Church Street, Higham

Rural Conservation Area Appraisal

Supplementary Planning Document

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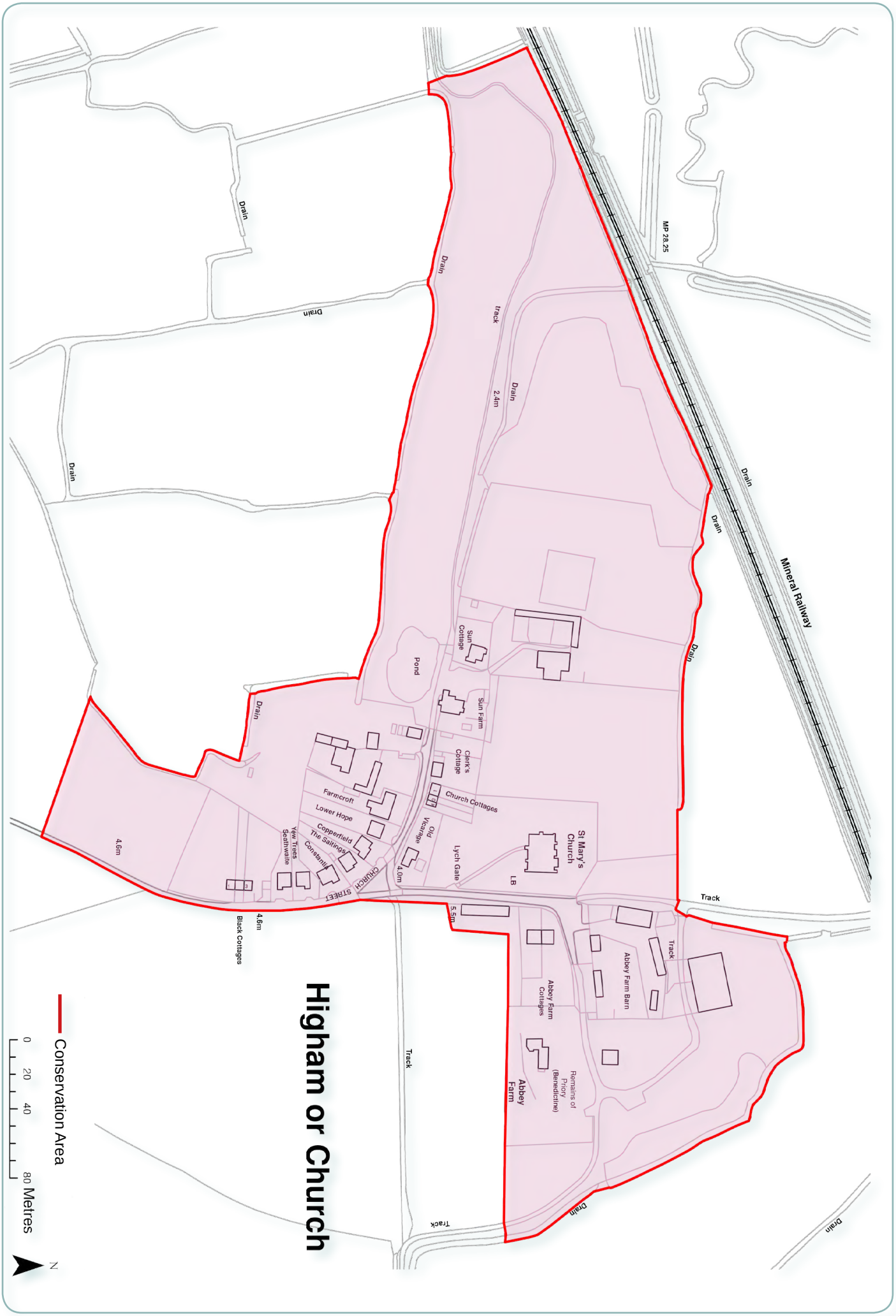
Gravesham Borough Council

Church Street, Higham Conservation Area Boundary



CHURCH STREET, HIGHAM - RURAL CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL SPD 2017

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1 STATEMENT OF SPECIAL INTEREST OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

Located at the road's end, Church Street, Higham, to the east of Gravesend, is sited at the limit of raised land at the edge of the reclaimed marshes that fringe the Thames estuary in this part of Kent. It is an old established and today very small settlement with its known roots in Saxon times. Its later development centred around medieval Higham Priory, now largely disappeared but with a few remnants still visible above ground. It clusters to east, south and west of its church whose north flank faces the marshes. The church is its dominating building with a spire and roofs visible from the surrounding countryside. The conservation area is of particular significance for its collection of historic buildings, its local character and its archaeological interest and potential.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Church Street, Higham, Conservation Area

Church Street, Higham, Conservation Area was designated on the 5th April 1979. A conservation area statement, including proposals to extend the conservation area boundary, was approved by stakeholders on the 14th of October 1999 and was subsequently adopted by the Council.

The conservation area's boundary contains the historic street of Church Street.

2.2 The purpose of the appraisal

This appraisal supersedes the conservation area statement referred to above. It identifies and defines the special architectural and historic interest for which Church Street Conservation Area merits designation. It also identifies the positive features that should be protected and highlights the negative factors that detract from its character and appearance. It will be used by the Borough Council in considering relevant applications for planning permission, including proposals for demolition or alteration of buildings, as well as for new developments. It will also help property owners and developers to take account of the importance of buildings, features, spaces and landscape within and adjacent to the conservation area.

The appraisal is to be included as a background paper in the Local Plan and, as such, will be a due consideration in the planning process. The appraisal was adopted as a separate Supplementary Planning Document within the Local Plan on the 21 February 2017.

Preparation of the appraisal involved an extensive survey of the conservation area. However, the omission of any particular feature does not imply that it is of no significance.

The historic Environment Record (HER) for Gravesham is managed by Kent County Council and can provide information for a wide variety of buildings and sites, from finds of prehistoric flint tools to medieval castles and Second World War pillboxes. For further information visit: www.kent.gov.uk/HER

2.3 Planning policy context

Conservation Areas are defined as 'areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance' in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act). Local planning authorities are required by the Act to identify the parts of their area that should be designated as conservation areas and to formulate and publish proposals to preserve or enhance them. Local authorities must submit proposals for the protection and enhancement of conservation areas for consideration at a public meeting within the relevant area. They must also have regard to any views expressed by people attending the meeting.

Broadly the effects of designation are:

- Conservation Area Consent must be obtained from the local planning authority or Secretary of State prior to the substantial or total demolition or any building or structure within a conservation area, with some exceptions
- The local planning authority must consider the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the conservation area when assessing relevant applications

- Permitted development rights are slightly different in conservation areas

- Permission is required from the planning authority to fell or prune a tree over a certain size

As well as receiving statutory protection, conservation areas are afforded a degree of protection under the planning system whereby it is expected that proposed development will preserve and enhance heritage assets and their setting as an irreplaceable resource. The exception to this would be where any substantial harm or loss of heritage interest is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss.

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise.

In the case of Gravesham, the development plan effectively comprises the adopted Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014) and remaining 'saved' policies from the Gravesham Local Plan First Review (1994). In certain instances, the Kent Minerals Plan and Waste Plan will also be of relevance and a material planning consideration. Plans in preparation are also capable of being a material planning consideration with the weight accorded them depending on the stage reached, whether there are unresolved objections and the consistency of the emerging plan with national policy.

Amongst a range of other things, policies set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2012) and Planning Practice Guidance (2014) issued by the Government are also material planning considerations in the determination of planning applications. Of particular importance in this respect are paragraphs 126 – 141 of the NPPF which set out the approach toward conserving and enhancing the historic environment, with the weight to be accorded the conservation of designated heritage assets and their settings dependent on the significance of the asset, the degree of harm likely to occur as a result of development, and whether such harm is outweighed by any public benefits that would arise.

The importance of retaining the built as well as natural heritage of Gravesham is well recognised because of the contribution this can make through reinforcing local distinctiveness and the creation of sense of place. This document identifies both the special character of Church Street Conservation Area and how that special character can best be preserved and enhanced.

In terms of the setting of the rural conservation areas, it is important to recognise that the surrounding landscape may also be of significance in determining impact or developing an appropriate design response. The reader's attention is therefore drawn to other documents available on the Council's website relating to landscape

character appraisal in general and the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in particular. In the case of the latter, the Council is under a statutory duty to have regard to the purposes of including land within the AONB when taking decisions on applications that may impact on it or its setting.

2.4 Community involvement

Prior to its adoption by the Council, the conservation area statement of 1999, including the proposed boundary extension, was the subject of public consultation and support.

The present survey identifies in more detail the following:

- The special characteristics of Church Street Conservation Area
- The key negative features and issues
- A range of possible actions that would mitigate or offset these detractors

3 LOCATION AND LANDSCAPE SETTING

3.1 Location, communications and local context
Fig 1- Location

Church Street, as it is known today, is some 6 miles east of Gravesend. It stands at between 6 metres and 4 (in places less) metres AOD. It is at the north end of a slightly elevated tongue of land running north from rising arable farmland to the south, into the southern margins of Higham Marshes. Reclaimed marshland forms an originally continuous belt of pasture-land fringing the south side of the Thames in this part of Kent.

The village is at the north end of a minor road running northwards from the A 226 at Gads Hill via modern Higham and Lower Higham to end in Church Street. This road line was undoubtedly in place at least by the time of the Saxons. Somewhat confusingly, the section of it between Lower Higham and Church Street is also known as Church Street.

3.2 Activities and uses

The settlement is very small, consisting mostly of houses of various sorts, and St Mary's Church. St Mary's is no longer the parish church and is now maintained by the Churches Conservation Trust. Until relatively recently the village possessed a pub (now converted to residential use). It has what appears to be a former small modern stockyard with buildings, a few other modern agricultural buildings and a traditional farm yard also with some of its buildings; some of these last were being converted to residential use at the time of survey.

3.3 Geology, topography and local building materials
Fig 2 – Geology
Fig 3 - Topography

The northward projecting, slightly raised, tongue of land on which the village stands is formed of the Eocene period Woolwich Beds – sands and clays, locally shelly with flint and pebble beds – of the Lambeth group. It is planted at the very end of this finger of relatively stable land with to its immediate north, east and west, the more recent, low lying, ditched and drained alluvial deposits of the Thames-side marshes.

Comparison between the contour and the geological maps shows the siting of the settlement to have been dictated by local geological and topographical circumstance. This was of course combined with the evident desire of the settlement founders, or developers, to seek a site as close to the margin of the marshes as possible.

Ditched lands – former alluvial marsh land – extend north in the form of the Higham marshes and south from Church Street to both sides of its Woolwich Beds ridge. They form corridors of low-lying land running some way into rising arable ground around and about them. West of the ridge, the former Thames and Medway Canal follows the western edge of one of these corridors.

Stretching away immediately to the west of the village graveyard is a flat, roughly rectangular area of arable land (with one corner chamfered off by the railway), ditched and hedged on three sides. This is slightly raised above the marshland and closely follows the line of the local 'outcrop' of the Woolwich Beds. It forms one part of the church setting, is included in the conservation area and may prove to be of

archaeological interest, should the priory works in the village ever be professionally investigated. The deep ditches forming the north east corner boundary of the conservation area are also likely to be of archaeological interest.

Flint from the chalk of the region has a long history of use in building. There has also been an agricultural tradition of excavating chalk for spreading on (chalkless) land. It was quarried and burnt locally first to produce lime for lime mortar and then as one of the ingredients of cement. Different varieties of local clay were used in brick-making. Cement manufacture also used clay as an ingredient. Both the local London Clay and the Chalk were quarried near to Church Street Higham, around Cliffe. West of Cliffe there are very extensive modern pits within the marsh, now flooded. These are the result of excavation for sand and gravel.

