

Lavenham Village Study

Countryside Group



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Introduction

"Lavenham, an almost unspoilt example of a mediaeval town in England, is charmingly situated on the crown and side of an eminence, west of a pretty valley in which flows the Brad, a tributary of the River Brett," wrote Lingard Ranson in 1950. Substantial changes in the surrounding landscape have occurred since that date due mainly to altered farming systems, in particular the conversion of permanent pasture to arable use.

This report, as part of the Lavenham Village Study, has been directed towards providing information, discussion and recommendations on the landscape surrounding Lavenham with particular reference to the views into and out of the town. Comment is also made on the wider Parish landscape particularly in a historical context.

Lavenham is set within a gently undulating landscape comprising boulder clay soils over chalk, which has resulted in land of high agricultural quality. Hedges with many hedgerow trees and small areas of woodland break up the fields surrounding the town. Watercourses create the grain of the landscape separated by higher undulating land, which offer slopes to the streambeds. These winding watercourses are usually lined by densely wooded bank vegetation contributing to the varied patchwork of ecological community types as well as the visual appeal of the countryside.

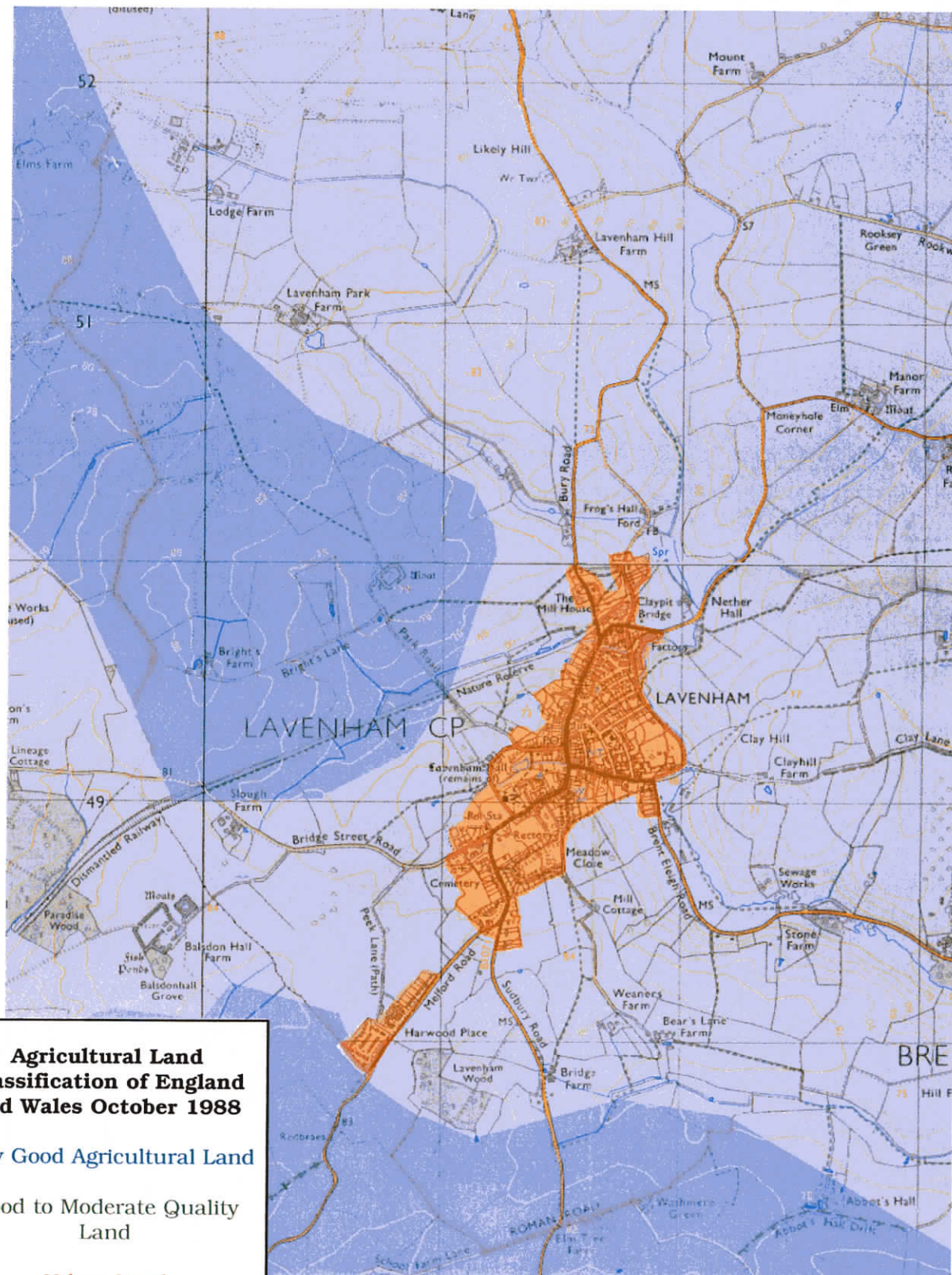
This is an attractive landscape of high visual quality and Lavenham's countryside setting contributes to the amenity value of the town. Major views are to be found looking into and out of parts of the town to the countryside beyond. Public footpaths connect the town with its surroundings and provide key visual and physical links between town and country. Therefore an essential part of the town itself is its relationship with the countryside. The landscape of the town is also important to the local environment, vegetation from gardens break up the built environment and this balances the variety of hard and soft character of the town and leads to the varied experience of the town landscape scene.

Land Classification and Agriculture

Chalky boulder clay of the Hanslope and Ragdale Series extends over the whole of the Parish being composed of a matrix of grey clay containing pieces of Lias and Kimmeridge limestone, flints and chalk fragments. Small outcrops of gravel deposits and chalky silts are to be found in the valley bottoms and brickearth emerges near Lower Road. The MAFF (1998) Agricultural Land Classification indicates that there are areas of Grades 2 and 3 soils in the Parish. Grade 2 (very good agricultural land) accounts for some 25% of the area with the remainder Grade 3 (good to moderate quality agricultural land). The higher quality land is situated north of the old railway line running towards Lavenham Park Farm and south of Bridge Farm (Fig. 1).

It is estimated that some 80% of the land is cropped with cereal production predominating within rotations which include sugar beet, field beans and oilseed rape. Permanent pasture makes up the remainder and is mainly situated adjacent to the town where it is used for sheep and horse grazing. A further area of grassland is situated at Lavenham Park Farm. (Fig. 2).

Agricultural Land Classification



Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales October 1988

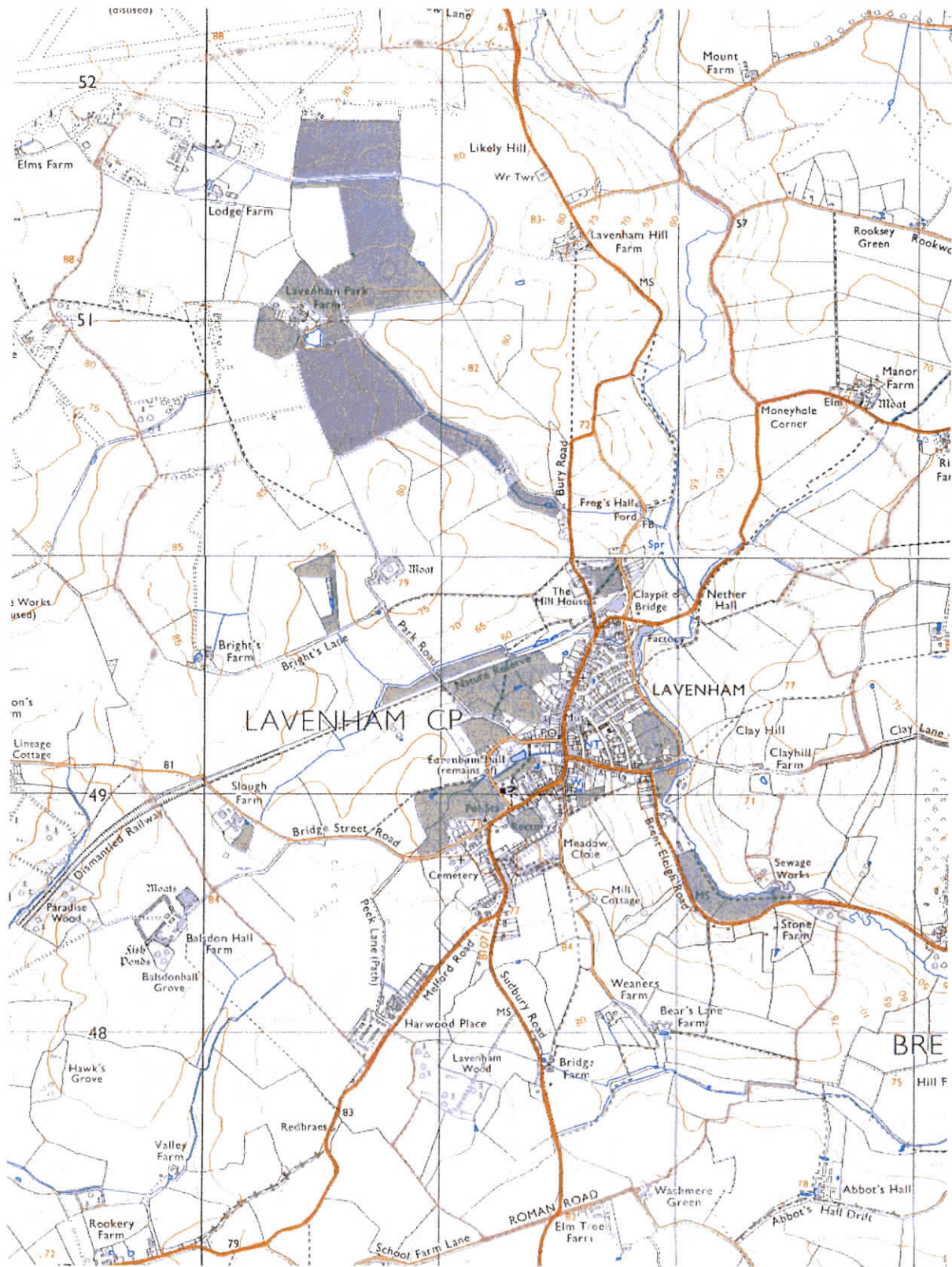
Very Good Agricultural Land

Good to Moderate Quality Land

Urban Land

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Existing Permanent Grassland



