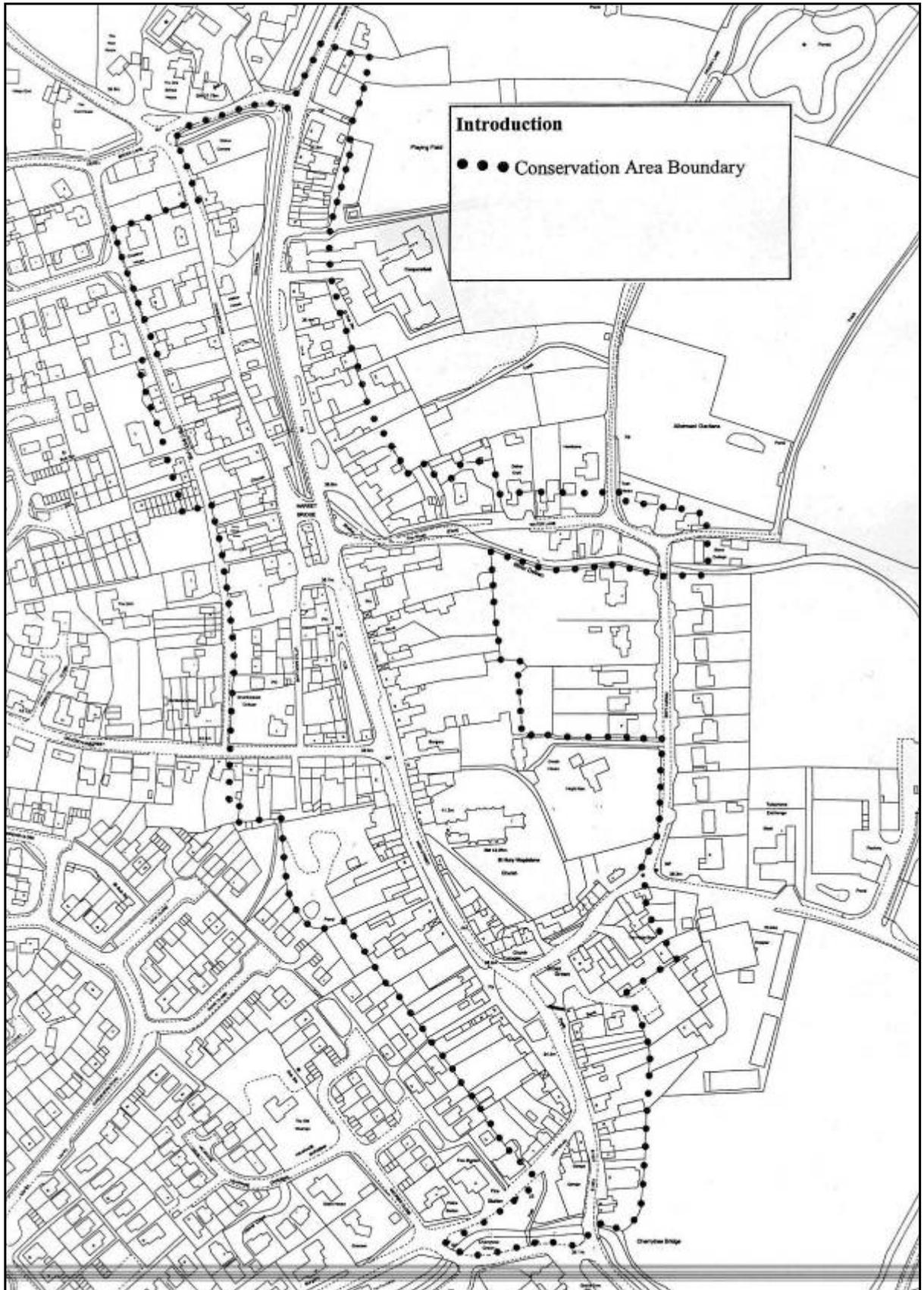


conservation area appraisal



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Introduction

The conservation area in Debenham was originally designated by East Suffolk County Council in 1970, 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 Debenham under a number of different headings as set out in English Heritage's new 'Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals' (2006).