3.4 Relationship of the conservation area to its surroundings
Fig 4
Fig 5

If one disregards the nearby railway line, the overhead power lines and pylons and the prominent modern industrial complex at Cliffe, the character of the wider village setting is probably little changed since the publication of the first OS map of the area in 1819. The wide-spreading layout of the arable landscape to the south retains its earlier underlying skeleton, some of this possibly medieval in origin, though hedges are likely to be fewer than before. The picture here is backed in the distance by the wooded ridge of sands, gravels and clays that runs from around Shorne through to Higham and beyond. The archaic character of the setting of the village is most evident when it is viewed from within the old reclaimed marshland fields of Higham Marsh – looking south from the railway crossing for instance. Many of the ditched and dyked fields of the marsh must retain their original forms.

The following features form the wider setting of the conservation area with the church a key feature in the landscape:

- To the north of the village, the historic landscape of Higham Marshes

- To the south of the village, open arable landscapes rising to the wooded ridge running from west of Shorne east through Higham and beyond

4 GENERAL HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

4.1 Early settlers in the region and the history of the priory and local industry

North Kent has a long history of known settlement. Bronze Age crop circles have been identified in the fields round Thong. Palaeolithic and Iron Age finds are recorded from the area inland around Lower Higham and modern Higham. Roman remains have been found along the Thames estuary coast and they had settlements close by, inland. Although there is no proof, it is thought that there may have been a Roman river crossing point over to Essex somewhere within this stretch of the marshes. At the beginning of the 19th century the Kent landing point for the crossing was at Cliffe a little to the north east of Higham Church Street. Landfall on the Essex side was Hope Point leading on to the village of East Tilbury. Historic routes through Higham Marshes also give access to the Thames shoreline and during the life of Higham Priory (at Church Street) the priory nuns had control of the ferry to East Tilbury.

In the 18th and 19th centuries Higham Church Street was still known as Higham. Eckwall has the first records of what she notes as Higham Upshire as 'Heahhaam' c. 765 and 'Hehham' 774. One obvious meaning of the word is 'heah-ham', OE high 'village, estate, manor, homestead'. 'High' in this case is of course relative. Eckwall notes that most Hams are on low-lying ground and that OE 'ham(m)' also means 'meadow, especially a flat, low lying meadow on a stream'. The corresponding East Frisian 'hamm' means 'a pasture or meadow surrounded with a ditch'.

In 774 King Offa granted lands at Higham to the then Archbishop of Canterbury and a church may have been built at Higham Church Street at that time. It is recorded in the Domesday Book as stone-built. Today St Mary's shows some 'Saxo-norman' work (Pevsner) though there is more of the 13th century and it underwent major changes in the 14th century. Higham Priory, a Benedictine foundation, was built to the east of the church by Mary, the daughter of King Stephen c. 1148 when she purchased the old manor of Higham. There was a connection with the abbey at Lillechurch near Rochester, but it is unclear which was established first. As an 'alien priory' St Mary's was originally dependant on St Sulpuice, Rennes but in 1202 the king granted the priory a yearly fair at Michaelmas. This provided some income with further funds coming from the ferry to East Tilbury. In 1357 the nuns extended St Mary's Church creating the south aisle and forming a double roof. They seem to have had difficulty maintaining the causeway across the marsh to the ferry and amidst accusations of sexual impropriety the abbey was suppressed in 1522-3. Its land and incomes were subsequently granted to St John's College, Cambridge, which still owns the abbey site and land roundabout today.

After the Reformation the priory land was let to a succession of tenant farmers although a considerable number of smallholdings in separate ownership remained. A vestige of common land possibly relating to such smallholders is Higham Common, a narrow strip of common land extending from Church Higham to the bank of the Thames. The eventual demise of the ferry is not recorded but in 1539-40 a blockhouse for defence of the river Thames was built at what has been said to be the approximate point where the ferry would have crossed to Essex; this has subsequently disappeared.

At the seaward end of Higham Common, near where the blockhouse may have stood the modern OS map shows 'saltings'. These were salt pans, the use of which lasted locally in Kent at least from Saxon times until imported salt was plentiful and cheap

enough from across the Channel or from the West Midland brine pits. Salt, or rather brine, pans where salt water was evaporated by boiling to extract salt were fuelled by large quantities of wood. Thus as well as the seasonal movement of sheep and cattle to and from the marsh and travellers to and from the ferry, the village and priory would have seen constant through-traffic of timber for the salt pan works. This was in addition to the regular movement each year of great numbers of hardwood piles and faggots (brushwood bundles) to reinforce the local sea defences of the marshes.

4.2 Water supply and the village

Modern bore holes inland from the village and beyond it, out within the marshes confirm that its local water supply would have been drawn from wells. Two pumps are shown on the 'Epoch 2' OS map**,** one for public use on the little green on the way into the village, the other within the farmyard of Abbey Farm.

5 THE VILLAGE'S HISTORIC LAYOUT, ITS FORM TODAY AND IT'S ASSOCIATED PUBLIC REALM

5.1 The village's historic layout and its form today

Fig 6 - Conservation Area Boundary

Fig 7 – Village layout

Fig 8 – Higham Common

Today Higham Church Street is the end of the metalled road. In earlier times it was the last staging post en route to the ferry, the road continuing as a causeway across the marshes to the bank of the Thames. It was also a cross-roads for minor east/west traffic with routes, now tracks, connecting up to King's Farm and Queen's Farm in the west, and another crossing the fields eastward to Oakleigh Farm.

The very simple basic arrangement of development at Church Street has remained almost unchanged, again for some 200 years. In fact a map drawn for the Commissioner of Sewers in 1695 shows Higham Church Street much as it is today with the farm, abbey buildings (now mostly destroyed) and houses along Church Street. Also shown are the surrounding fields, suggesting that the underlying medieval field system still existed in the 17th century. Parts of this still survive today.

There is one small difference between development shown on the modern OS map and on the first, 1819, OS map. On the latter map a pair of dwellings is shown interposed between the church and the houses fronting the north side of the west running section of Church Street. Today the position of the church lychgate and an abrupt change in back garden boundary line in the graveyard show where these extra houses once stood.

The village's small collection of mostly freestanding buildings takes the form of houses of various ages. As the village is entered from the south residential development is confined to the west side of the road. A block of three early-to-mid 19th century agricultural workers cottages is at the point of entry and this is followed around the corner by a number of modern detached dwellings. These are part replacement of two earlier cottage terraces and part infilling of previously roadside field or garden land.

Soon after entering the village a very small triangular green comes in view and the road divides, with one arm continuing north. The other arm swings off to the west end. A short distance further on it becomes a footpath within the first part of Higham Common, formerly one of two key routes from the village out on to the marsh, initially through land that is today reverting to scrub. Apart from a small detour at the railway line the common offers a continuous public right of way from village to shore here. The path starts alongside the large and very overgrown village pond, at the road-end.

For a little distance westward beyond the pond the Common is within a wide grass corridor between east-west running dykes. On the north this corridor is bounded by a rough hedge and the north-side ditch, the north bank of which ramps up to a higher level. On its south side, low lying arable land extends up to the parallel south-side ditch. The original character of this space perhaps related to its use on the way to and from the marsh. It possibly functioned as a wide, open, tracked and grassed route-way and collecting and holding-place for sheep and cattle, with a drinking pond for cattle and horses at the village end.

Houses and other buildings line both sides of Church Street as it turns westward towards the pond. Included here are the thatched 'Old Vicarage', the former Sun Inn (now Sun Farm) and a small former cattle yard. 19th century maps show that there were once a few more buildings west beyond the Sun Inn; these have been replaced by the modern Sun Cottage. The large hedge-enclosed fields behind and to the north of all these buildings, west of the graveyard and extending to the railway line, are important as an area of cultivated 'high' land within the conservation area and as noted earlier, for their possible archaeological potential. Within them are some modern agricultural buildings linked via the former pub car park to Sun Farmhouse. From the marshland immediately to the north of the settlement the raised, almost platform-like, effect of this higher ground running off from the west end of the church, is strikingly evident. Its junction with the marsh shows as a low bank above a drainage dyke. The regularity of this feature suggests a deliberate local re-forming of the landscape.

The main section of road continues north, with the churchyard wall and its lychgate to the west side, and some modern farm cottages to the east. The church itself stands towards the north end of the graveyard and by the north east corner of the latter the road finally runs out at a gateway into the fields. From here a second key footpath leads out onto the marshes. The churchyard thus stands close to the junction between marsh and the slightly higher ground on which the settlement is built, its north flank facing out towards the Thames.

To the east of the north-leading path onto the marsh, and fronting onto a short stub-end of highway that turns east from the end of the main road, are the remains of a substantial farmstead, Abbey Farm. Beyond this to the north is a very large modern agricultural building. At one stage in the 19th century the abbey farmstead had two main and a number of smaller cattle yards. At that time today's stub section of highway was part of one of the yards with the present farmhouse adjacent to it. At the time of survey part of the former cattle yards had been or was being 'gentrified' into paved areas, gardens, vehicle accesses and garaging, all associated with change of use to residential. This former yards area will in due course be hived off from its surroundings to the south by walls, gates etc.

Abbey Farmhouse now stands a little way off on the south side of the old farmstead complex. Built into the ruins of part of the priory, it survives today, but not to the same extent as 100 years ago. The Priory site extended eastward behind and around the farmhouse which has some underground medieval structures joined to it and medieval exterior walling built into it.

5.2 The associated public realm

Due to the size and particular location of Church Street vehicles and pedestrians are generally safe in making joint use of the highway within the village. The only piece of formal public space other than roadway areas is the grassed triangular island (on which stand a road sign and telegraph pole) at the road junction towards the south end of the village.

A very attractive highway feature is the consistent lack of kerbs to road edges. This works well because there is no through traffic and vehicle speeds are low. Thus grassed verges may abut directly onto the tarmac, stones and gravel may form a band between road and verge or garden wall, or front gardening may come quite unprotected right to the tarmac edge. Roadside parking on dirt and stones abutting

the tarmac occurs in a few places, but again for the reasons just given, it is both practically and aesthetically acceptable. Workaday roughness is appropriate here.

As in most rural areas, telegraph poles and wires within the village strike an alien note but, paradoxically, they are so commonplace as to be hardly noticed. In addition the informality characteristic of relationships between buildings in the village itself helps to reduce the impact of the poles. No street lamps were noted. A small post box is built into the east wall of the churchyard.

6 THE BUILDINGS AND ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

6.1 Building types

The church is the village's largest and most prominent structure. The majority of remaining buildings in the conservation area are two storey dwelling houses of varying dates. One is the former Sun Inn. Of the two other historic houses in this part of the village the Old Vicarage is a timber framed house of two storeys and the other, Clerks Cottage, is a storey and a half 'cottage' in rendered brick. There are three two-storey, cottage terraces in the village. These were probably all purpose-built for agricultural workers, one in the early 19th century, another in the later 19th century and a third in the second half of the 20th century. The buildings of the small former cattle yard across the road from Clerks Cottage may still contain some elements of interest though some of its corrugated iron clad neighbours have an impermanent air about them. Scattered through the village are storage sheds of various sorts. The group of traditional farm buildings, including the former barn and cattle sheds at Abbey Farm in the north eastern part of the conservation area retains some historic interest. Abbey Farmhouse itself is a very interesting and odd example of late 18th/early 19th century design. As noted earlier it is built into, as well as over, surviving medieval fabric including high status knapped flint work and an attached single storey extension shows more medieval material, probably re-used. The house basement connects to the ends of medieval undercrofts.

6.2 Building form

Workers houses are grouped in short terrace runs. The earlier two have relatively narrow individual frontages with a regular rhythm of opening to void in their walls. The earliest is timber framed and weather-boarded above with brick below, the others are of brick. Overall block-plans for both historic terraces and houses are simple rectangles with narrow depth to length ratios. This is also the case for the occasional traditional shed among the houses. House outshuts of various forms and sizes do sometimes occur. The farm buildings at Abbey Farm follow the usual regional pattern for their date, which generally appears to be early 19th century though the barn itself is 16th century (with a queen-post roof structure) and is listed. Again plan-forms are simple with narrow depth to length ratios. Most roofs are simple double pitches and gables predominate. The church is roofed as an 'M'-shape in cross-section, i.e. two simple double pitches with a central longitudinal valley.