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Hedges and Boundaries

The landscape of the Parish is fortunate in that the field boundaries in the main are still adequately defined by hedges and small areas of woodland. The hedges would appear to have been planted during the enclosures but further work is required to ascertain the ages of particular hedges. For instance those lining Park Road have on average some five woody species and may be up to 500 years old (Andrews & Rebane 1994).

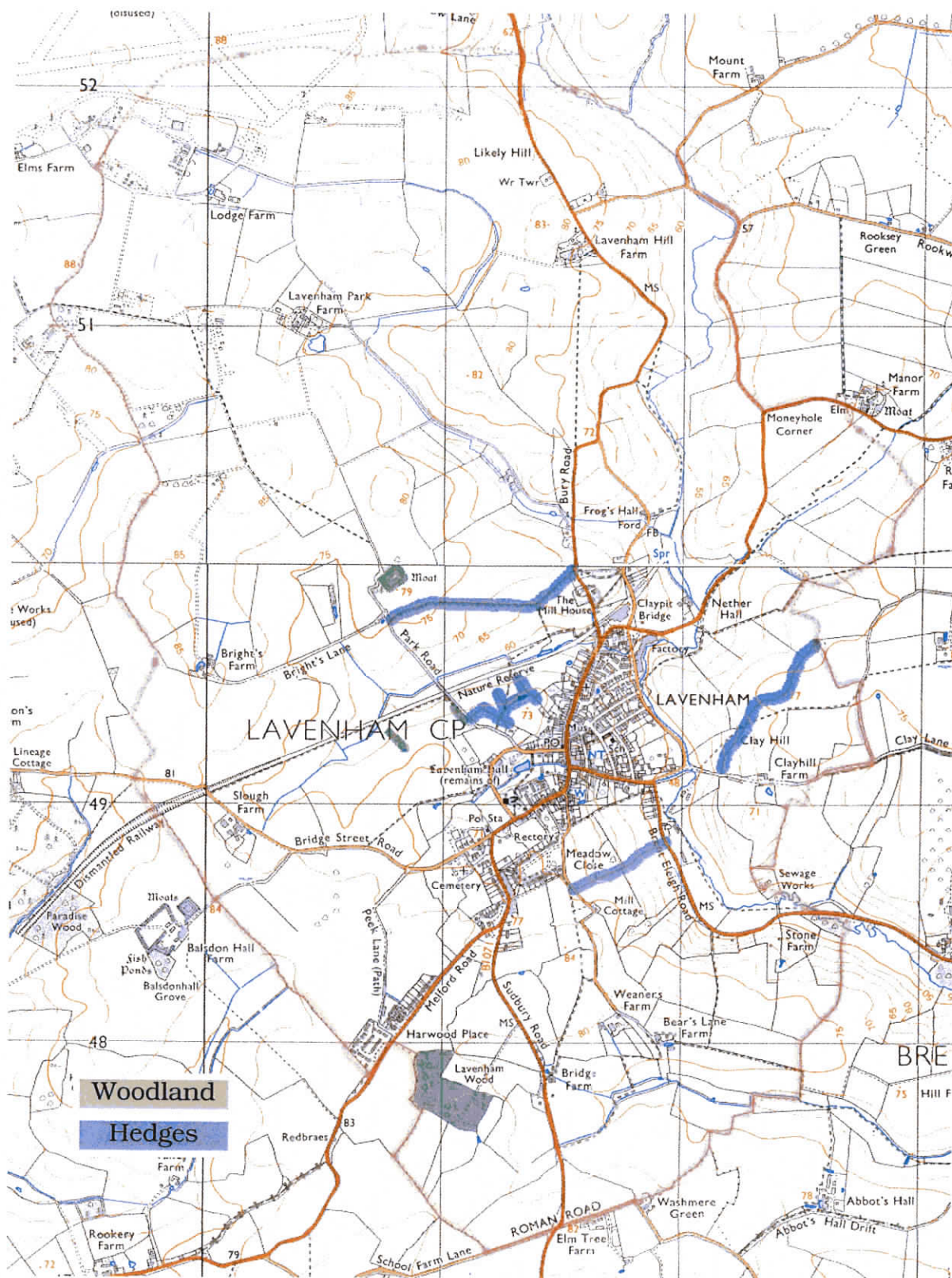
Whilst many of the hedges are in good condition some of the most significant from the landscape aspect require sympathetic management and in particular gapping up to maintain continuous lines which emphasise the land form. Some hedges appear to be cut too often and to a low level thus restricting their use by wildlife and reducing their value to the appearance of the landscape. A good hedge size is 1.4 m. tall and 1.2 m. wide at the top. Hedgerow trees form a significant element in the landscape and their management requires consideration. Mature individual trees have considerable value in both landscape and conservation terms. Two Black Poplars have been identified in the Parish.

The small areas of woodland are valuable landscape features tying in the landform to hedge lines and framing viewpoints. Many of these blocks of woodland require management and in some instances under planting to ensure their continued existence.

(Fig.3) identifies hedge lines and woodland that are important in terms of the landscape views into and out of Lavenham.

Hedges and Woodland

Visible in main views out of and into Lavenham



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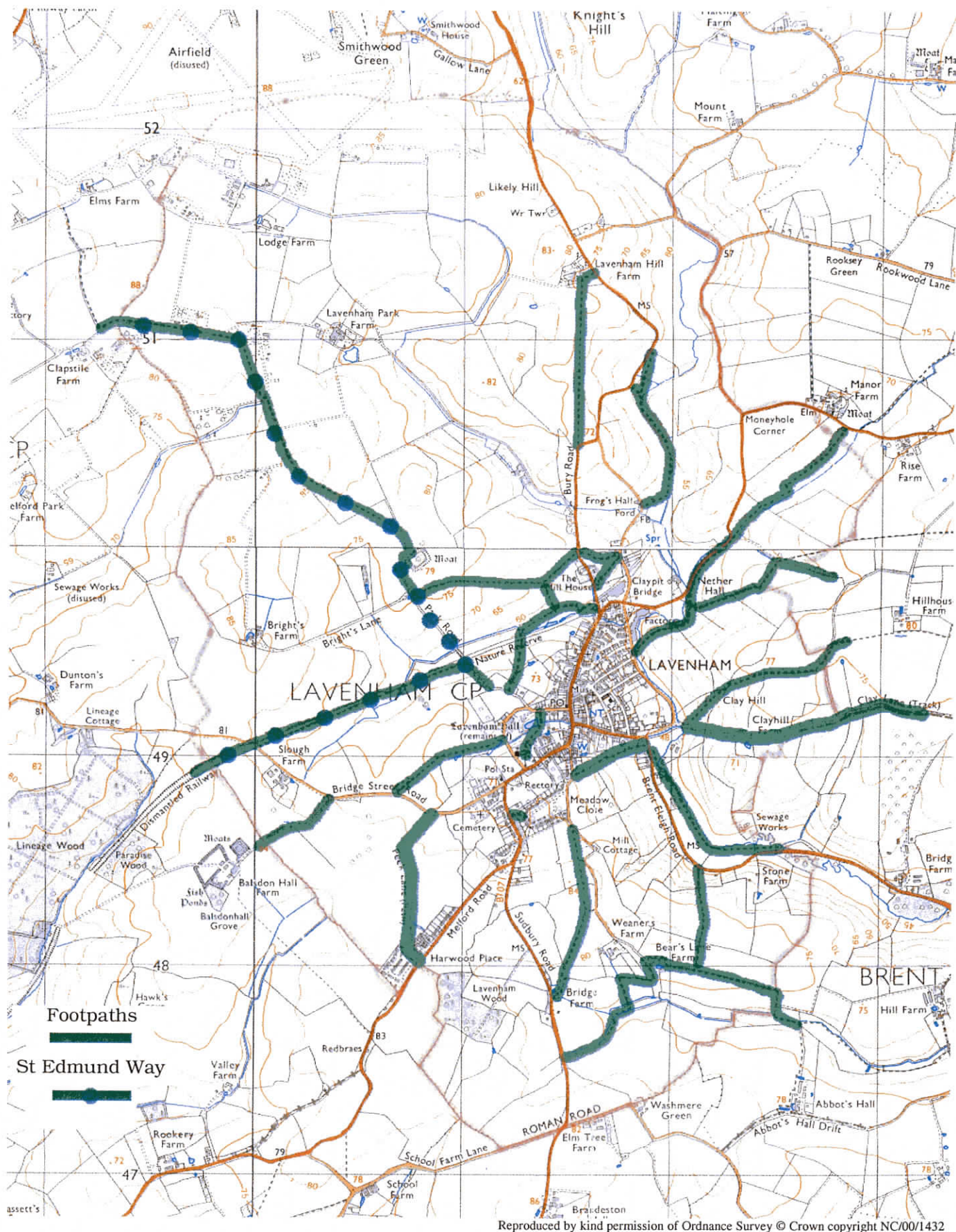
Footpaths

Lavenham has an excellent network of public footpaths including the Railway Walk which is managed by the Suffolk County Council. Views of Lavenham, which include the dominant church tower, are a material element in the pleasure obtained by those using the paths (Fig.4). The St Edmunds Way, a cross Suffolk footpath which runs from Flatford to Brandon (88 miles) utilises the Railway Walk from Long Melford to Park Road then turns north-west and leaves the Parish west of Lavenham Park Farm.