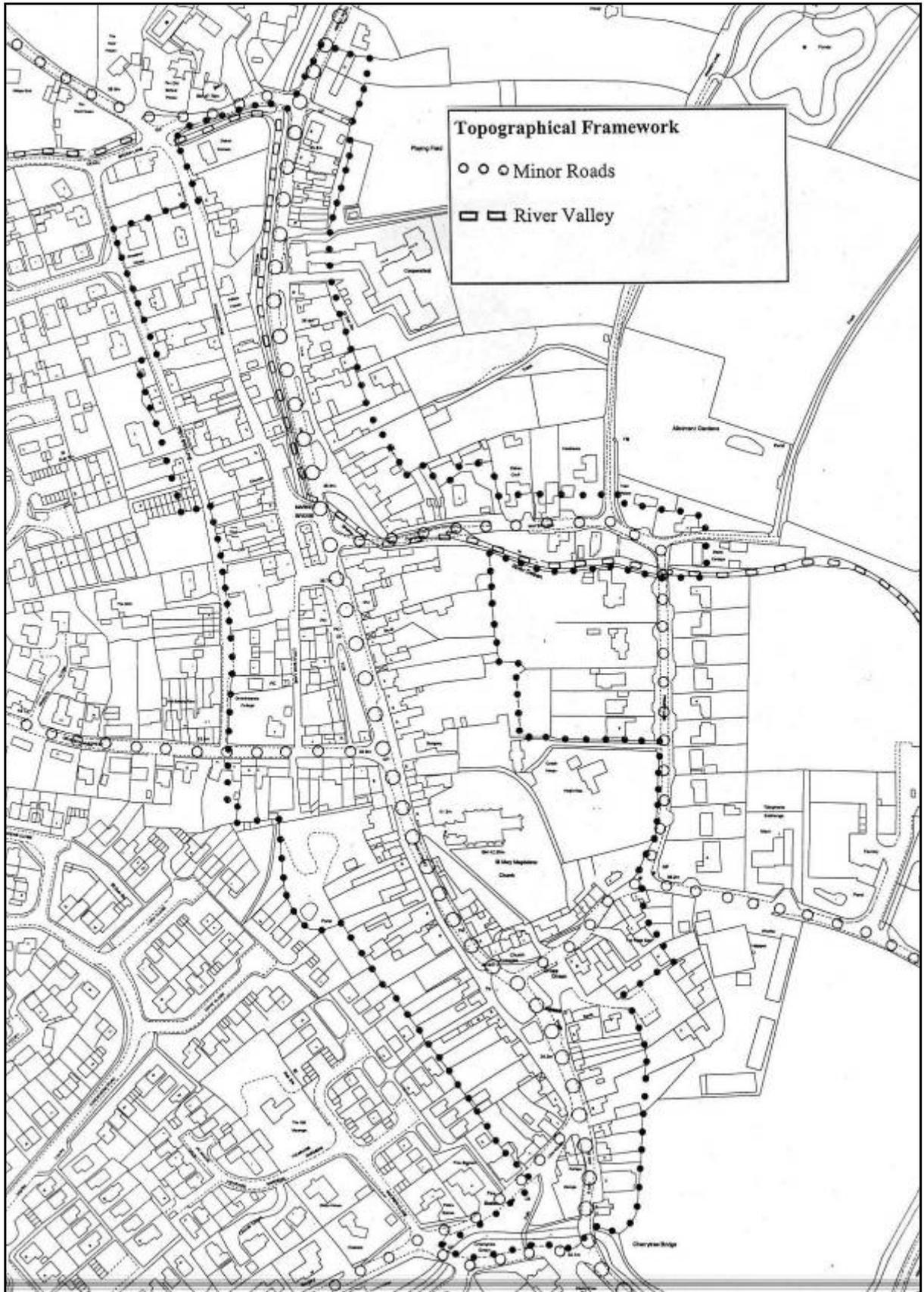
As such it is a straightforward appraisal of Debenham's built environment in conservation terms and is essentially an update on a draft document produced back in 2000.



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 2008.



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Topographical Framework

Debenham is a large village in the east of Suffolk, situated on the upper reaches of the river Deben.