6.3 Listed, locally listed and key unlisted buildings; buildings making a neutral contribution to the conservation area; and buildings detrimental to conservation area character.

Government advice is that the preparation of a List of Locally Significant Buildings is a useful planning tool. Gravesham Council does not currently maintain a list of locally significant buildings although all buildings that were identified in the 1974 Listed Buildings Survey for their architectural or historic interest, but were not awarded a listing status have been treated as 'Buildings of Local Interest' ever since, when considering planning applications. Gravesham Council's list will be reviewed in due course.

Those buildings recommended but not approved for listing in 1974 are shown together with others identified during the preparation of this appraisal, on the accompanying map Fig 9, all for their positive contribution to the character of the Higham Church Street conservation area. In addition those buildings making a

'neutral', as well as those making a 'detrimental', contribution to conservation area character are shown.

6.4 Brief descriptions of some buildings contributing positively to conservation area character

It should be noted that the following comments are made without the benefit of internal inspection. Interiors invariably fill-out the picture and may sometimes change the emphasis of exterior descriptions. Descriptions are generally as seen from the highway.

Approaching the village from the south along the Church Street:

Nos. 1-3 Church Street

The first building in the village, this is a black painted terrace row of three with sash windows and brick stacks. The ground floor is in brick while the upper floor is weather-boarded. The positions of ground and first floor openings have no relation to each other. At first floor three six over six pane sash windows are spaced out along the façade. At ground floor, handing in the plans of the southerly two units shows in the chimney stack, shared between them, and in their mirrored arrangement of front doors and sash windows. Ground floor window openings extend almost up to the weatherboarding above while the heads of the plain boarded front doors are lower, formed with low brick arches. The most southerly unit has a small projecting modern porch.

Beyond this are a number of modern houses, some built in the 1960s, which turn the corner to the west. Opposite, across Church Street, is:

The Old Vicarage

This is a 16th century two storey timber framed house with a thatched roof. It is of simple rectangular form with full gables to each end. The chimney stack is towards the building's west end and is centred on the ridge. The house is weather-boarded throughout. The boards are white painted to the front and back, with the gables in black. There are three first floor window openings on the street elevation comprising two pairs of double casements and one four-casement window. The individual casements are all divided into four lights. At ground floor the boarded front door is set well towards the building's west end under a small bracketed porch hood with a three light high, six pane, double casement window close to it to the left**.** To its right are two further windows, one of paired nine paned casements, the other of paired six pane casements. Windows are timber and their detail is traditional.

Nos. 1-3 Church Cottages

The terrace is built on the site of the former village poorhouse which was sold to the parish in 1840 and demolished shortly thereafter. The present building appears on the 1842 tithe map. It was formerly a row of four narrow frontage two storey workers houses. Two of the units have been knocked into one. As originally built it was of brick and no doubt had a slated roof. Plans were handed, in this case arranged so that front doors of pairs of adjoining units came side by side with shared chimney stacks on the opposite party walls. Thus there are only two stacks, both centred on the roof-ridge. Single ground and first floor windows were one over the other, to left or right of respective front doors. Original windows were of the timber double hung

sliding sash type, the openings very plainly detailed. One house retains the original design of window with eight over eight sashes; the others have suffered heavy modern alterations, damaging to character. The whole building is white rendered or whitened brickwork and the roof is of heavy modern concrete tiles. Two of the dwellings have modern fully closed-in projecting porches with modern 'sub-Georgian' front doors.

Clerks Cottage

The present building dates from the 16th century though a house is recorded as having existed here in a will of 1485. It is of simple rectangular form, a storey and a half high to eaves and thatched with a painted rendered front onto brickwork. The underlying brickwork, of alternating burnt headers and stretchers and including a low projecting brick plinth, is shown in an old photograph. The east gable return wall is also shown as brick in this picture, with the gable triangle above weather-boarded in. At the west end today is a weather-boarded in-line addition under a cat slide roof. This extends down from the hip of the main roof to a single-storey west elevation. A single thatched roofed and gabled dormer with a casement window breaks the low eaves line towards the west end of the building. The chimney stacks are at the rear. The boarded front door is roughly in the middle of the elevation and there are single double hung timber sash windows to each side under (hidden) low cambered-head brick arches. The windows are timber double-hung sashes with eight over eight pane sashes, boxes set towards the front of the wall.

Sun Farm (formerly the Sun Inn)

The former pub is brick-built and of various ages. The front section of the building is earliest, possibly 18th century in origin. This is a rectangular-plan two storey yellow/brown brick box with a pitched and concrete tiled roof and gabled ends. The west gable is infilled with weatherboard while the east gable is of brick contemporary with that below. Projecting from each gable is a more or less central brick flue. The face of west flue has three step-in stages in the brickwork as it rises. The face of the east has two. The sides of both stacks step-in twice as they rise; all but the top stages are rendered. Such projecting, staged, stacks, not especially common in Kent, are more usually seen in timber-framed buildings. The front façade is symmetrical with a central front door and former tall double hung sash windows to each side at ground and first floor. There is a projecting brick porch **–** a later addition**.** The windows are modern replacements inappropriate in conservation area terms. Their lower openings have gauged brick lintels probably originally with cambered undersides. At the back of the west end of the building is a later brick cat-slide addition while at the other end is a full two-storey gabled rear extension**.** The latter might repay detailed investigation – its east wall is rendered in two parts with the upper section suggestive, perhaps, of framing behind.

St Mary's Church

St Mary's is built from Kentish ragstone with flint banding. As noted earlier there is some evidence of Saxo-Norman work though the building was remodelled with the construction of a south aisle by the nuns in 1357. The church tower fell into disrepair and was removed in 1710, to be replaced with the present small shingled spire, or fleche. Although repaired in the 19th century the building did not suffer extensive close attention at that time with the result that much historic fabric remains, both inside and out. The main damage was the complete renewal of its windows in 1863.

Higham Priory

'Excavation in 1966-67 suggested that the Priory buildings were quite humble, a cruciform church without a crossing tower and cloister, small chapter house, and warming house on the south side.' (Pevsner, West Kent). The site is a Scheduled Monument. (The schedule is attached as an appendage to this appraisal.)

Abbey Farmhouse

The early 19th century Abbey farmhouse, disproportionately tall for its plan area, sits close up to medieval basements and incorporates very significant medieval fabric in its walls. Not quite a square in plan, the house has a low pitched and short ridged roof designed for natural slate. The chimney is at one end of the ridge. The north elevation is blank and rendered. The west elevation has two tall double hung sash window openings above and a tall front entrance and a window below. The south elevation has four windows, two up, two down and the east has one only. The house is unfortunately not listed and this has allowed its recent 'upgrading', externally with new unsympathetic plastic double glazed windows and shiny modern synthetic roofing slates. From a distance it remains important in the landscape but closer-to the conservation area character is let down by these unfortunate changes. Extending from its north east corner at right angles is a single storey pitched-roof former agricultural range joined to it by a short two storey section under a mono-pitch roof. The lower part of this structure shows much re-use of medieval material. The mono-pitched part incorporates a tall and very thick flint-faced masonry wall, part of the priory buildings, with a panel of external alternating, chequerboard, stone and flint-work in one side.

The former barn at Abbey Farm

The old farmstead group includes a large Kent barn of the 16th century recently converted to a house. This is an aisled building with Kent half-hips to each end of the roof. It is weather-boarded and peg-tiled. There are four modest brown-stained close-placed new windows in the south gable facing towards Church Street and four larger new windows on the west side facing the public footpath to the marshes. At the time of inspection the barn still retained doors to the rear wagon entry on this elevation**.** The building has been given a gabled wagon entry canopy on its east side.

Other former farm buildings at Abbey Farm

Associated with the barn is a probable beast hovel range of the early 19th century, now converted to residential use. If the conversion scheme is true to the original, this was an open sided shelter with brick back and end walls and a low-pitched, hip ended, peg-tiled roof. Another single storey shed, a cart shed or possibly again a beast hovel or shelter stood un-converted on the south side of the former farmyard in 2010. This was then clad in much patched weather-boarding and its hip-ended roof was covered in corrugated material, an indication that it was probably originally thatched. A third agricultural structure a modern single storey brick and asbestos roofed store, stood east of the former farmyards.

6.5 Building materials

Walling materials range from early flint and ragstone in the church, through post-medieval and nineteenth century weather-boarded timber frame, red brick in eighteenth and early nineteenth century buildings and buff/yellow in later ones and whitewashed and externally rendered brick. In Church Street flint makes a late

reappearance in a boundary wall between the former Sun Inn and Clerks Cottage and was also used along with ragstone, cobbles and brick in the graveyard boundary wall. Roofing materials comprise shingles and peg-tile on the church, and on the remaining buildings peg tile, thatch (with inappropriate, non Kent, block ridge), slate, galvanised iron sheeting, concrete tiles and composition slates and the like.

6.6 Local details

Black weatherboard survives, for instance on 1-3 Church Street and the gables of the Old Vicarage opposite. Black denotes the bottom level of 'status' as far as the painting of traditional vernacular buildings is concerned; here it would originally have been coal-tar applied by the farmer/owner as the cheapest way of protecting the boarding. It was normally used only on agricultural buildings and its survival here in a domestic situation is thus of considerable historic interest. The banding of flint and ragstone in the church walls is a local feature, found in several medieval churches in this part of north Kent. Chequered stone and flint survives in a section of medieval priory wall built into Abbey Farmhouse, as noted. Otherwise local village detail follows the general tradition of Kent's timber and brick vernacular architecture with no other building or use of material that has a character unique to the village.

Window and door design, and therefore appearance, is on occasion not in character with an historic host building. The survival of historic exterior joinery is quite common but in places inroads into appropriate character have been made by the introduction of off the peg timber and plastic windows and doors. The design and appearance of these is invariably unacceptable in conservation areas.

6.7 Scheduled ancient monument

Much of the land around Abbey Farmhouse is a Scheduled Monument (see Appendix 1).

7 SPATIAL ANALYSIS

7.1 Spatial character and form of development within the conservation area

The village is divided up notionally into six separate, abutting, areas each with its own distinctive character. These are all shown on the Map, Fig 10. The areas are:

1 The land and buildings flanking the west side of the road as it enters the village and the road up to and including the village green and its surroundings

2 The remaining built up area and gardens along the west arm of Church Street and the field behind this, to the south

3 The graveyard and church

4 The sites of the former Abbey Farm and farmhouse and field area to the north and east of these

5 The area of level field west from the church as far as the railway line

6 The area to the immediate south of area 5, now partly scrubland and with the village pond at its east end

7.2 Individual character areas

Each character area is discussed below and its special character is briefly described. Fig 11**.** The relationship of buildings to spaces, nature of spaces, contributing and detrimental features are all shown. Main contributing trees, important boundaries and important garden areas and planting are shown.

1) The land and buildings flanking the west side of the road as it enters the village and the road up to and including the village green and its surroundings

Development along the road as one enters Church Street from the south provides a gradual, linear progression – open arable fields to one side, domestic-scale houses and gardens to the other – which ends as the tiny green at the road junction in the village comes into view. Some space 'funnels' away, disappearing round the corner of the section of road going westward.

The main view, up the road and over the green to the north is 'layered' in depth. On the left, immediately beyond the green and set at an angle to it are the gables of a two storey house (the Old Vicarage) and (a modern) one storey garage/shed, their tiled roofs running away westward. Straight ahead, beyond concealing tree and hedge growth is the south side of the church with only the main part of the roof and the fleche showing. Mature Yew trees in the churchyard throw the graveyard lychgate in front of them into sharp relief. This character area, with the church in the background, thus announces that one has 'arrived' at the centre of the village.