Most of the existing footpath network is in fair to good condition, however some sections of the Railway Walk urgently require maintenance particularly improved drainage. In addition action needs to be taken to separate horse traffic and pedestrians along certain lengths so that the surface is maintained. A section of Peek Lane, which runs from Bridge Street to Green Willows, requires considerable work undertaken particularly at the back of the SCC Highways Depot where pollution appears to have killed off the hedge and trees. The footpath network is well signposted.

The continuing maintenance of the footpaths and in particular the Railway Walk is essential in terms of value to Lavenham residents and visitors to the town.

Footpaths



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Scheduled Sites in the Parish

County Wildlife Sites (CWS)

Lavenham Railway Walk ^(Fig.5)

Description of features and map Appendix A.

Lavenham Wood ^(Fig.5)

Description of features and map Appendix B.

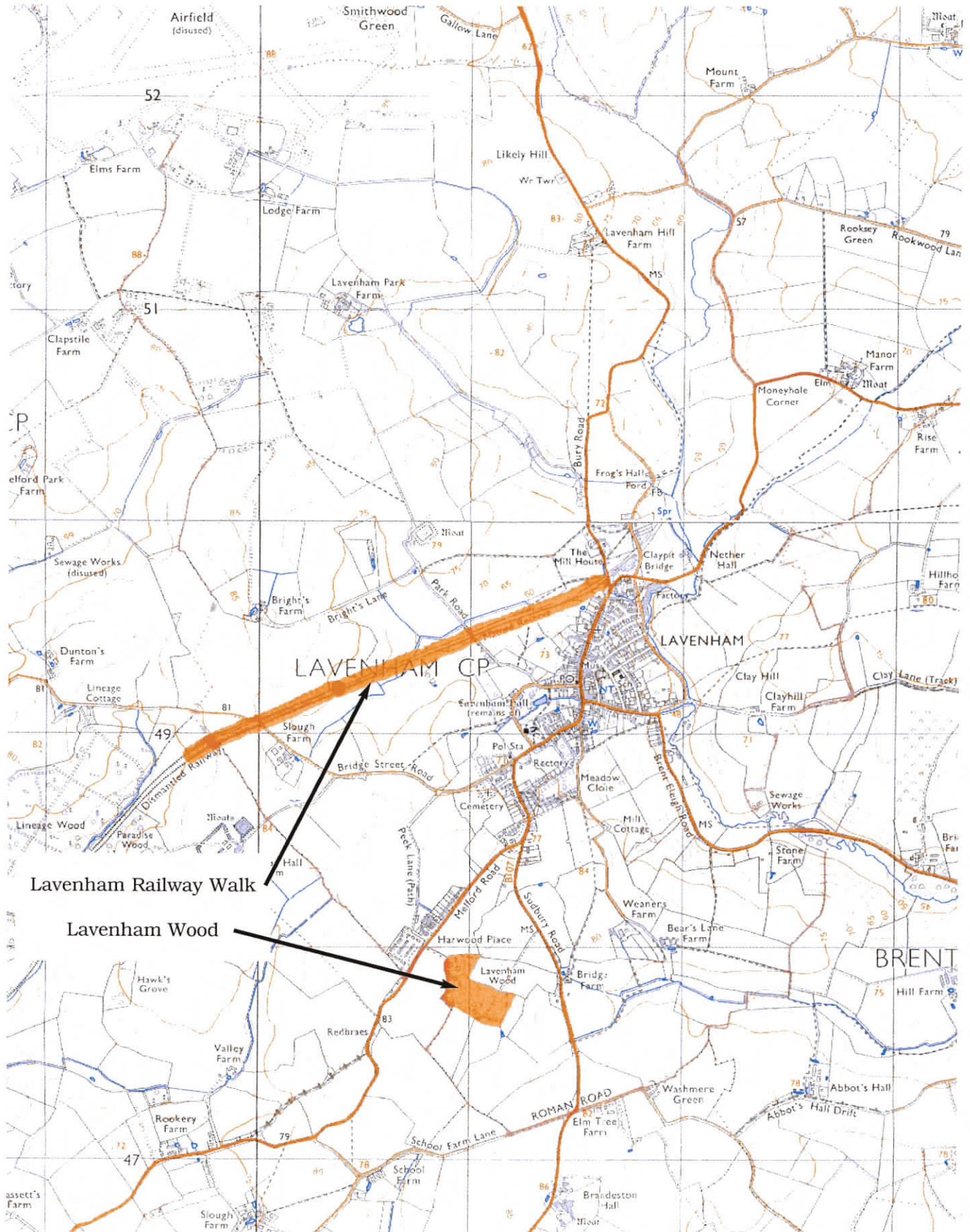
Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

Lineage Wood SSSI extends along the Railway Walk and joins the CWS.

Special Landscape Areas (SLA)

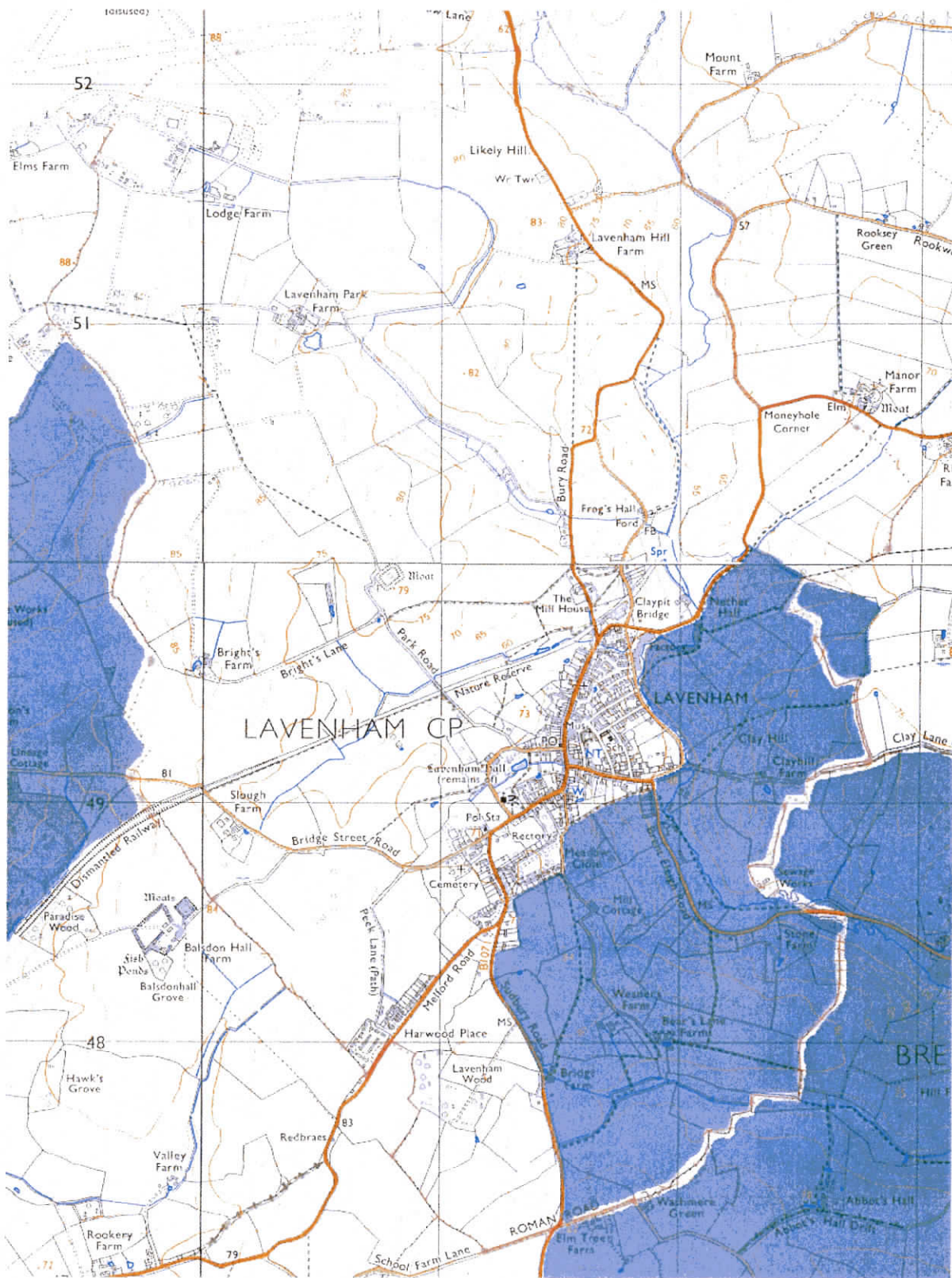
Designated by the Babergh District Council the Brett SLA covers the south east of the Parish ^(Fig.6). It is to be noted that the Stour Valley SLA adjoins the Parish boundary to the west.