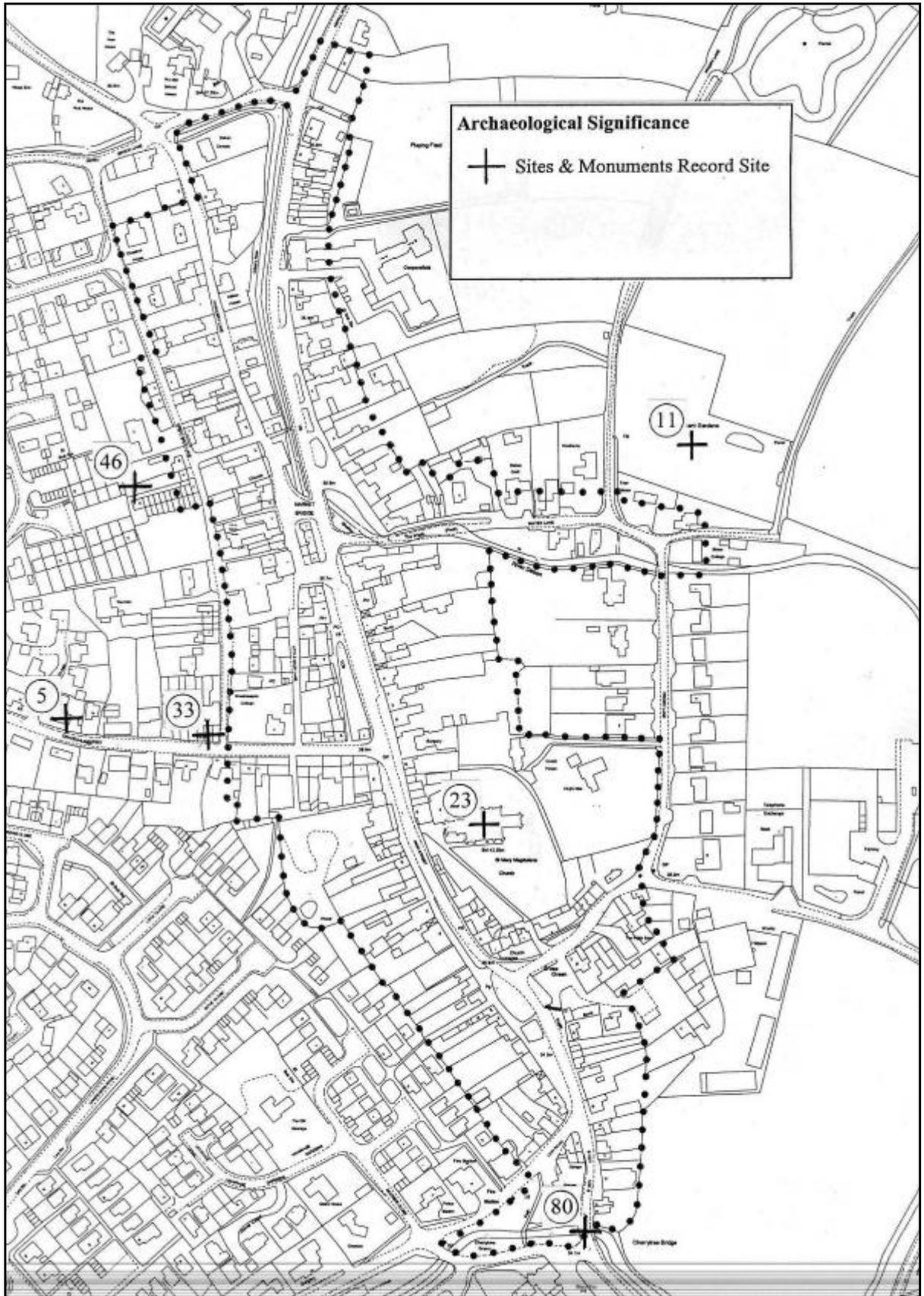
The underlying geology around the village is chalk, with the overlying clays and glacial gravels of 'High Suffolk' here cut through by the river valley.

The river flows from Debenham in a south-easterly direction 12 miles to the head of its estuary at Woodbridge, from where it ultimately reaches the North Sea just north of Felixstowe. In 1818 a scheme was proposed, but never implemented, to create a navigation up to Debenham and thus make cheaper the shipping of corn.



The village is essentially linear in plan, a settlement running from north to south along the road between Woodbridge and Eye that was turnpiked in 1802. The numerous lanes that converged on Debenham led to a great many side-gates on this road at first, a situation later rationalised with a toll-house just north of the village on the Aspell road.

In 1904 the Mid Suffolk Light Railway was opened, running from the main Ipswich to Norwich line at Haughley, across mid Suffolk as far as Laxfield. This had a station 2 miles north of the village at Aspell, and a goods only branch line that served Debenham. Remnants of this can still be seen just west of the Aspell road.



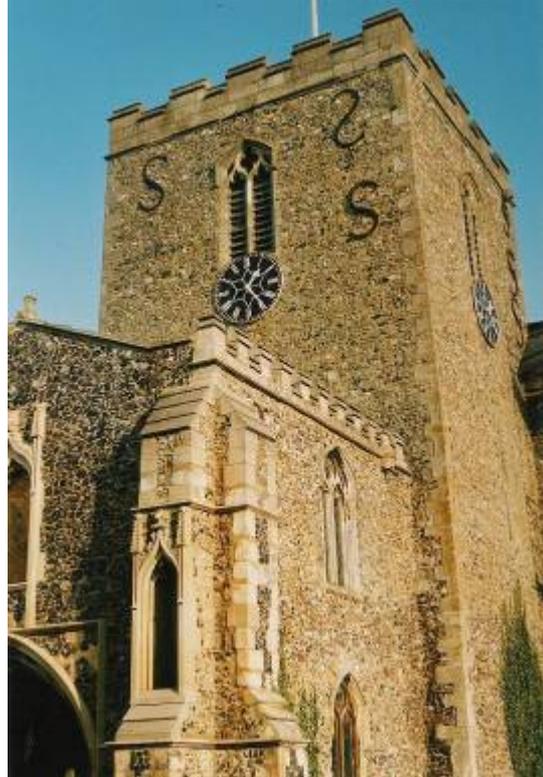
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Archaeological Significance

Although over one hundred sites are listed for Debenham in the Suffolk County Sites and Monuments Record, there is very little there to be seen on the ground.