2) The remaining built up area and gardens along the west arm of Church Street and the field behind this, to the south

The curve of the west-running section of road produces linear enclosure to each side of the street here. It allows the historic buildings on its north side to each in turn come

gradually into view as one moves west, with modern houses and other small buildings on the road's south side largely hidden behind shrub and tree growth along the highway edge. Though not the last building on the road's north side, the former Sun Inn acts as a marker defining the limit of historic development contributing to the character of the conservation area here. Its car park is open to the roadside and unused. Quite quickly towards the road's end, the view down the former wide track-way of Higham Common (area 6), now with a shrunken field path in its place, opens up. Its far end is closed by shrub growth, into which the path disappears.

3) The graveyard and church

The space of the graveyard is the immediate setting of the church but it also contributes to conservation area character in its own right. South and east graveyard boundaries, to back gardens and highway respectively, are marked by informal tree and shrub growth, paling and other fencing and brick, cobble and flint walling. Along the east, road-side, graveyard boundary some trees are approaching maturity and these and others are important features of the conservation area. From the road here the church is partially hidden behind this greenery, especially in summer. There is a surprise element in entering the graveyard through the lychgate and seeing the outline of the church beyond. From the lychgate the graveyard path climbs almost imperceptibly and turns slightly to reach the church porch, passing between two mature Yew trees in the process. The church stands slightly higher than anything else around it, back from the road and towards the north boundary of the graveyard. The graveyard itself is characterised by rough cut but not untidy grass, scattered with leaning tombstones. Seen from due north the north flank of the church and that side of the graveyard are partly concealed in summer by a mature tree and other planting with the result that a picturesque group is formed. The body of the church and its little spire are nonetheless unmistakable behind and beyond the tree.

4) The sites of the former Abbey Farm and farmhouse and field area to the north and east of these

The south west corner of this area is formed around the north end of Church Street. Some key spatial elements here are the church (area 3), the modern Abbey Farm Cottages with their front gardens and some mature planting, the field gate opening northward to a track-way onto the marsh and the turn in the road for Abbey Farm. General enclosure here is given by the graveyard wall and various trees, fences and hedges and the feeling is of intimacy. This fades as one turns the corner to face eastward where the Abbey Farmhouse stands up isolated and stark behind a post and rail fence on the right. Spatial character is one of openness; priory remains exist both above and under the ground here. To the left, at a slightly lower level, is the eastern half of the abbey farmstead site, with the farm's current giant covered cattle shed looming in the background. Beyond, further to the east the road, now a farm track, leads down to a dyke and then away south east. A deep curving dyke edged by trees and shrubs defines the limit of the conservation area in the field to the north and east of the farmstead buildings.

5) The area of level field west from the church as far as the railway line

The homogeneity of this space, its character as a lightly divided, slightly raised platform of land above the marsh, open to the sky, is hardly disturbed by the presence within it of a group of transitory-looking, twentieth-century sheds and agricultural buildings. It forms the west setting to the church. Along its southern side a rough hedge conceals it from external view (from area 6) but from the north-east its

large, open, extent is visible. Its edges are ditched and banked-up and along the accompanying boundary ditches some willows survive in company with other hedging plants. The graveyard, area 3, extends as a kind of promontory into its east end. The mystery of its purpose remains.

6) The area to the immediate south of area 5, the end of Higham Common, now scrubland and with the village pond at its east end

This is now perceived as comprising a narrow footpath running along the edge of a stretch of grass and scrub with the large, overgrown, village pond at its east end. It was no doubt originally the wide grassed common man and beast corridor described earlier, within which sheep and cattle may have sometimes been temporarily held. The original open character of the space, related to its use on the way to and from the marsh, was one of an open area flanked by ditches with open arable fields to the south and an enclosing ditch and bank up to the plateau-like area west of the church (area 5). This character has been heavily eroded in modern times by the growth of scrub, particularly at its west end.

7.3 Landmarks, or key buildings, focal points and views
Fig 12 - showing Landmarks, focal points and views. Main contributing and detrimental views are identified.

Seen as one approaches down the road from the south the church roof with its little spire/fleche rises above a mix of mostly modern domestic gables and roof slopes and the trees and hedges closely surrounding, and within, the village. From other 'external' viewpoints the church dominates in a similar way. Seen from the north within the marsh it becomes the main element in a timeless composition, fronted as noted earlier by a great tree with a barn roof showing above the bushes lining a deep dyke to its east, permanent grassland and grazing cows in the foreground and to its west a long view south to the blue heights of Shorne woods.

One other building, Abbey Farmhouse, catches the eye from the southern approach to the village and from elsewhere. It is well to the east of the church and now stands out starkly, seemingly apart from the main settlement. Its predecessors on this site – the priory buildings – would have formed a substantial visual counterweight to the church.

Within the village the little green and its surroundings at the road junction make an important focal point. There are two points of exit or entry to the marshes. One is at the north end of the village street by the graveyard, the other, via Higham Common, is at the end of the west running section of village street. Both are key markers reminding one of the history of use of the place.

8 SUMMARY CHARACTER APPRAISAL

Church Street, Higham, is a small hamlet at the limit of raised land at the former marsh edge. It comprises some modern and historic houses relating to an attractive and tiny village green, a former substantial traditional farmstead with behind it a modern successor building, and an historic church set in a mature churchyard. The former priory does not contribute to character except in a small way as part of the later Abbey Farmhouse and as an area of ground in the conservation area that is statutorily protected as a scheduled monument. Two other open spaces play important parts in the character of the area. One is the long and relatively narrow field in the south west part of the conservation area, once down to permanent grass and containing the village pond, which is the first part on a route via historic Higham Common from the village to the Thames shore. The second is the relatively large, slightly elevated and ditch and hedge enclosed area of land west of the graveyard.

In terms of distant views the church roofs and spire and surrounding greenery mark out the settlement from both inland to its south, and north from within the marsh. Most of the buildings, historic and modern, cluster beyond the south side of the graveyard and church except for Abbey House and it former farmyard. This second key landmark stands out on its own, away to the east of the village. Local character arises from the contrasts between visually 'tight' areas of development - that around and west of the little village green and the buildings and yards of the former traditional farmstead, the intermediate visually part open/part enclosed space of the graveyard with the church within it, the openness of the marsh-edge field west of the church and the wide grassy route space of Higham Common south of this with its village pond.

Positive features:

- Distant views of the church roofs and spire and surrounding lower roofs and greenery
- Distant views from the road into the village of Abbey Farmhouse to its east
- From the south, the opening building in the settlement, the black weather-boarded row of former workers cottages
- The tiny village green with historic houses and their ancillary buildings leading off westward along the road set in mature, informal, front and side gardens
- The relationship of the historic houses just mentioned to the public highway
- The partial concealment given by high hedges and mature front gardens to a number of modern (unsympathetic) properties to the west and south of the road into the village, by the green and round the corner to the west
- The section of north-running road alongside the graveyard including the lychgate, and enclosed by a wall and trees/hedges, and the continuance of this into the open at the road's north gateway into the marsh, where wide views north are to be had
- The newly re-tiled roof of the recently converted Kent barn, on the marsh edge north east of the graveyard, which can be seen above concealing hedges and trees

- The partly (tree-, fence- and wall-) enclosed graveyard with the church setting enhanced by various mature trees within it and with the view out from the graveyard over the marsh

- The two areas of open land in the west part of the village, one, part of Higham Common, containing the pond and being the start of an historic route to the Thames shore, the other raised up above the marsh with possibly artificially defined edges suggesting considered landscape alteration

Negative features:

- 20th century development in the village

- The recent modernising of the exterior of Abbey Farm farmhouse

- The present unfinished state of works to the setting of the former Abbey Farm farmyard and buildings and the generally bleak character of the local landscape on the north side of Abbey Farmhouse

- The car park to the former Sun Inn

- Scrub invasion and the condition of the village pond within Higham Common, the open strip of land in the south west of the conservation area (the start of one historic route to the Thames shore)

9 ISSUES

9.1 Definition of issues

The following issues form part of the means by which it is intended to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the conservation area. Some arrangements by which to manage change have already been adopted following public consultation, such as the Article 4 Direction explained below, whilst others have been identified by the appraisal process and represent proposals only at this stage.

9.2 Conservation area boundary review

No amendments to the conservation area boundary are considered necessary.

9.3 Alterations to buildings

It is evident that some well-intentioned, but unsympathetic changes, especially to doors and windows, have had an effect that is damaging to the conservation area. An Article 4 Direction is now in force, applying to all building frontages facing the public highway and bringing many small scale incremental changes under the remit of the planning system.

9.4 Uses and vitality

The village is as a residential settlement with Giles Dairy Farm being a working farm with recently replaced farm buildings. The former traditional farmstead has been converted to residential use. There is one very large modern working farm building towards the perimeter of the conservation area.

9.5 Locally listed buildings

There is no adopted comprehensive Local List for the Borough and, subject to availability of resources, identification of buildings or structures for a local list is considered to be a priority once criteria have been agreed. Any Local List should be drawn up with the full consultation of the local community.

9.6 Highways and traffic/parking

There appear to be no significant problems in conservation area terms arising from these matters.

9.7 Enhancement potential

The opportunity should be taken when it arises to improve the appearance of the car park to the former Sun Inn.

Character area 6 (the start of Higham Common) is losing its original character due to scrub invasion, spreading from its west end. In addition the large pond in this area is overgrown by water plants. The area of common land is gradually being brought back into use as grazing land. Ideally a scheme to return the area to its historic open character as the first stage in the route from the village to the Thames shore should be considered.

9.8 Trees

Subject to certain size restrictions, all trees within the conservation area benefit from a level of protection, and permission is required from the local planning authority to undertake works to them.

9.9 Archaeology

The Conservation Area contains known archaeological sites relating to a Roman cemetery, early medieval pit and the medieval priory, church and village buildings. There is potential for further archaeological remains to be discovered within the Conservation Area and in the event of development proposals being submitted appropriate archaeological mitigation may be needed.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Scheduled Monument

List Entry Summary

This monument is scheduled under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 as amended as it appears to the Secretary of State to be of national importance. This entry is a copy, the original is held by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Name: St Mary's Priory: an alien Benedictine priory 100m east of St Mary's Church

List Entry Number: 1010241

Location

The monument may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County: Kent
District: Gravesham
District Type: District Authority
Parish: Higham

National Park: Not applicable to this List entry.
Grade: Not applicable to this List entry.
Date first scheduled: 09-Aug-1994
Date of most recent amendment: Not applicable to this List entry.

Legacy System Information
The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.
Legacy System: RSM
UID: 23022

Asset Groupings
This List entry does not comprise part of an Asset Grouping. Asset Groupings are not part of the official record but are added later for information.

List Entry Description

Summary of Monument

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.
Reasons for Designation

A nunnery was a settlement built to sustain a community of religious women. Its main buildings were constructed to provide facilities for worship, accommodation and subsistence. The main elements are the church and domestic buildings arranged around a cloister. This central enclosure may be accompanied by an outer court and gatehouse, the whole bounded by a precinct wall, earthworks or moat. Outside the

enclosure, fishponds, mills, field systems, stock enclosures and barns may occur. The earliest English nunneries were founded in the seventh century AD but most of these had fallen out of use by the ninth century. A small number of these were later refounded. The tenth century witnessed the foundation of some new houses but the majority of medieval nunneries were established from the late 11th century onwards. Nunneries were established by most of the major religious orders of the time, including the Benedictines, Cistercians, Augustinians, Franciscans and Dominicans. It is known from documentary sources that at least 153 nunneries existed in England, of which the precise locations of only around 100 sites are known. Few sites have been examined in detail and as a rare and poorly understood medieval monument type all examples exhibiting survival of archaeological remains are worthy of protection.

St Mary's Priory survives comparatively well, with upstanding fragments of masonry as well as extensive below ground remains. Documentary sources, combined with the archaeological remains and environmental evidence demonstrated by partial excavation to be contained within the monument, provide an insight into the economy and way of life peculiar to a Benedictine priory.

History
Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.
Details

The monument includes the alien Benedictine Priory of St Mary, situated on level ground c.2km from the south bank of the River Thames.

This includes the church, the cloister, east, west and south ranges, the rere- dorter and drain, the cemetery to the east of the church, the footings and foundations of associated monastic buildings and the ground in between.