County Wildlife Sites



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Special Landscape Areas



Historical features in the Parish

Second World War Pill Boxes

11 Pill Boxes are situated within the Parish (Fig.7). These formed part of the Eastern Command Line defence during the Second World War, (Dymond & Martin 1999).

Manor Moat

Site of De Veres' Manor House (Fig.7), (Lingard Ranson 1950). It is to be noted that Leigh Alston considers this to be the site of the De Veres' Hunting Lodge.

Saxon Boundary (Acton Will)

The present Parish boundary follows the ancient Saxon line from Lineage Wood past Balsdon Hall Farm to near School Farm Lane, (Fig.7), (Scarf 1972)

Mediaeval Deer Park Boundary

Follows the Parish boundary north of Bright's Farm to the disused airfield (Fig.7). It is of interest to note that apart from a section on Clay Hill, the Parish boundary appears to be identical to that in 1597, (Melford Estate Maps 1580 and 1613, Alpheton Parish Perambulation 1688, Lavenham Parish Perambulation 1596).

Roman Road

The southern Parish boundary follows the line of a Roman road along School Farm Lane, (Fig.7).

Palaeolithic Site

Finds of hippopotamus tusks, rhinoceros molars, deer teeth and the caudal vertebrae of either elephant or rhinoceros. (Wymer 1985) adjacent to Lower Road.

Bright's Drift

The Drift is the turning on the left at the top of Park Road and is probably the "Oxford Way" mentioned in sundry deeds, (Lingard Ranson 1950).

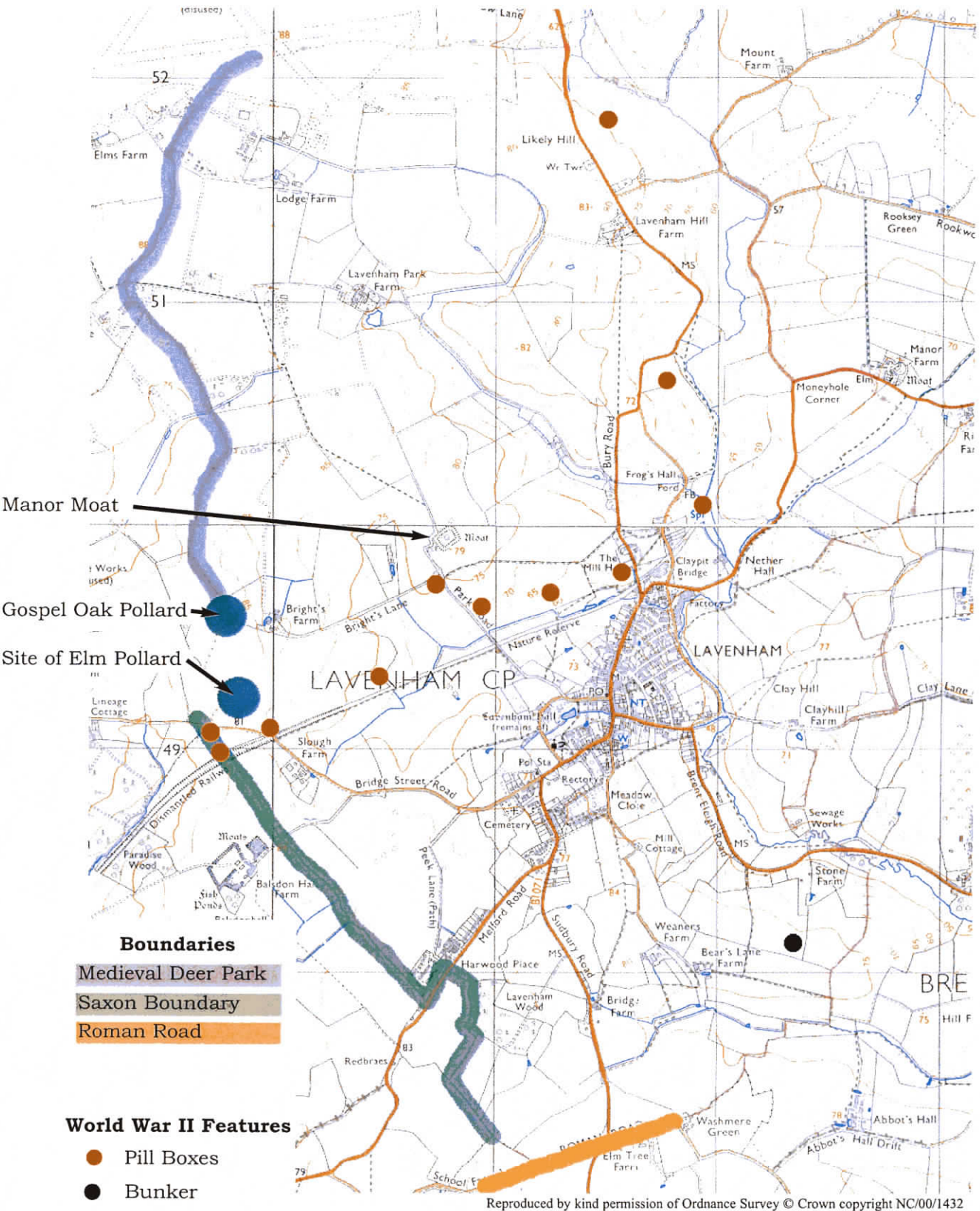
Lodge Farm

Find of Roman Urn containing silver denarii of 13 different emperors, (Lingard Ranson 1950).

Sites of Elm Pollard and Gospel Oak

It is likely that these pollards defined the Parish boundary in the mediaeval period ^(Fig.7). The Gospel Oak (Map of Long Melford 1820) may well have played a part in the Parish Perambulation. It is thought the site of the Elm Pollard is shown on the Great Eastern Railway Plan.

Historical Features



Countryside Policies in Local District Plan

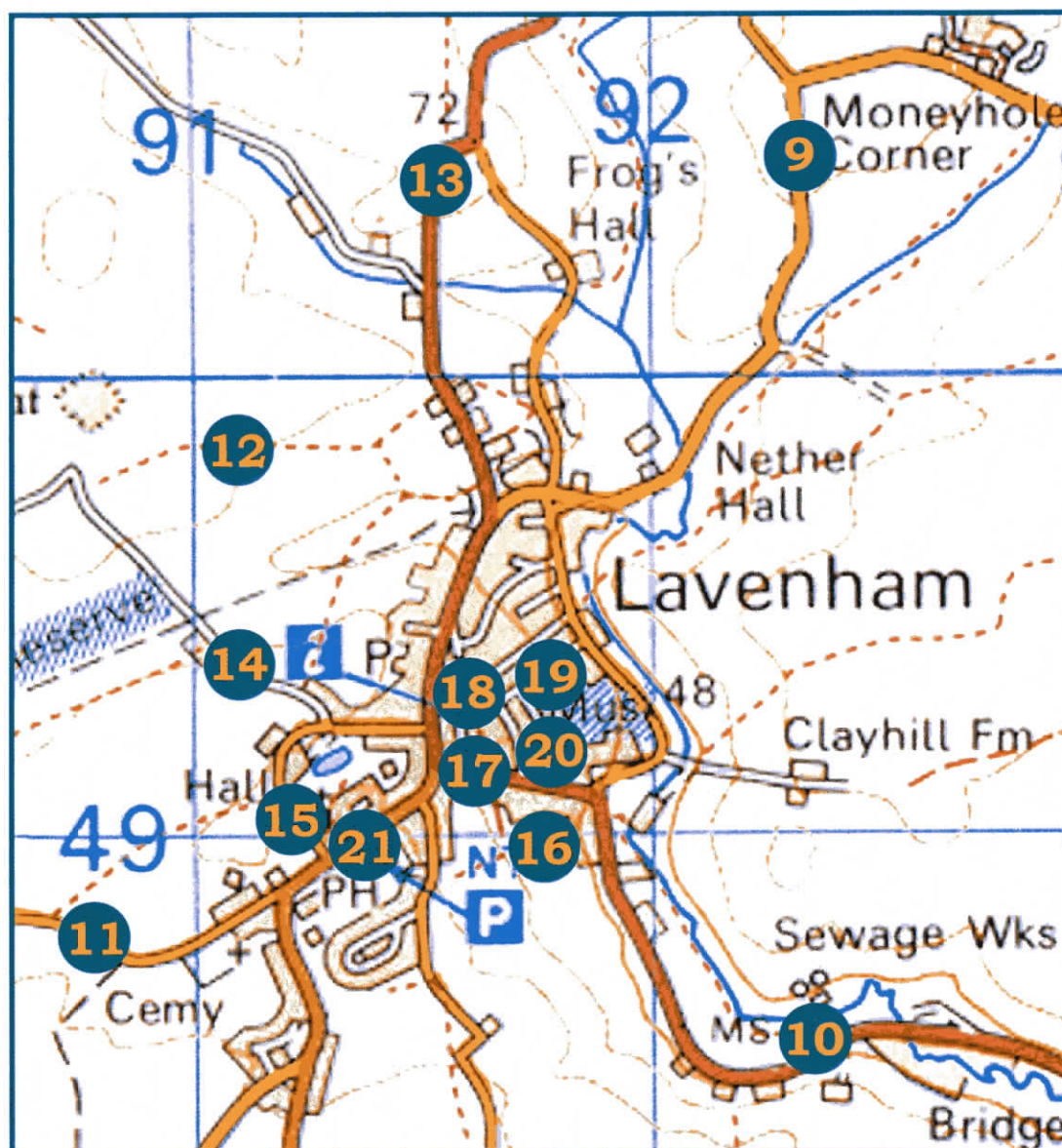
The current Babergh Local Plan, Alteration No. 2 Issues Report produced January 1999 covers, under Section 8, the Countryside and Rural Economy. Mention is made that a Countryside Strategy non-statutory document is to be produced being based on a landscape assessment, which will also reassess the extent of Special Landscape Areas. The current Local Plan is presently under review and a revised Draft will be available for public consultation in June 2001. Included in this consultation exercise will be a Draft Countryside Policy paper embodying the former Strategy document.