The majority of these sites are scatter finds of Roman or Medieval pottery, along with a large number of 'burnt flint patches' dating from the Stone Age. The earliest finds include a Neolithic flint arrowhead, and there is an undated ring-ditch type cropmark recorded.

About two miles south of the village, the line of an important east-west Roman road still leaves an impression on the modern road layout.



Edric, a free man under the patronage of Malet's predecessor, held DEBENHAM; 1 carucate of land as 1 manor, in the Abbot's jurisdiction. Always 16 smallholders; 2 ploughs in lordship. Then 3 men's ploughs, now 1½ ploughs. Meadow, 4 acres; woodland, then 60 pigs, now 40. Always 1 colb. Then 4 cattle, now 6; then 40 pigs, now 20; then 30 sheep, now 45; then 40 goats, now 28. 30 acres in lordship which are in another Hundred. Value then 60s; now 50[s].

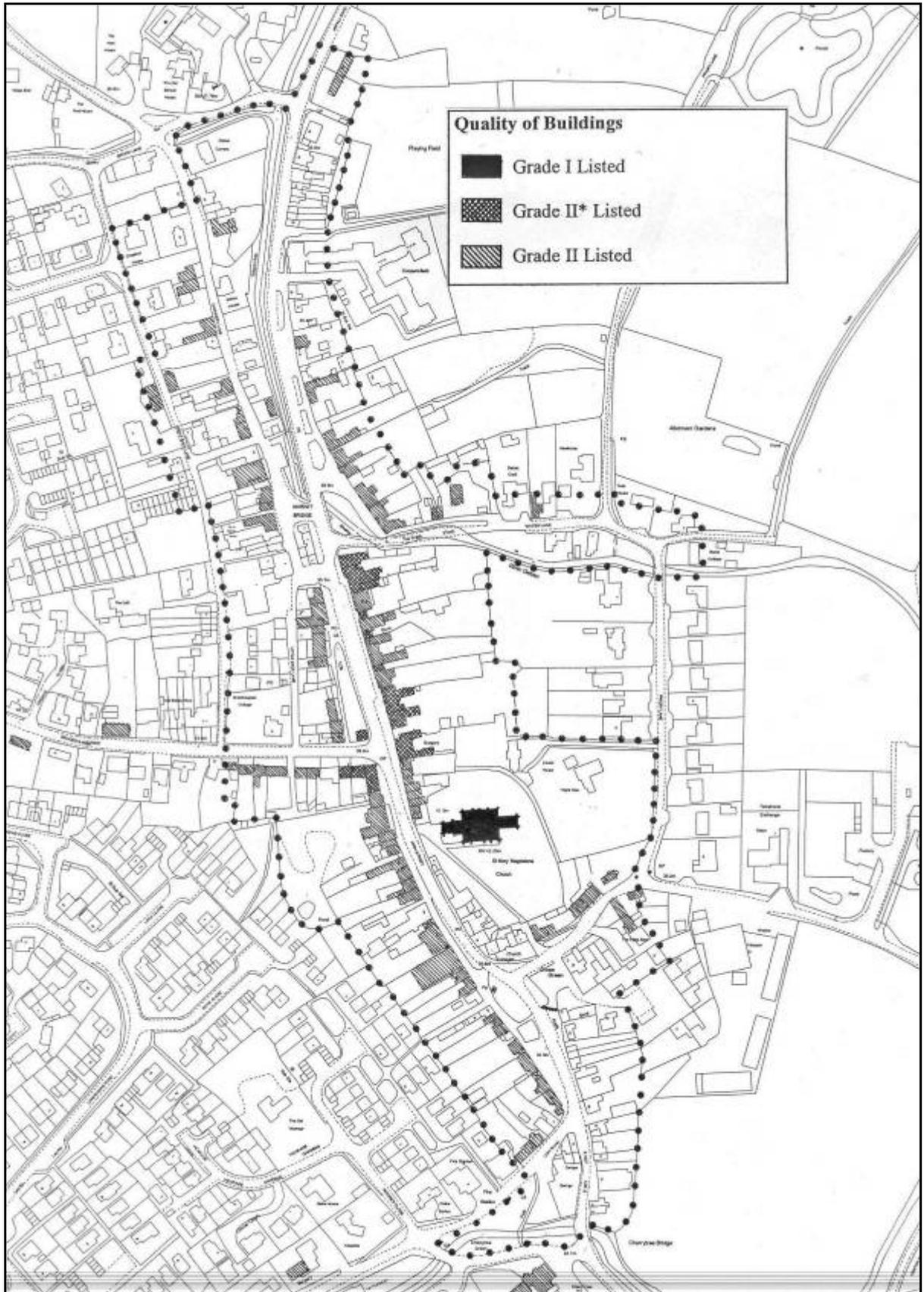
William Goulaire holds this. The jurisdiction (is) the Abbot's. In the same (Debenham) 6 free men under the patronage of the above-mentioned Edric; 36 acres. Then 2 ploughs, now 1½. Meadow, 1 acre. Value then 10s; now 6[s].