Abbey Farm farmhouse is situated in the south west corner of the cloister and has incorporated the standing remains of the west range and the north and west walls of the frater. These lie to the south of the cloister garth, or courtyard, and are built of stone and flint up to 0.9m thick. Part of the south wall of the church is upstanding on the north side of the cloister garth and measures 0.7m thick, 4m long and 1.5m high. To the east are the buried foundations of the chapter house, warming house, reredorter and covered drains which were all noted during partial excavation in 1966.
To the south of this area, chalk footings of other medieval monastic buildings have also been noted, all within the area of the precinct.

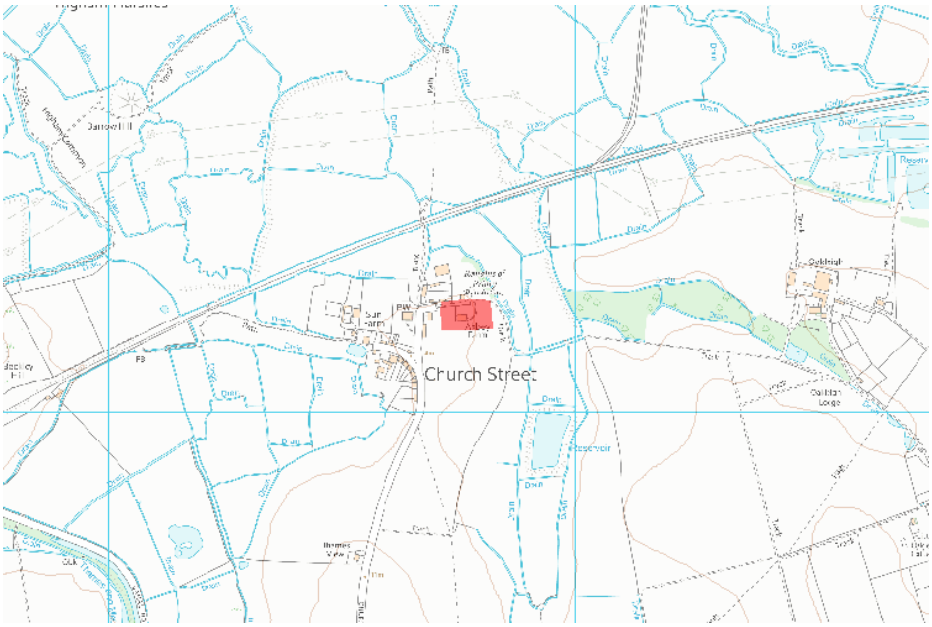
The priory, originally built to house 16 nuns, was founded c.1148, when Mary, the daughter of King Stephen, became the first prioress. As an alien priory, St Mary's was originally dependent on St Sulpice, Rennes. This was the monastery from which Mary had come, bringing with her a number of the nuns. The priory, however, became independent at sometime around 1227 when the King granted the priory a yearly fair at Michaelmas. The house was suppressed in 1521-2 when it was granted to St John's College, Cambridge.

In 1965 a resistivity survey was undertaken in order to identify the position of any surviving foundations. The following year partial excavation of the site took place which revealed the plan of the medieval priory buildings. A stone coffin in the east

alley of the cloister is the earliest datable evidence from the site, while a late 13th century brass jetton was found embedded in the mortar of a covered drain. None of the buildings can be dated unequivocally to the period of the founding of the priory, but some appear to have been built or possibly rebuilt in stone during the 13th century.

Excluded from the scheduling are the occupied buildings, garden sheds, aviary, other outbuildings, gates, fences and fence posts, but the ground beneath all these features is included.

MAP EXTRACT The site of the monument is shown on the attached map extract.
Books and journals
The Victoria History of the County, (1926), 145
Tester, P J, 'Archaeologia Cantiana' in Excavations on the site of Higham Priory, , Vol. 82, (1967), 143-61
Other
Ordnance Survey, TQ 77 SW 8, (1969)
Map - National Grid Reference: TQ 71765 74212
The below map is for quick reference purposes only and may not be to scale.



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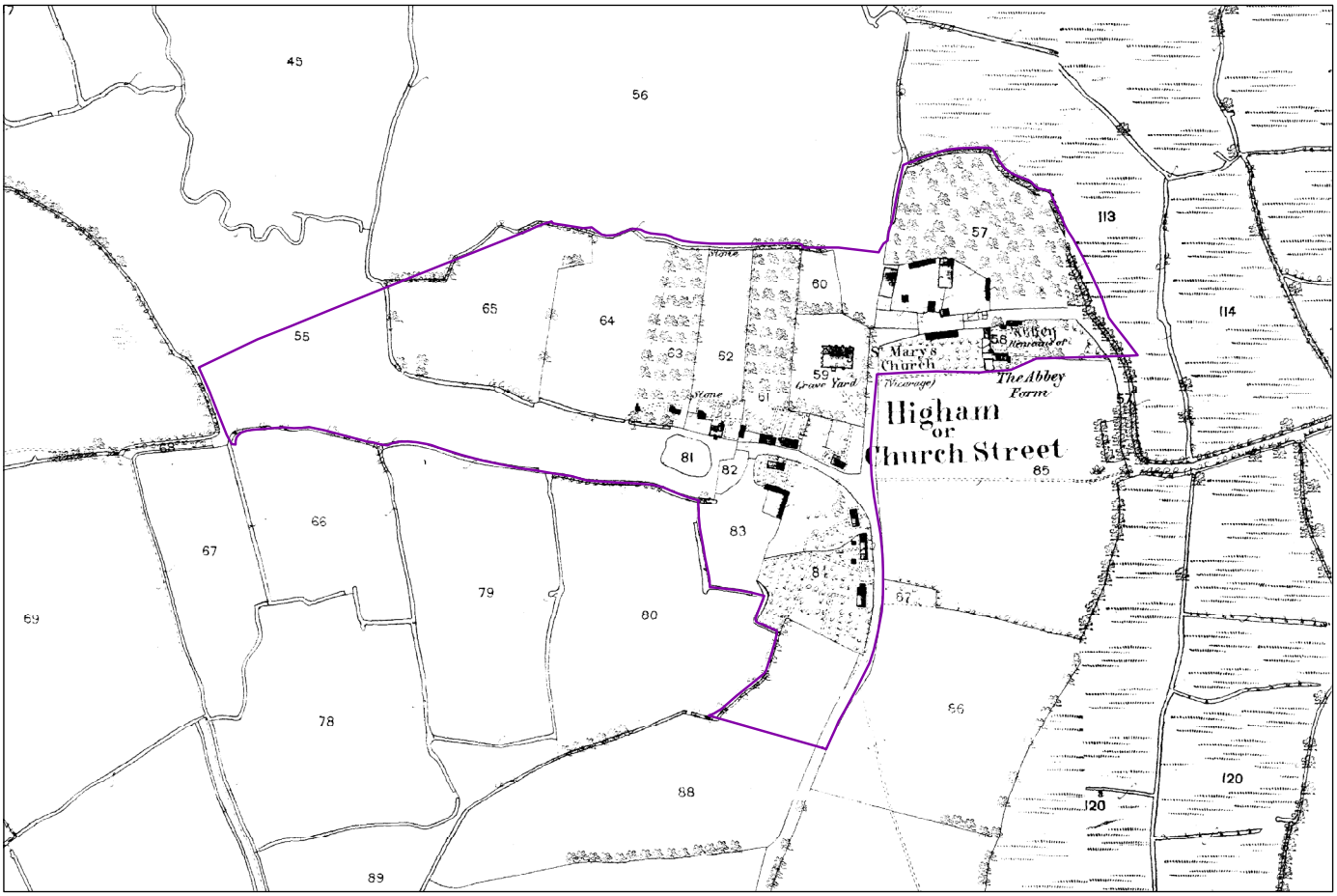
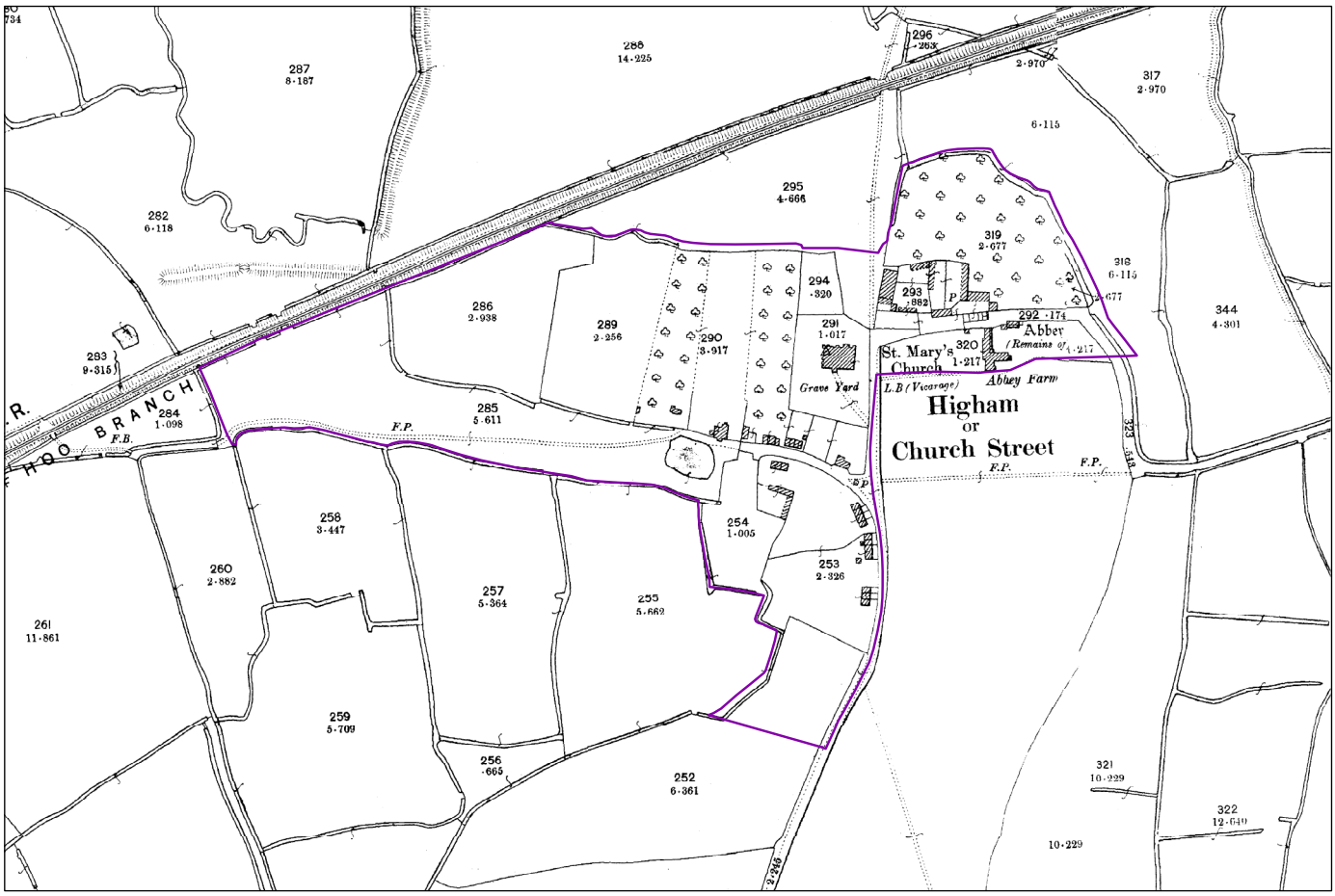
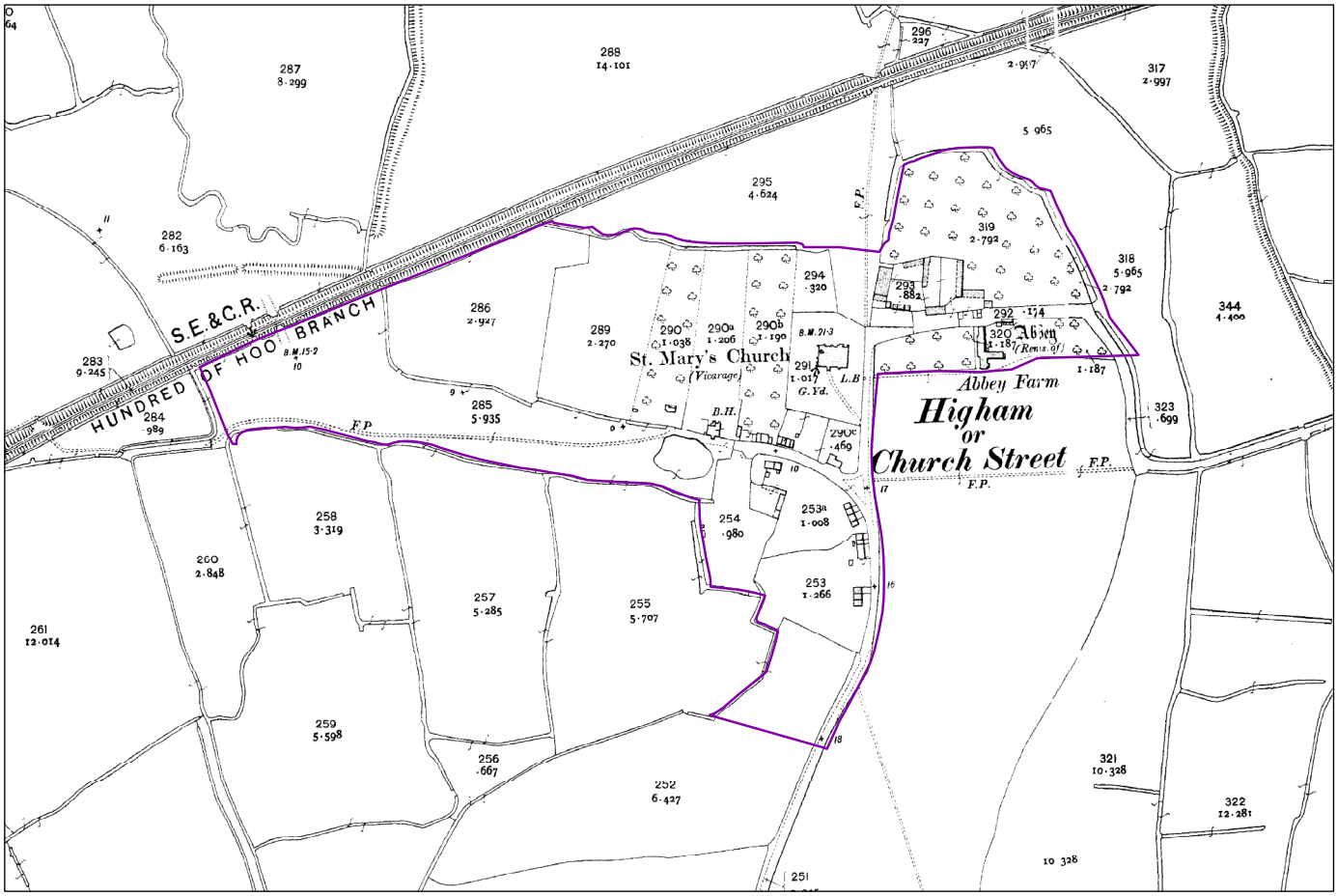
1843-93