Aspects of Section 8 of the existing Local Plan which are of particular importance to the environs of Lavenham are :

Issue 26	Special Landscape Areas
Issue 28	Trees and Woodland
Issue 29	Hedgerows
Issue 30	Nature Conservation
Issue 31	Biodiversity
Issue 32	Agricultural Land
Issue 34	Buildings in the Countryside

When commenting on the revised Draft Plan in 2001 aspects such as the merging of the SLAs, improvements to the composition of significant hedge lines and woodland will need to be addressed in the context of Lavenham. A Countryside Fund is proposed by Babergh DC and this may in the future assist with necessary work to identified hedges and woods. Partnership proposals for environmental work are to be encouraged and grant aid should be sought for landscape improvements and wildlife habitats.

Key to the Views into and out of Lavenham

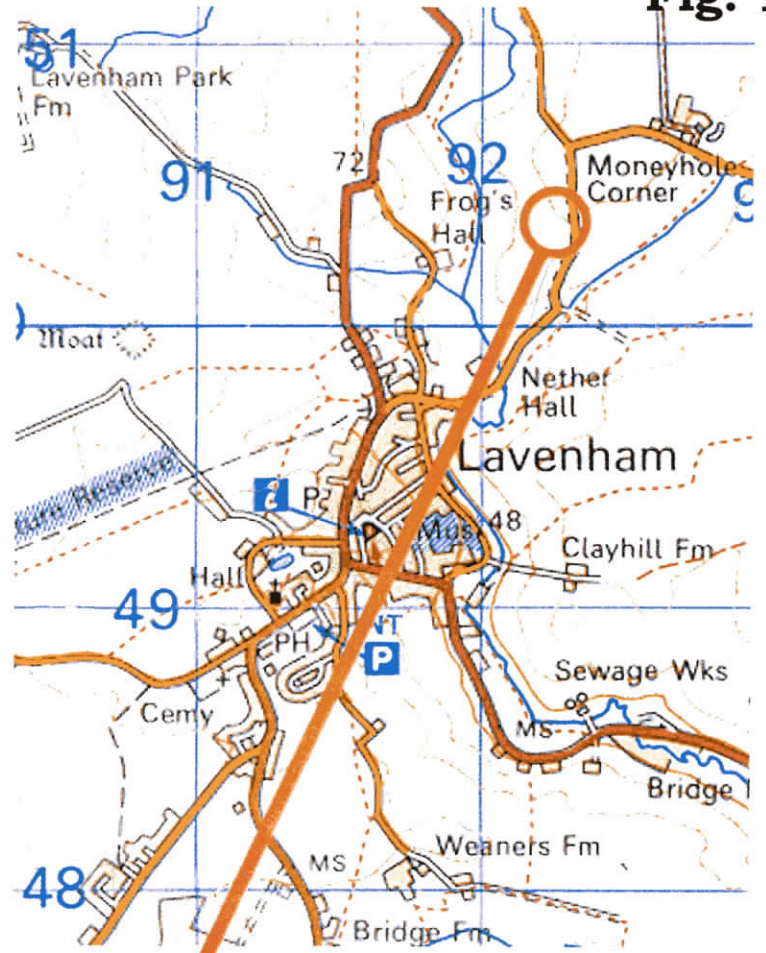


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- Fig: 9 View from Moneyhole corner
- Fig: 10 View from Brent Eleigh Road
- Fig: 11 View from Bridge Street Road
- Fig: 12 View from the Footpath North West of Village
- Fig: 13 View from Bury Road
- Fig: 14 View from Park Road
- Fig: 15 View from Church West Door
- Fig: 16 View from The Lolls
- Fig: 17 View from Water Street
- Fig: 18 View from Prentice Street
- Fig: 19 View from Bolton Street
- Fig: 20 View from Shilling Street
- Fig: 21 View from Church Street

Fig: 9

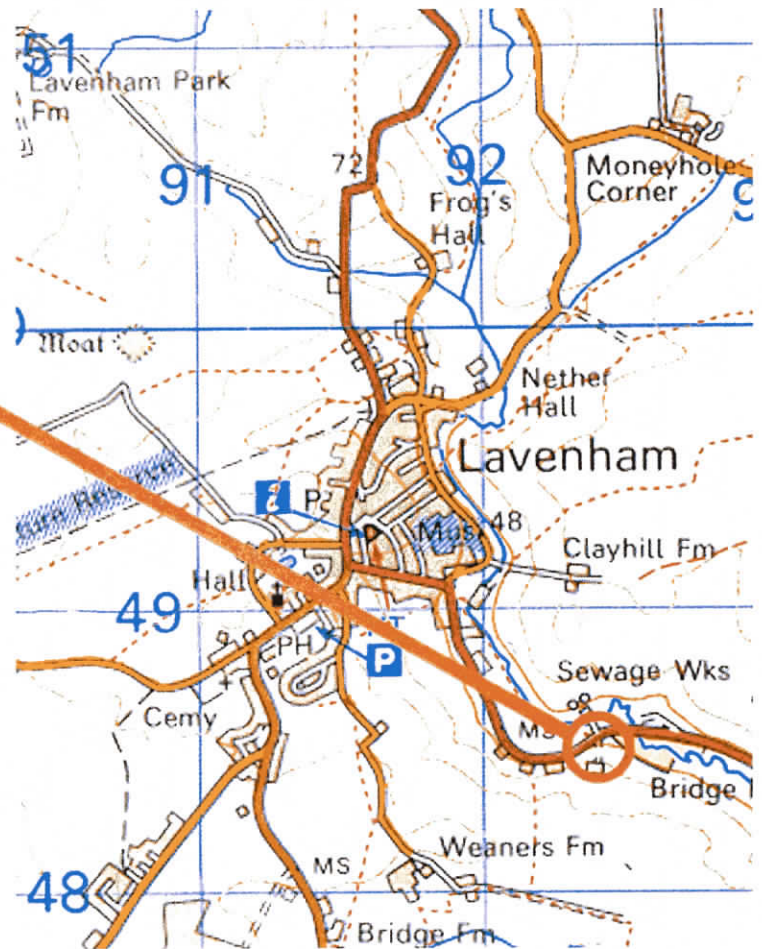
View from:
Moneyhole Corner



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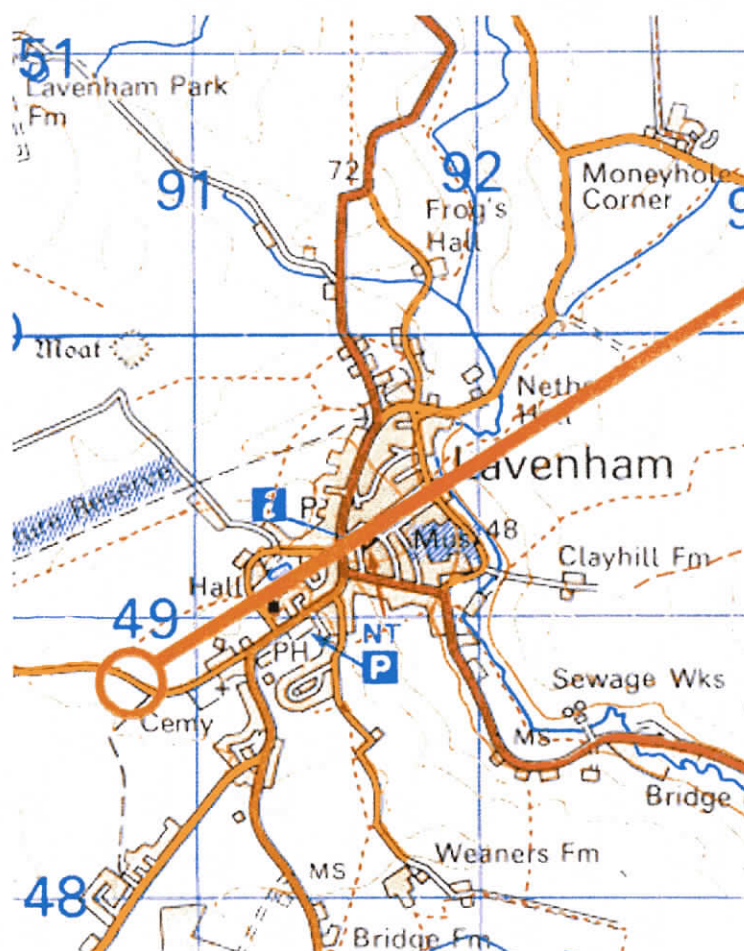