The jurisdiction (is) the Abbot's. William also holds (this). In the same (Debenham) 1 carucate of land which Robert's mother holds from Robert Malet; Brictrmer, a free man, held (it) as an outlier in (the lands of) Kenton before 1066. Always 1 villager; 9 smallholders; 2 ploughs in lordship. Then 3 men's ploughs, now 2. Meadow, 4 acres; woodland, then 100 pigs, now 40. This is in the assessment of Kenton. In the same (Debenham) 11 free men and a half; 60 acres less 1; [the men were] under the patronage of Brictrmer. Then 3 ploughs, now 2. Meadow, 2 acres. Value then 30s; now 20[s].

The jurisdiction (is) the Abbot's. In the same (Debenham) Saxi, Ramulf Peverel's predecessor, held 6 acres before 1066. Now Robert's mother [holds it]. William Malet, and his predecessor, was in possession of them after 1066. Value 12d. In the same (Debenham) 2 acres, [held] wholly in the same way. Value 4d. The jurisdiction (is) the Abbot's.

At least half a dozen Medieval moated sites are listed for the parish, many the location for its numerous collection of manors and sub-manors. One of these is called Blood Hall and is said to commemorate a battle with the Danes; in addition 'litle blood field' was named in the Tithe apportionment of 1838.

The grade I listed Church of St Mary has some late Saxon work in the lower part of its tower. It was mentioned in the Domesday survey of 1086, along with another church dedicated to St Andrew, which is thought to have been an outlier, possibly situated in one of the hamlets of Ulveston or Winston.



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Intrinsic Quality of Buildings

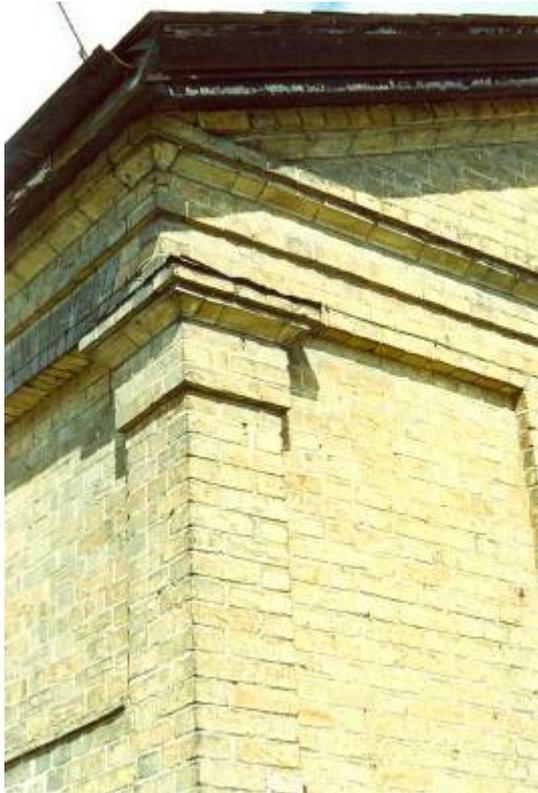
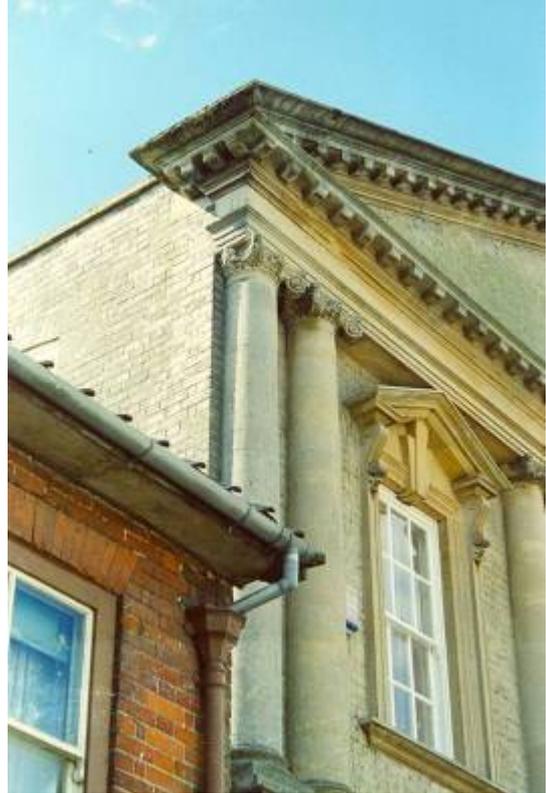
The grade I listed Church of St Mary is the jewel in Debenham's crown with a late 13th Century chancel and 14th Century tower. Pevsner says of it "The principal interest of the church is the W porch, tower, and galilee." This last is the narthex or chapel at the west end that includes the porch. Built mainly of flint with limestone dressings, the church has some bays of red brick to the south aisle which have recently been repaired.