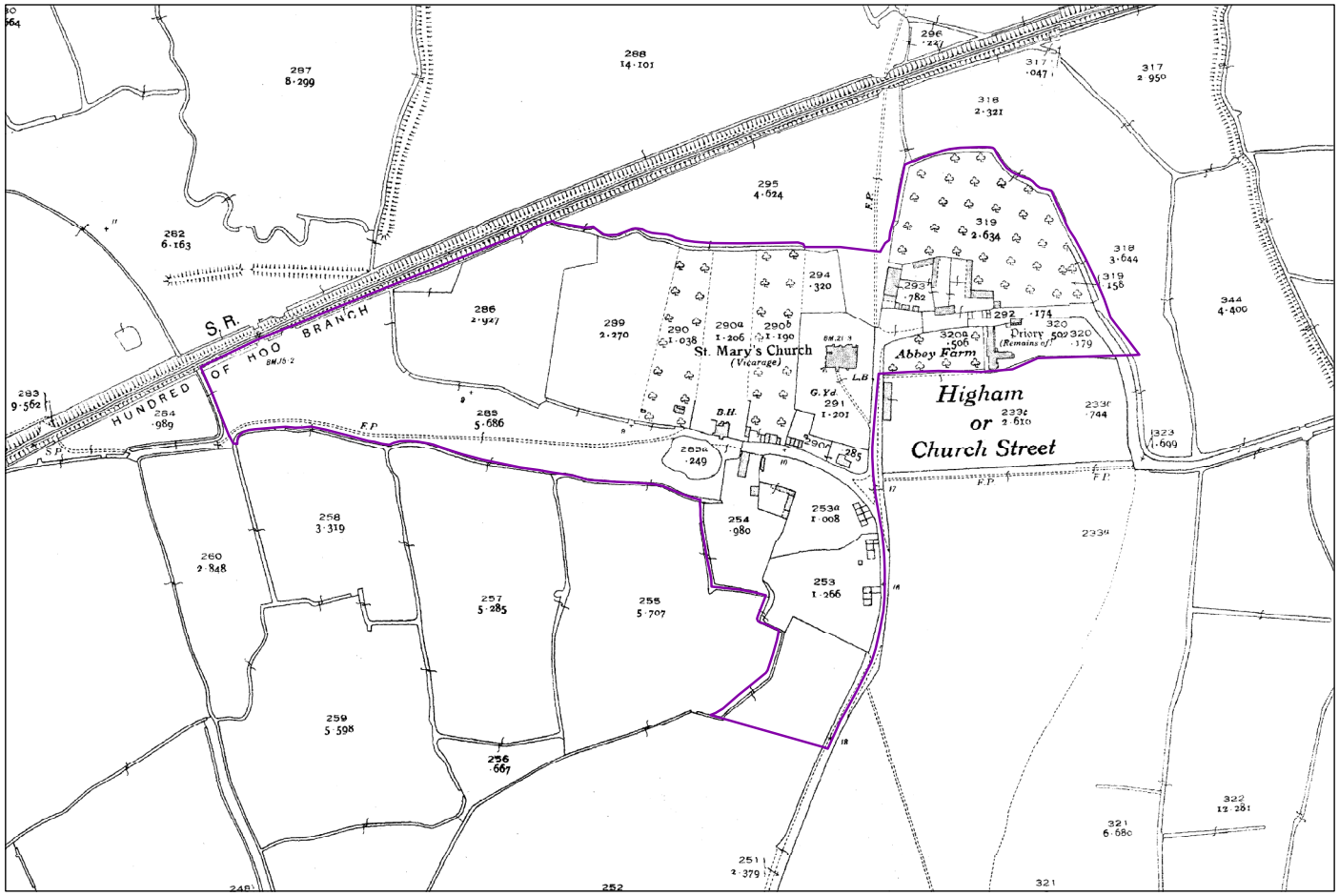
1891-1912



1904-39



1919-43



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The Conservation Studio ‘Higham Church Street Conservation Area Statement’, Lewes, 1999.
Eckwall E, Concise Oxford dictionary of English place-names’ 4th ed. Oxford, 1977.
Worsdale d s ‘Shamel Hundred’ Zaltbommel, Netherlands, 1995.

