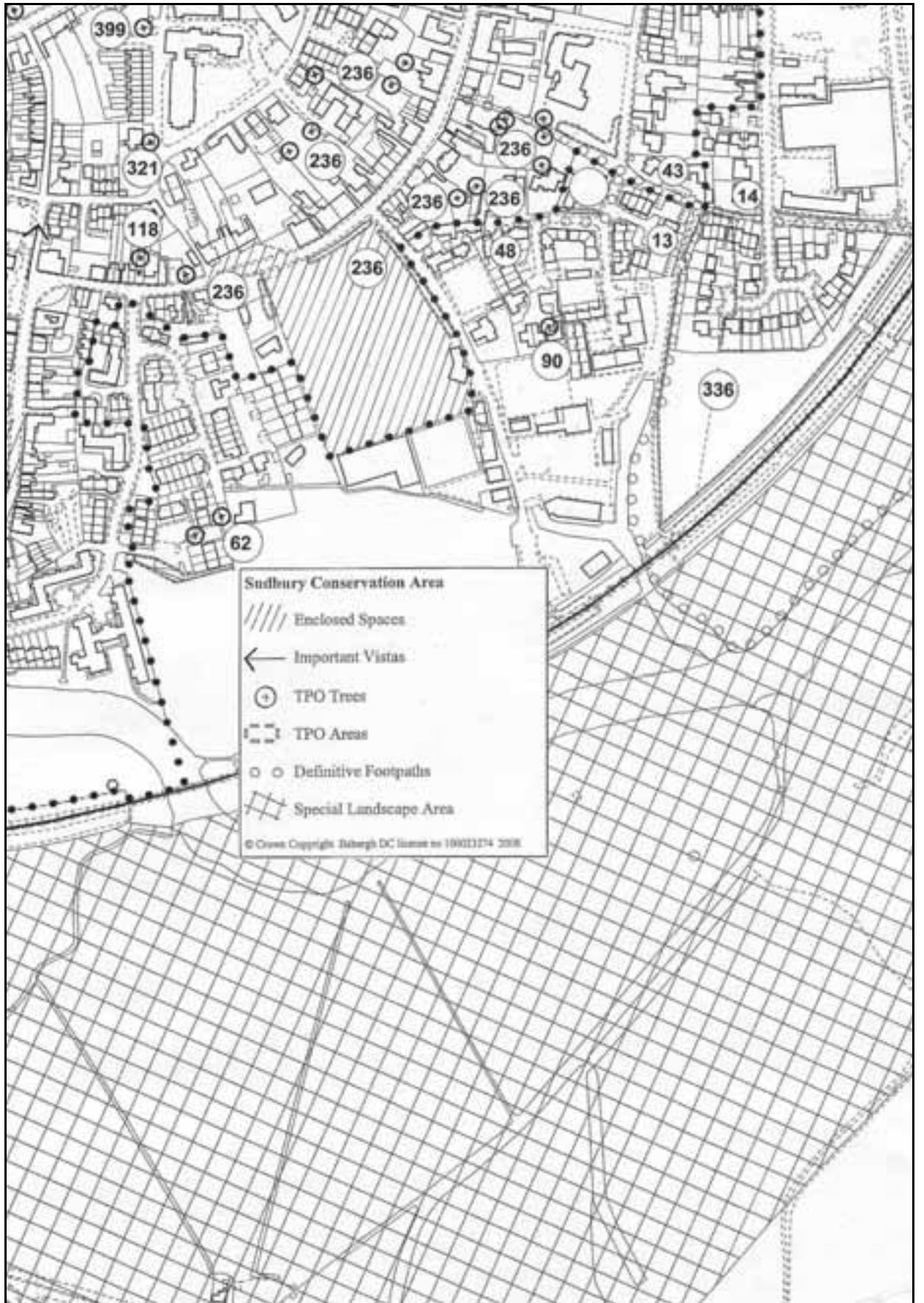
To the south-east the once separate village of Great Cornard has been absorbed, acting now as a large dormitory to the town, greatly expanded by overspill after the Second World War. The countryside on this side of town is consequently now that much further from the centre.

To the south-west at Ballingdon a small area of development has encroached upon the west bank of the Stour, which otherwise sweeps unhindered right around the town to the west and south with its large expanses of open grazing marsh.



These areas can be glimpsed from the new Ballingdon Bridge and are managed as the Sudbury Common Lands. They are easily accessible from the town and can be seen to good advantage by walking the disused railway line that also encircles the town to the south and west.

The far side of the valley is essentially open countryside coming within the area of the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project. It has effectively been saved from development as Sudbury expanded, by both the river and the Essex border.



Prevailing & Former Usage

Sudbury has been a market town since Saxon times, a function much boosted by the arising of the medieval South Suffolk woollen industry, which manufactured cloth from the locally produced wool.

The wool wealth of the 15th Century has left its mark on the town in the form of its fine timber-framed buildings and grand Perpendicular churches. The skills involved in this business continued to be used in the spinning and weaving that took place at various silk mills, originally a 19th. Century introduction to the town. Many three storey weavers' houses remain as a record of this industry.

Other local industries included malting and brewing using the local agricultural produce.



There was also brick making and lime burning, making use of both the underlying London clay and chalk.

Such was the draw of Sudbury and its trade that it boasts one of the earliest canal links to the sea in the Stour Navigation of 1706, at one time allowing barge traffic to and from the sea port at Mistley.

Other historic trade links include the turnpike trusts, whose routes had toll-houses at Rodbridge on the Bury road northwards and at Bulmer Tye on the route south-west into Essex. These were in turn superseded by a rail link to the Eastern Union Railway that remains in use to this day to the south, although the northern link to Lavenham, Bury St Edmunds and Cambridge is now disused.





Losses & Possible Gains

Sudbury town centre suffered in the sixties with a number of modern buildings being inserted with little heed to the local character and texture. This can be reversed in time, as such sites come up for redevelopment.

On North Street in particular are to be found a number of incongruous modern buildings, mostly spread thin amongst older properties. In addition, Sulby House, a large office block at the north end of the street, is fortunately distant enough from the centre not to intrude excessively on the townscape.

Other major intrusions on the street scene further from the centre, but in the historic area, comprise two large advertisement hoarding sites, one in Ballingdon Street and the other where Church Street joins Friars Street.



Minor intrusions and damage are more numerous and include some poorly executed crude shop fronts and areas where uPVC windows are on the increase on unlisted buildings e.g. Ballingdon Street, Church Street and probably worst of all Cross Street.

Many unlisted examples of the three-storey terraced weavers' houses have suffered from their multiple ownerships within the terrace. Here a variety of modern timber and uPVC windows of different designs have been inserted and various facades have been rendered, painted or poorly repaired without reference to the unity of a block.

As part of the enhancements, overhead wiring has been put out of sight underground in Ballingdon Street, but remains an eyesore in Church Street.

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Committee 15 January 2009*