Apart from the church, Debenham has a wealth of timber-framed buildings, seven of which are listed grade II. One of these is the outlying manor of Crow's Hall, with its 16th Century red and blue diaper pattern brickwork.*



The remaining six grade II buildings are in the village itself, a true testament to the quality of Debenham's buildings:*

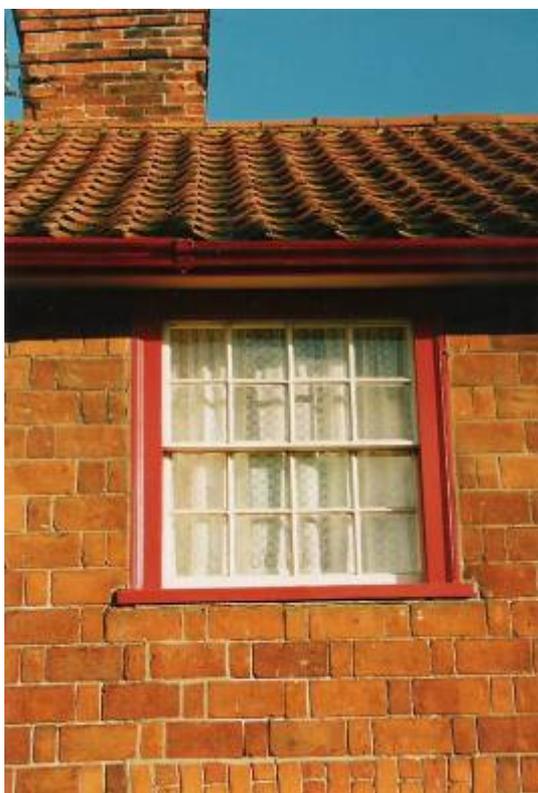
At the northern end we find nos. 1-3 High Street, originally an early 15th Century Wealden-type house, one of four in the village. It has a 16th Century two storey porch with brick nogging between the studs. Nearer the centre of the village there is a group comprising nos. 21 to 25 High Street, two houses and a shop, and the adjoining no. 27, an unimposing 18th Century front, behind which is hidden a 'very rare and possibly unique survival' of an inn-yard grandstand, part of the former Buck Inn.



Traditional Building Materials

The other three grade II buildings form another group where Gracechurch Street meets High Street, and represent well Debenham's timber-framed building tradition. No. 26 High Street has exposed timber-framing with brick nogging between the studs and adjoins 'Ancient House', nos. 1-3 Gracechurch Street, at the rear. This has the more usual Suffolk rendered timber frame and plaintile roof. Both these date from the mid 16th Century. Across the road at no. 2 Gracechurch Street is the former 17th Century Guildhall, again timber-framed and rendered, but with elaborately carved bressummers.*

Most of Debenham's other listed buildings, grade II are also rendered timber frames.



A few of these have exposed framing and many have more recent applications of roughcast render. Roofs on the timber-framed buildings are predominantly red clay pantiles, although several have clay plaintiles and there is a scattering of black glazed pantiles and slate and just two examples of thatch.

The other main material in the village is brick, mostly the local soft red variety and quite frequently in Rat Trap Bond. The brick buildings tend to be 18th and 19th Century cottages with red or black pantile roofs. There are also a few with slate roofs, also found on the buildings of white brick that became popular in the early 19th Century.



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Hierarchy of Spaces

The centre of Debenham is dominated by the church which sits on a spur of land that rises to the west of the village. The High Street ascends this rise from both north and south as one approaches the centre, whilst the river winds out around the spur in a loop to the east.

The actual central portion of High Street over the rise is well enclosed on both sides, the building line only broken where the church sits back in its generous churchyard on the eastern side.

The approaches to the rise are more varied, but consist in the main of gently widening vistas, filled with generous wedges of grass, which suddenly pinch wherever roads join High Street.



From the south this occurs once only, on the eastern side at Cross Green, whilst from the north it first widens to the east and pinches at Water Lane and then widens to the west and pinches again at Gracechurch Street.

Water Lane is precisely what it says, containing The Wash, essentially an elongated ford where the riverbed is the road and the footway is safely up on a grassy bank. Gracechurch Street rises gently to the west from its junction with High Street and coming off it to the north parallel with High Street are Little and Greater Back Lanes, two unusual remnants of medieval street pattern which were at one time centred around the market.