Figure 1

3.1 Location

Church Street, Higham



Figure 2

3.3 Geology
Church Street, Higham

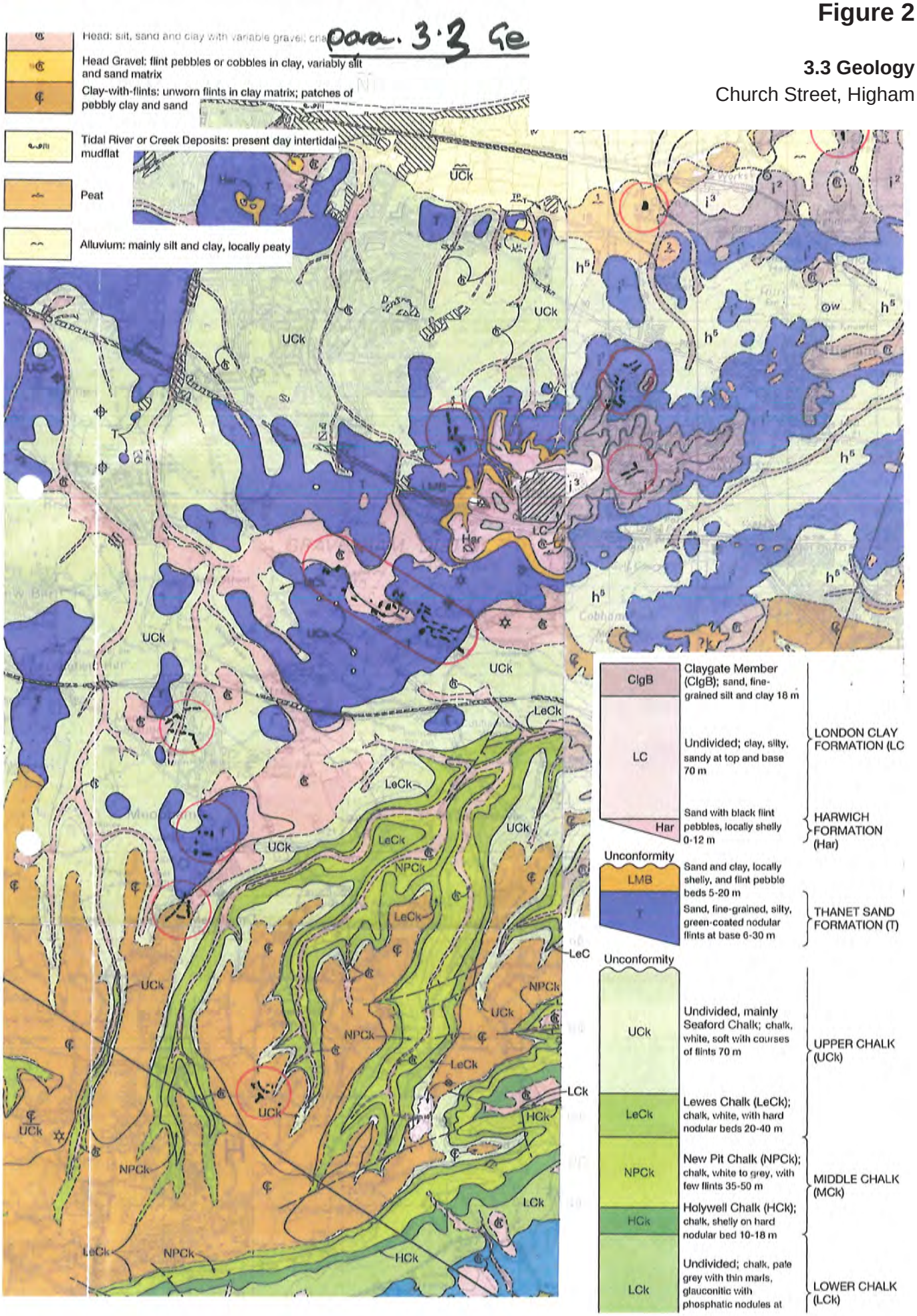


Figure 3

3.3 Topography
Church Street, Higham

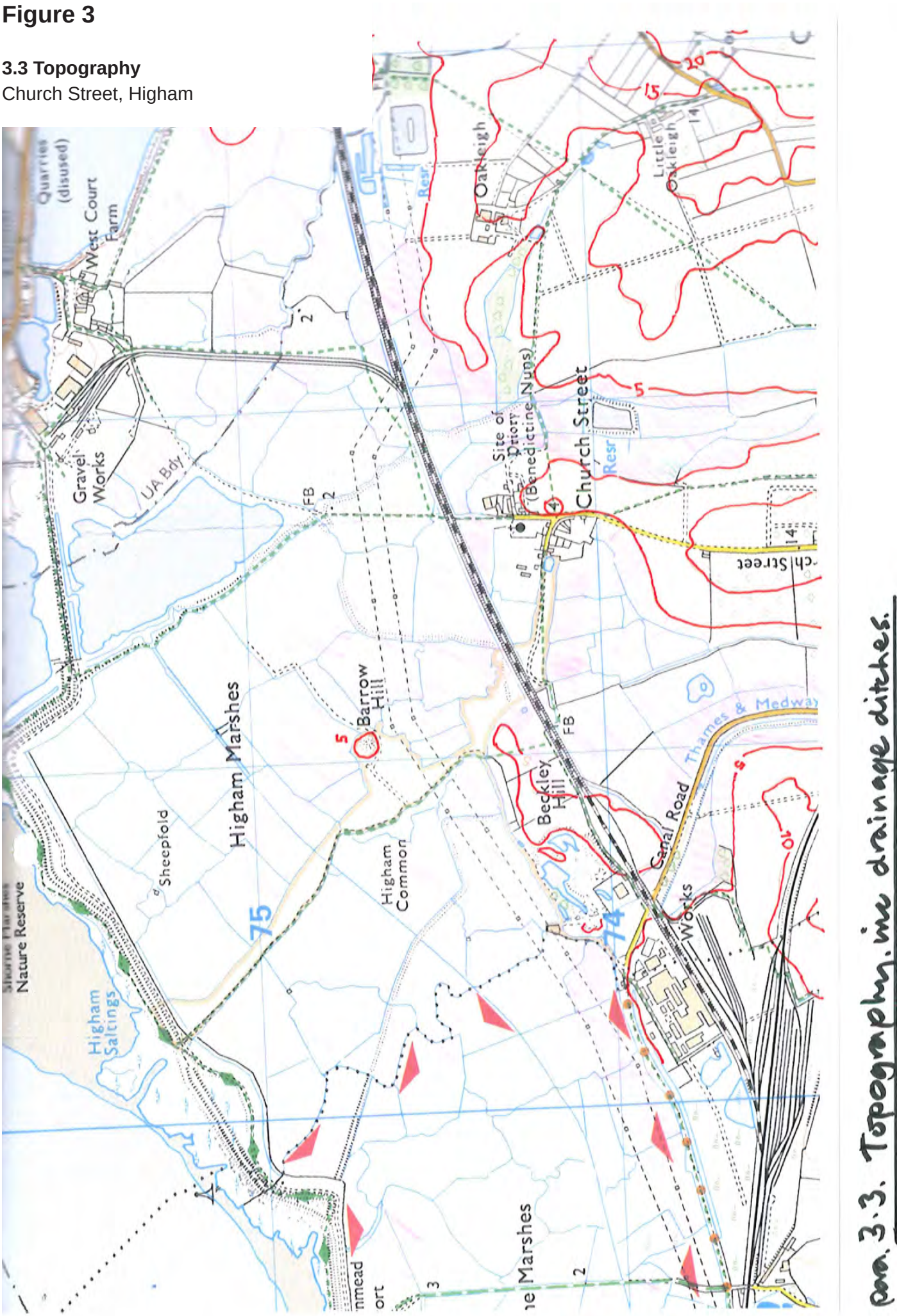
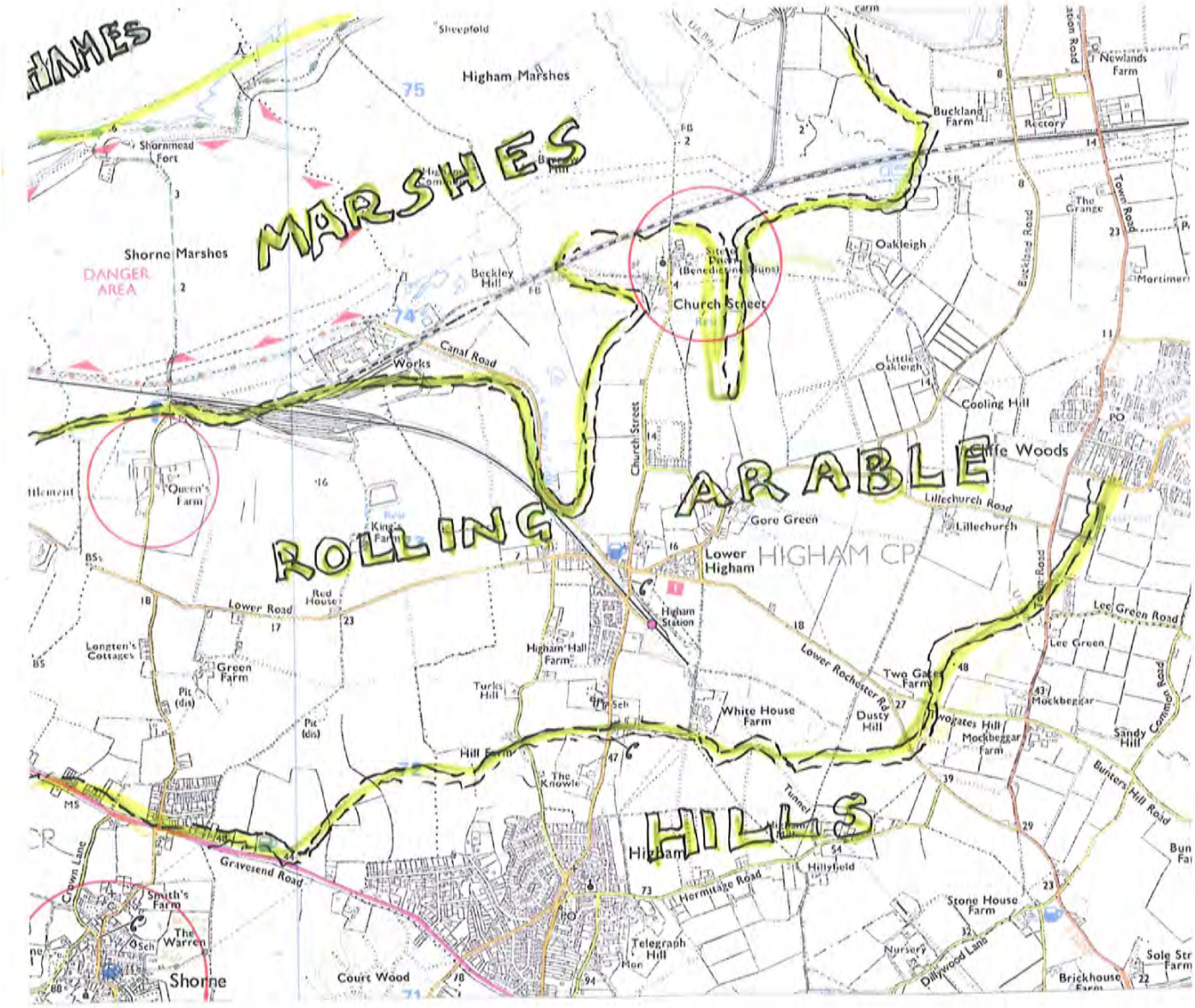


Fig. 3.3. Topography, inc drainage ditches.

Figure 4

3.4 Landscape zones

Church Street, Higham



pom 3.4. Landscape Zones.

Figure 5

3.4 First OS, 1819
Church Street, Higham



Figure 6

5.1 Conservation Area Boundary
Church Street, Higham

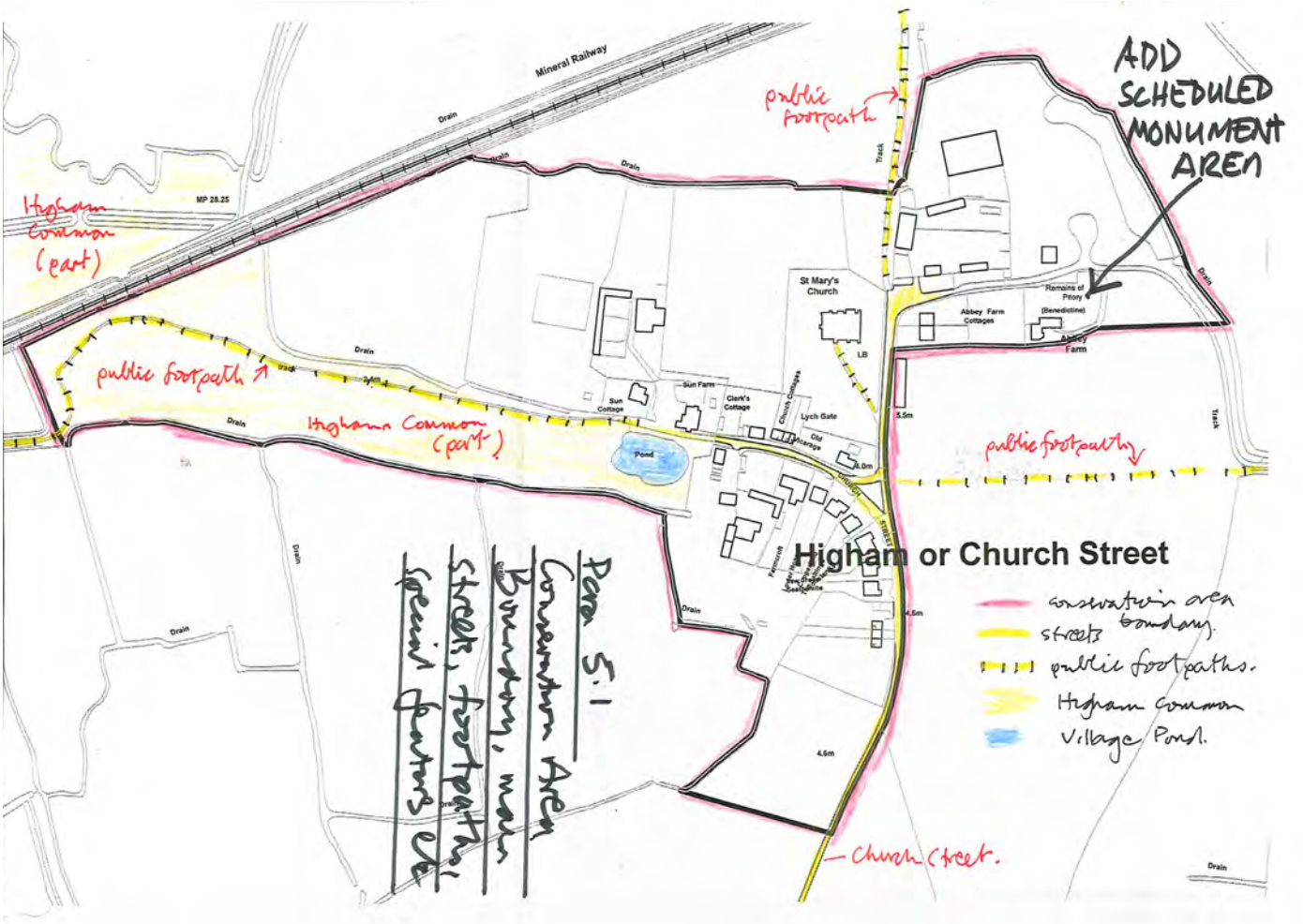


Figure 7

5.1 Village layout
Church Street, Higham



Figure 8

5.1 Higham Common
Church Street, Higham

para 5.1. Specifically to identify "Higham Common"