Fig: 10



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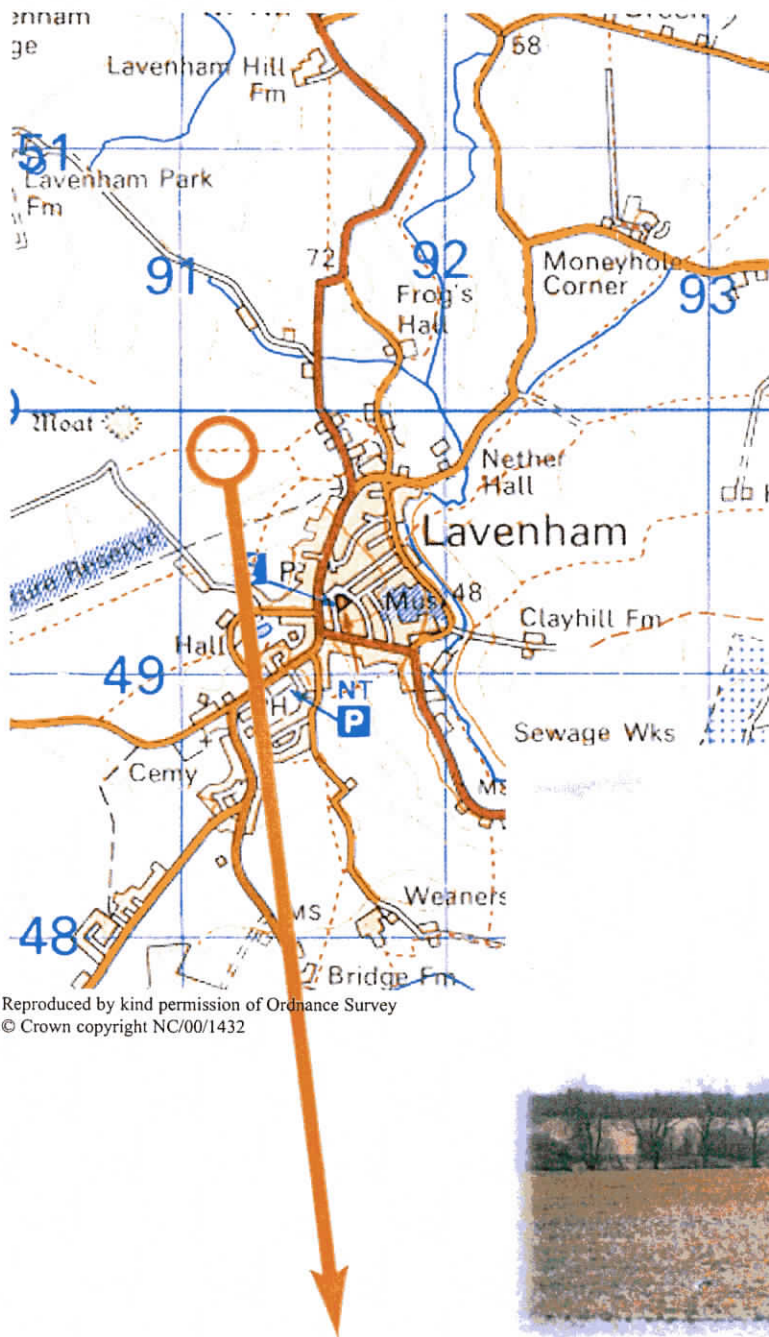
View from:
Brent Eleigh Road



View from:

Bridge Street Road

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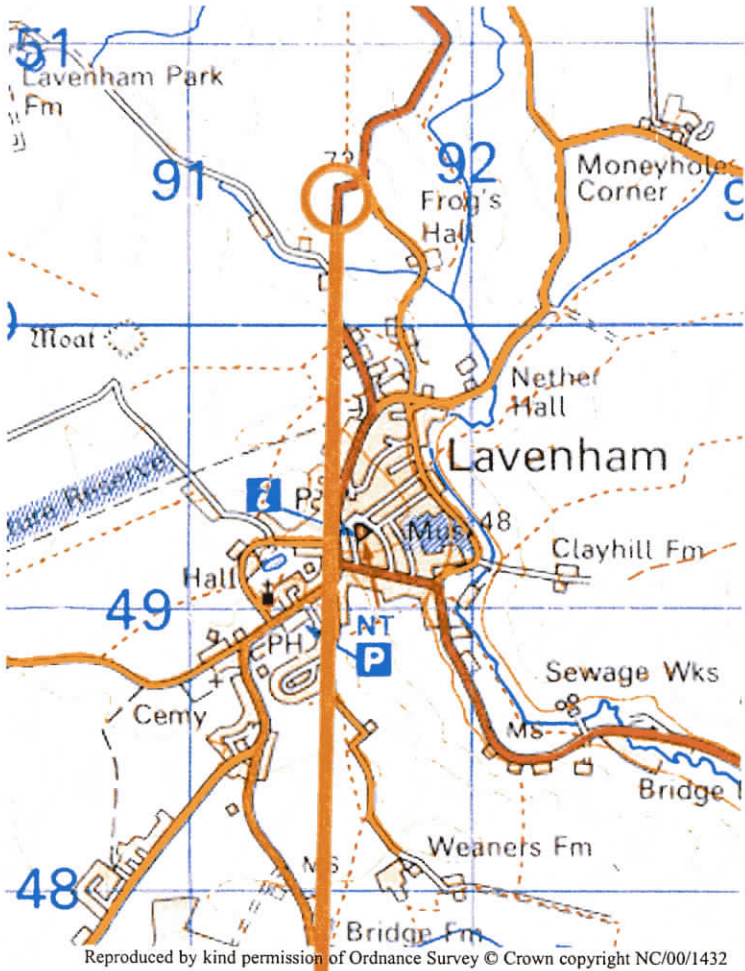


View from:

Footpath North West of Village

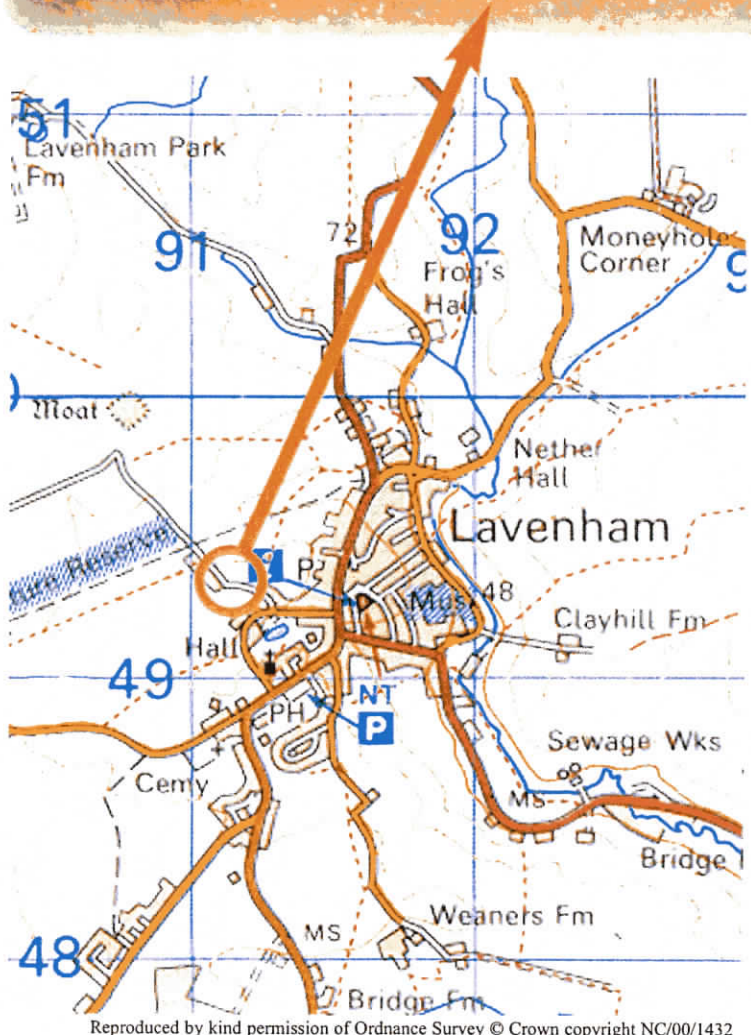


Fig: 13



View from:
Bury Road



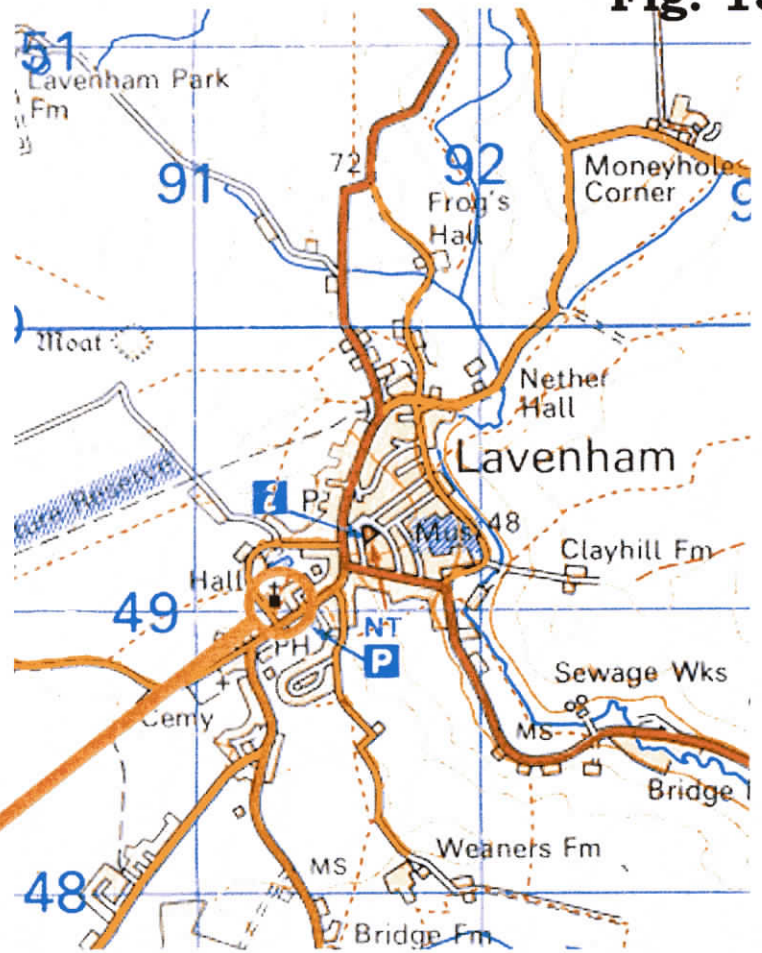


View from:
Park Road

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Fig: 15

View from:
Church West Door

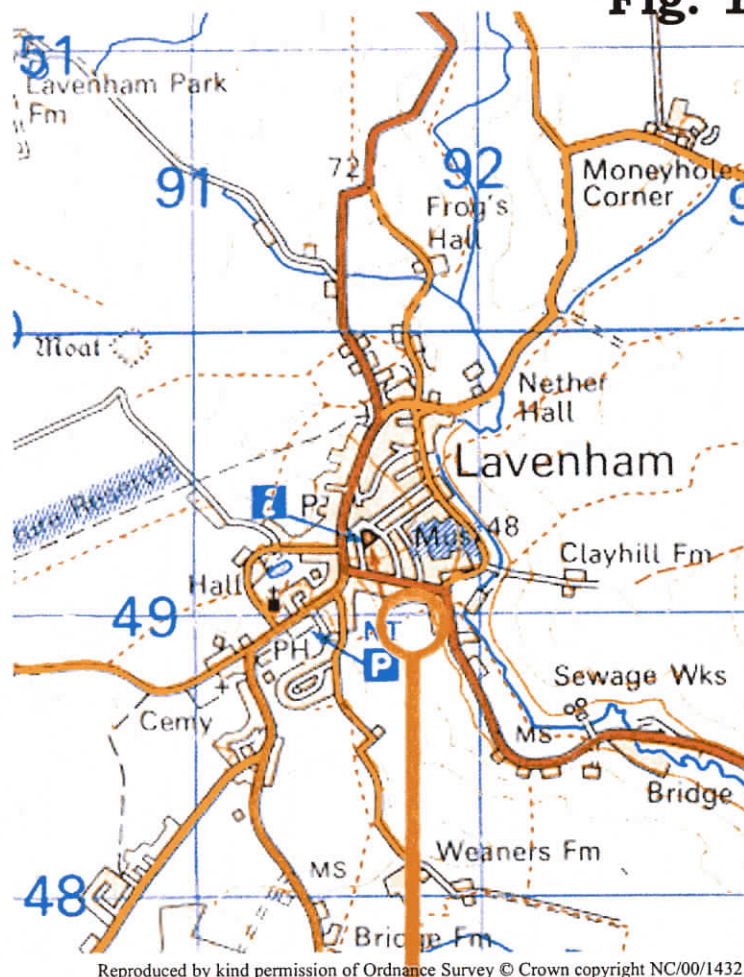


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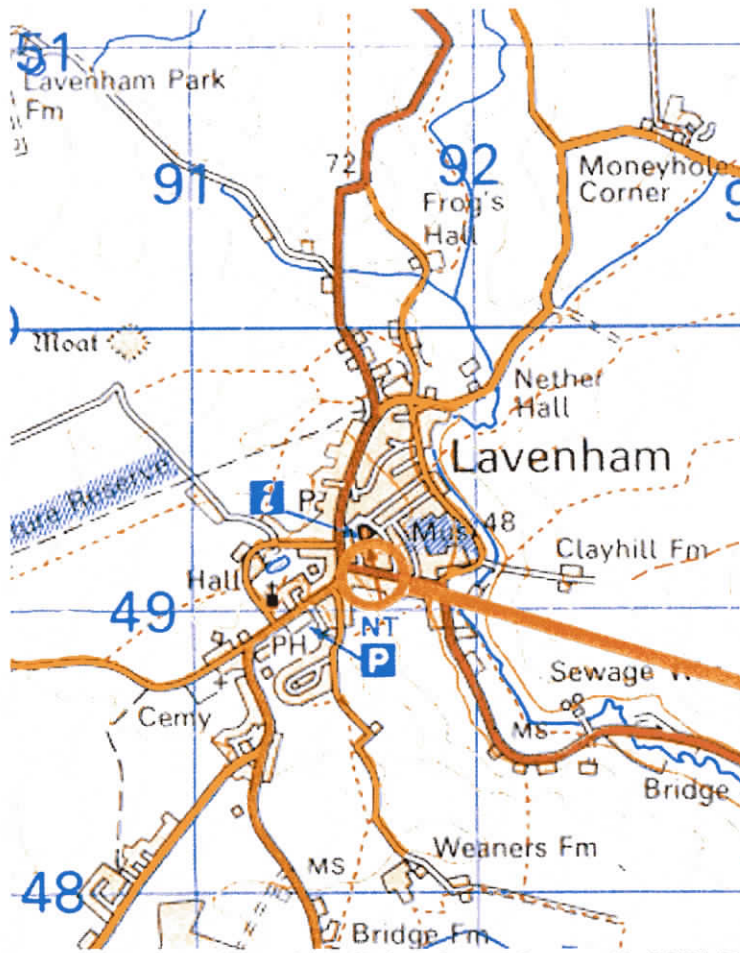
Fig: 16

View from:
The Lolls



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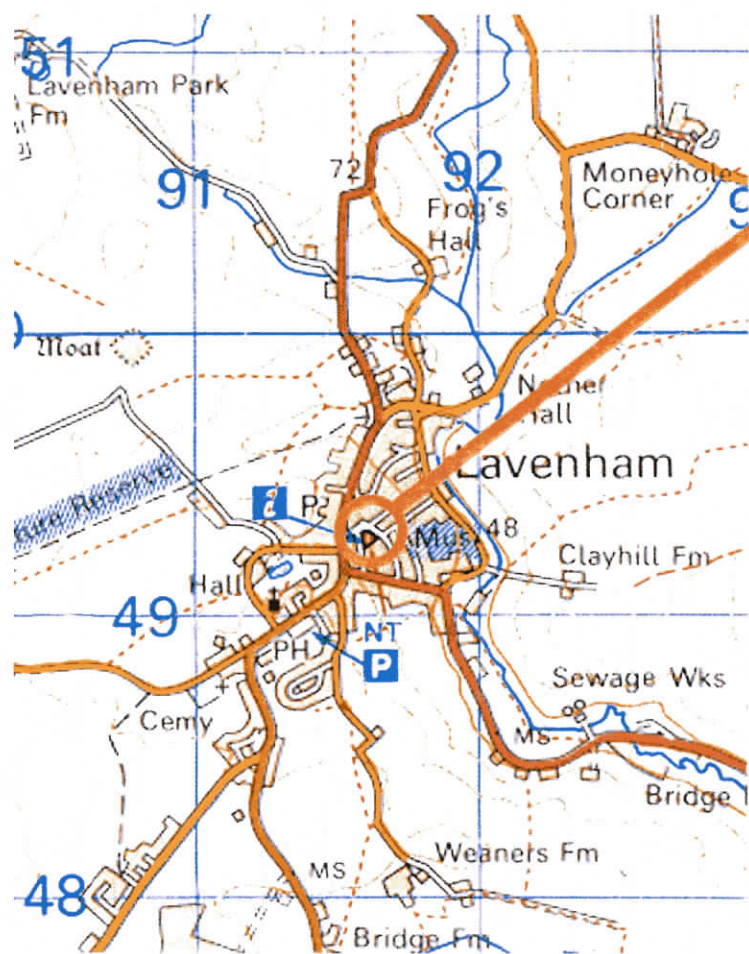