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Trees & Planting

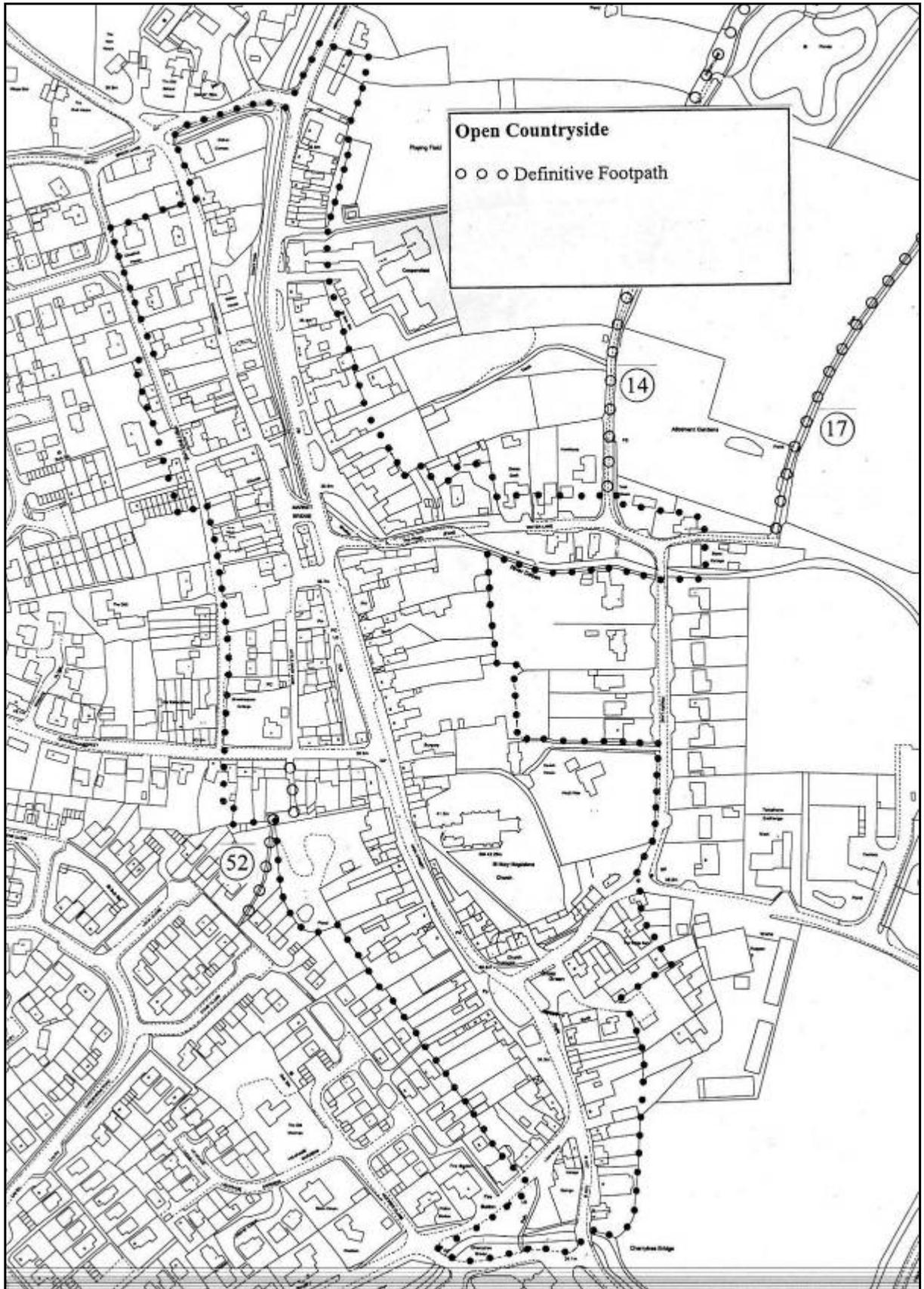
The many small grassed areas where the main street widens are an important part of Debenham's character, giving the effect of an elongated village green. Small trees within these areas add to the effect without either overpowering the built elements or shading out the lush green grass. These trees are for the most part Hawthorn or Cherry.

There are also some Lime trees in the street, both near Cross Green and outside 25 High Street, kept manageable as pollards. Formerly there were more Lime pollards in front of Cross Green House, which could perhaps be reinstated.



The churchyard is fairly open with a few trees, mostly conifers and Yew along its eastern boundary.