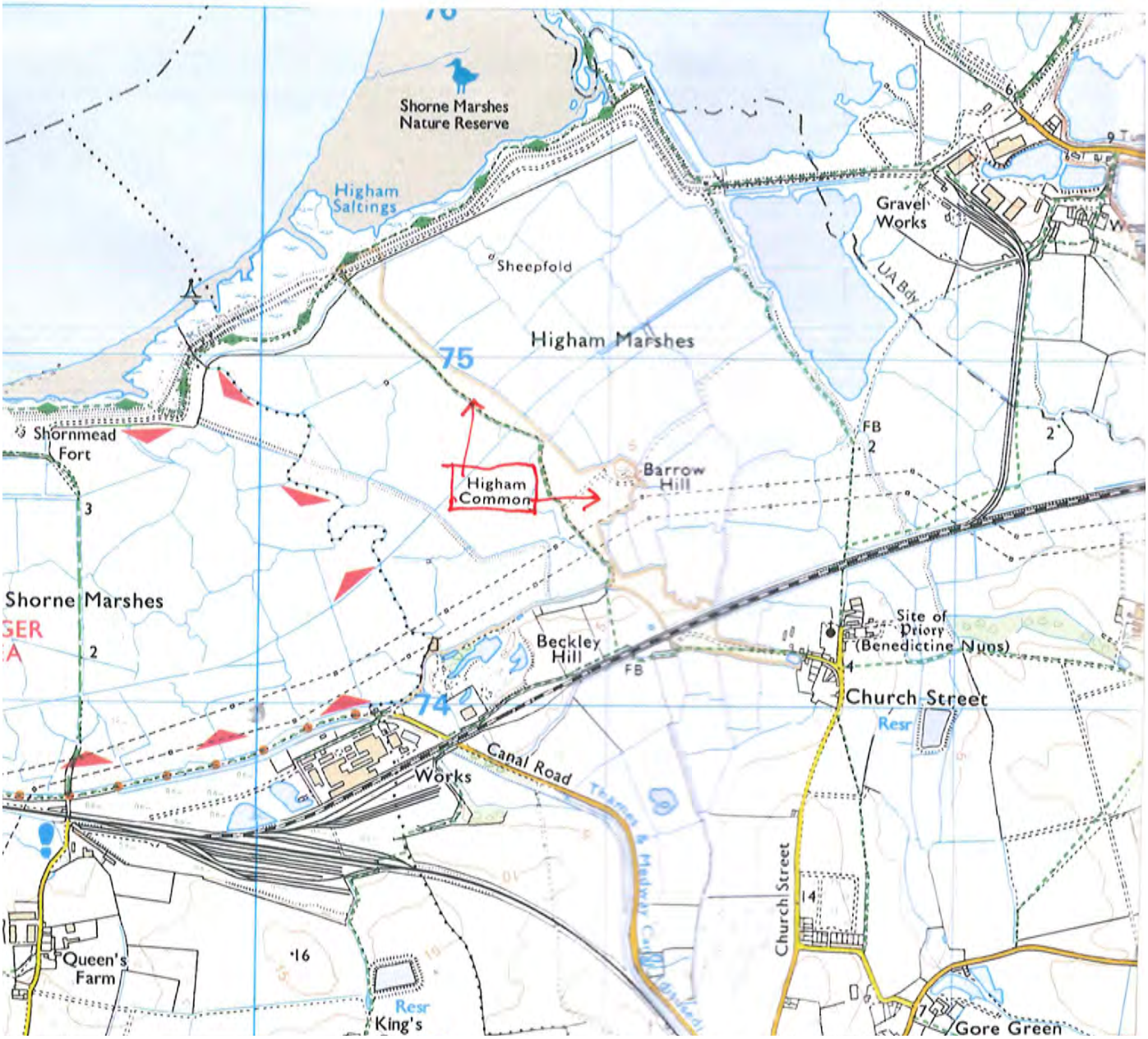


Figure 9

6.3 Buildings contributing to the Conservation Area Character

Church Street, Higham

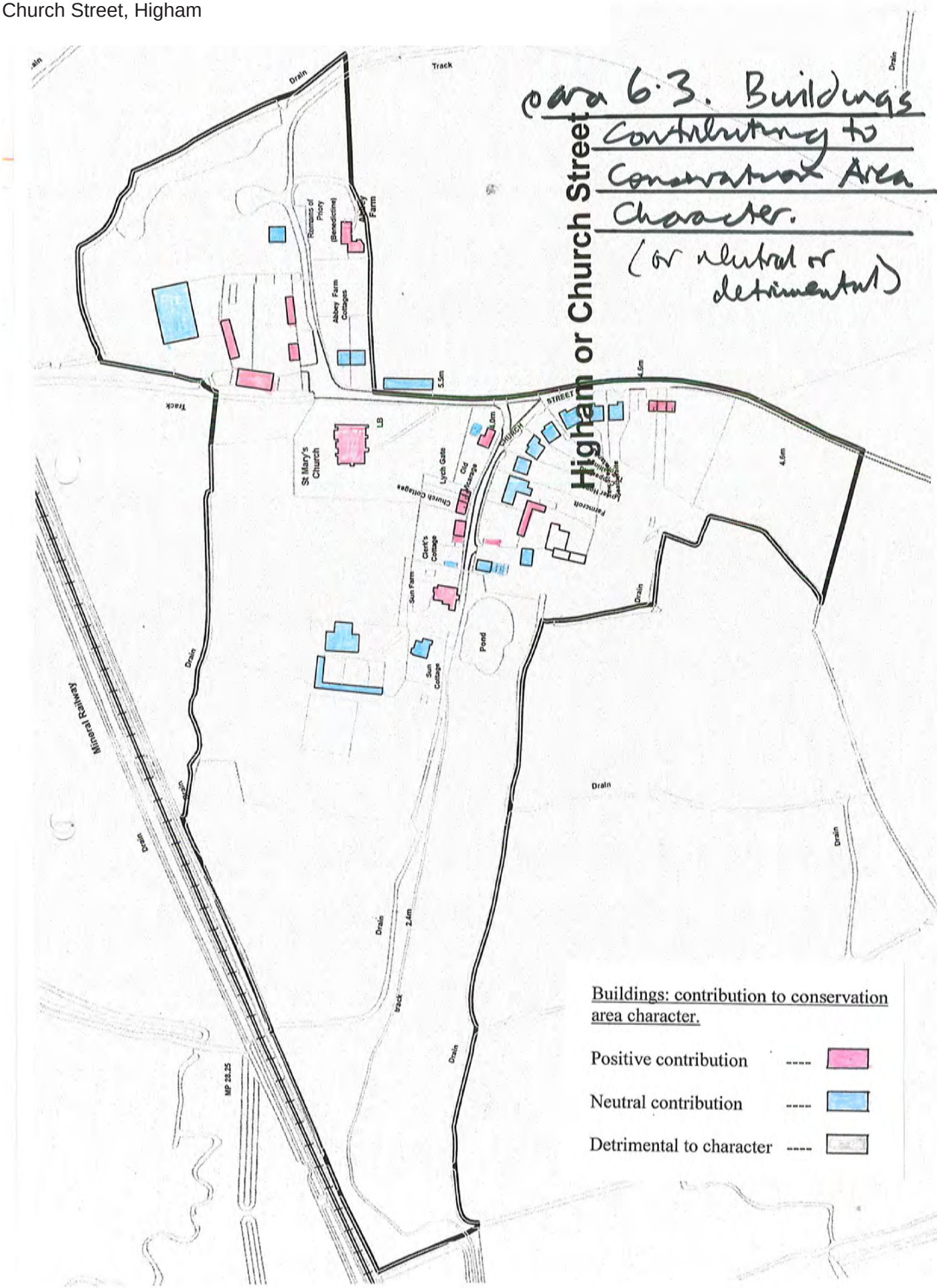


Figure 10

7.1 Village Character Areas
Church Street, Higham

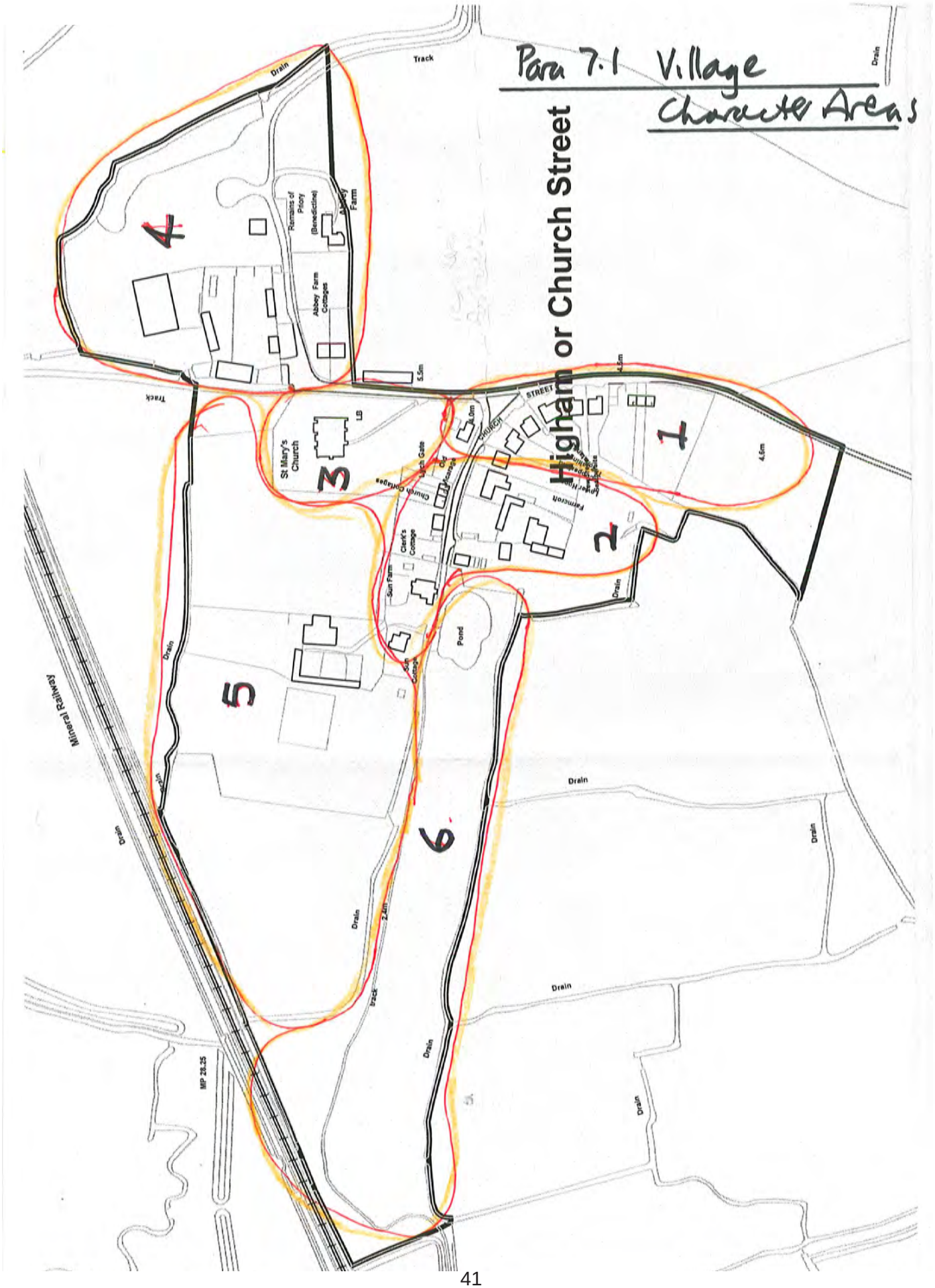


Figure 11

7.2 Spatial Character
Church Street, Higham



Features contributing positively to the spatial character to the conservation area. (omitting individual buildings).

- Agricultural land ----
- Graveyards ----
- Public open space ----
- Gardens ----
- Private roads, drives, car parks, farmyards ----
- Public footpaths, bridleways ----
- Walls ----
- Railings ----
- Fences ----
- Individual tree, (approximate position) ----
- Tree belts, screens, mature & semi mature ----
- Hedges ----
- Hedges, or undergrowth, intermixed with trees ----
- Pond ----
- Pond, dry ----
- Key space-forming building elevations ----

Features making a neutral contribution to the spatial character to the conservation area (omitting individual buildings).

- Public highways ----

Features contributing negatively to the spatial character to the conservation area (omitting individual buildings).

- Car park, private drive, commercial yards etc. ----
- Derelict/run down site ----
- Boundary feature ----

Figure 12

7.3 Landmarks, focal points and views

Church Street, Higham