Trees felt at risk in the past and made the subjects of Tree Preservation Orders within the parish include a single Beech on Great Back Lane (TPO 99) and three groups of trees at the southern end of the village. TPO 127 covers a Walnut tree behind the Cherry Tree Inn, but not the Oak, Ash and Willows growing along the nearby stream, whilst TPOs 55 and 148 cover a number of mature Oaks, Limes and Yews around the old vicarage, remnants of a larger area within which several trees have been felled by the church authorities.



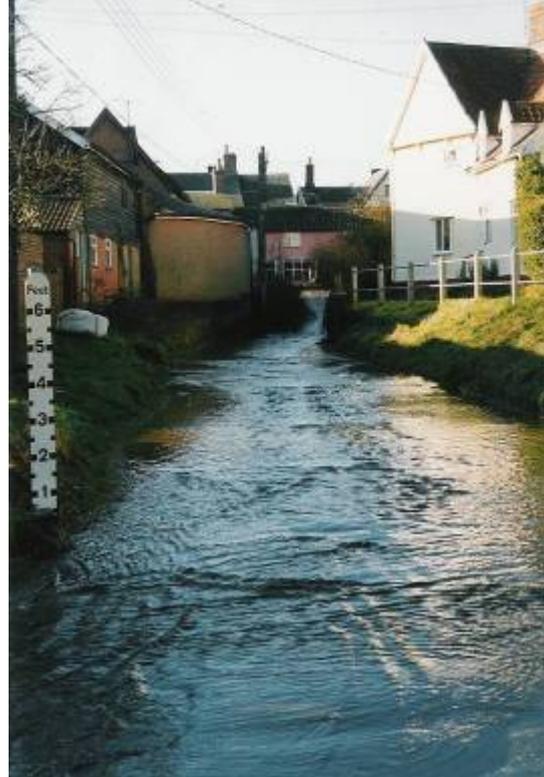
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Relationship to Open Countryside

Debenham's elongated medieval core and containment by the river to the north-east have caused the majority of its newer development to take place on the higher ground to the south-west.

From both these areas of housing estate and from within the village itself, access to the countryside is only available by road.

However, with the river putting in an appearance at either end of the village and the raised section of High Street giving good views out across the surroundings, the countryside does not seem so far removed.



Along the roads and lanes, not too far from the centre there are footpaths out into this surrounding countryside.

To the north-west off the upper part of Gracechurch Street, FP 46 leads on to FPs 44 and 45. To the north-east FP 14 runs along Priory Lane parallel to FP 17 off Water lane, both heading off north-eastwards towards Blood Hall.

These link to a network of other paths to the east of the village also accessible via FP 33 to the south-east.

To the south-west FP 47 links the two roads out of village in that direction, around the back of the housing estates.

Prevailing & Former Usage

Unlike many of Suffolk's late medieval settlements, Debenham does not appear to have its wealth based on the woollen cloth industry. The village had been granted its market in 1221, and agriculturally based trade and industry have been its mainstay ever since.

There are early records of hemp weaving, spinning and worsted production, an industry more associated with the north-eastern part of Suffolk around the Waveney valley.

Its importance as a general trading centre is shown by late 17th Century records of the presence of such diverse trades as tailors, blacksmiths, butchers, wheelwright, draper, glover, saddler and apothecary.



A serious fire took hold of the north end of the village in 1744, eliminating forty houses, so that most of what we see there today is 18th Century rebuilding. Both the turnpike road and the proposed canal are evidence of the village's trading status continuing into the 19th Century.

At this time Debenham boasted two brick works and several maltings. The parish also contained at least three windmills. Page's Mill on the Kenton road and another to the north-west were both post mills, demolished in 1917 and 1890 respectively. A third post mill on the road beyond Gracechurch Street was replaced by a brick tower mill in 1839, the two storey stump of which remains to this day used as a store.



Losses & Possible Gains

Apart from the major fire of 1744, Debenham has suffered remarkably little loss of its historic fabric over the years.

The former garage premises housed in an old school building at the southern approach to the village are perhaps a little untidy and industrial in appearance, but the buildings do provide good massing and enclosure to the street before it opens out around the corner into Cross Green.

Opposite here the premises of Debenham Antiques present a classical style frontage marred by an asbestos roof, whilst one of the nearby brick cottages has suffered some over-zealous weather-struck cement pointing.



In the central part of the village, over the hump, there is scope to improve the paving finishes with an aggregate finish to the footpath in front of a cobble, brick or York stone strip against the buildings.

The guard rails to the raised pavement outside the former Forester's Hall have already been improved, a number of other items of street furniture could be enhanced and the overhead telecom wiring could be put underground.

At the northern end of the village parts of Little Back Lane let down the otherwise high standard of Debenham's streetscape. Abbott's supermarket buildings are poor adaptations and extensions of an otherwise pleasant building, whilst the adjoining parking area exposes to full view the rear of two new houses in Great Back Lane.

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*This Appraisal adopted as
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Environment Policy Panel
17 November 2009*