View from:
Water Street

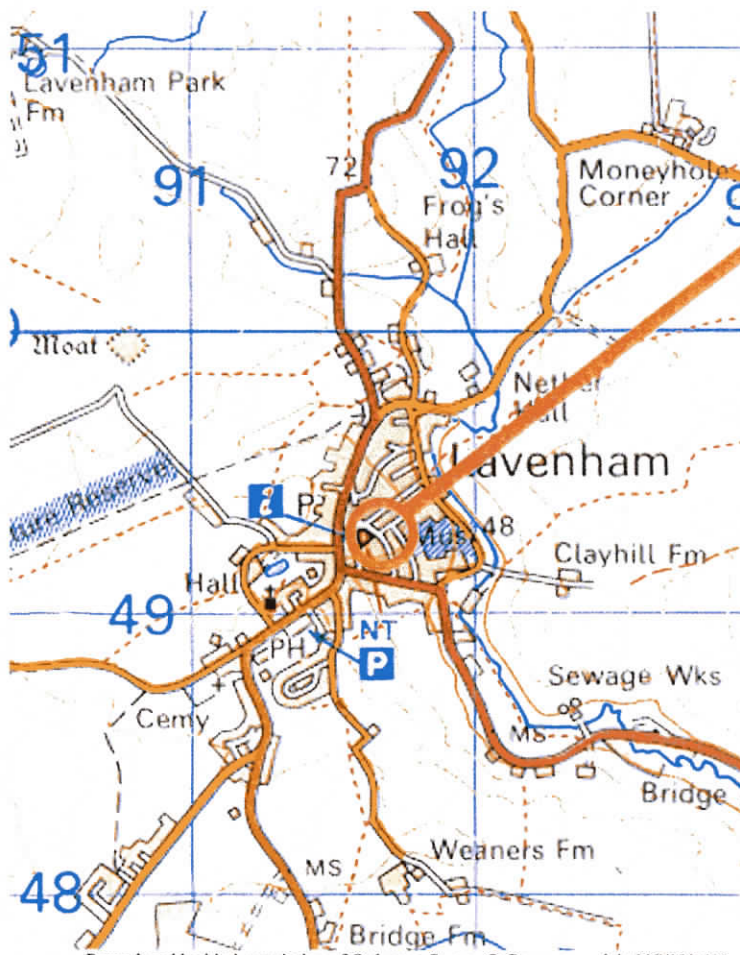
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View from:
Prentice Street

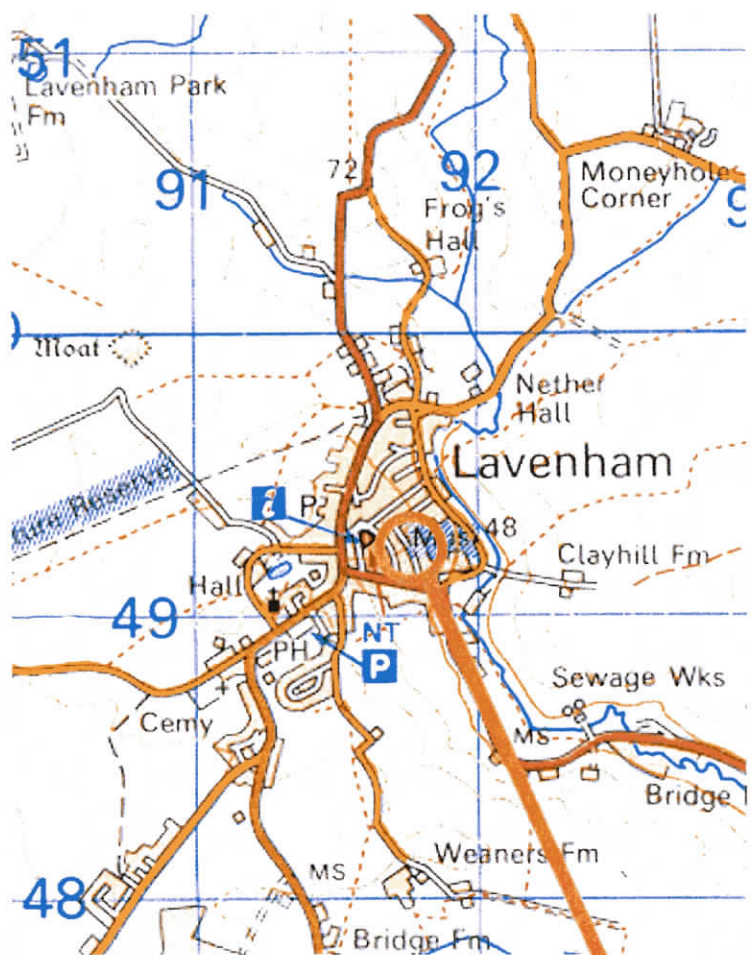
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View from:
Bolton Street

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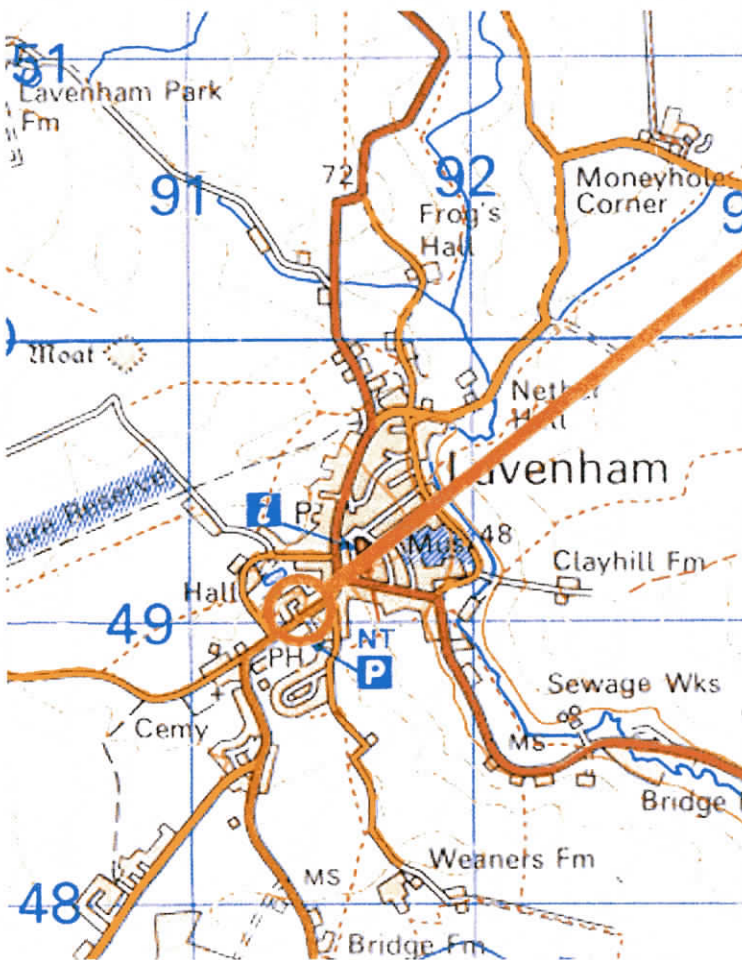
Fig: 20



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View from:
Shilling Street





View from:
Church Street

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Discussion

The importance of the countryside surrounding Lavenham should not be underestimated. It provides the setting for, and the remarkable views into and out from the town. Changes over the last 40 years in agricultural production techniques have altered the landscape to the extent that the remaining permanent pasture (Fig.2), hedges and woodland should now be highly valued. This particularly relates to the identified hedges and woods (Fig.3), and landowners should be encouraged to improve and maintain them together with retaining all the existing permanent pasture which includes the distinct grass fields adjacent to Lavenham. In this context the provision of Barn Owl nesting boxes should be considered.

Closely associated with the countryside is the excellent and extensive network of footpaths (Fig.4) which generally are well maintained and signposted. Of concern however are sections of the Railway Walk, which require remedial work, particularly improved drainage, the provision of wheelchair access to a part of the Walk should be considered. Peek Lane also requires attention to the surface and improved drainage. The SCC Depot is extremely unsightly and would benefit from some landscaping within its boundary fence. Pollution, possibly from the Depot has affected the nearby trees and hedge.

The County Wildlife Sites (Fig.5) are well documented. The Railway Walk is used extensively by the public and it is suggested that additional wildlife interpretation boards would be helpful. Lavenham Wood is privately owned and perhaps annual open days led by a conservationist could be arranged to view the fauna and flora.

The Special Landscape Areas are shown in Fig.6 and it is suggested that a strong case exists for joining the two areas that would then include the whole of Lavenham. The intervening landscape is of high quality and justifies inclusion.

The historical features in the Parish (Fig.7) are of value in the local context. It is considered that any future actions which may affect them, i.e. changes to the Saxon boundary, should be fully researched before works are carried out.

A case could be made for the Pill Boxes to be considered for Listing and it is suggested that the historical features are given greater publicity in the Parish.

Consideration should be given to improving the visual aspect of the River Brad but not to the extent of reducing its wildlife value.

It is essential that when the revised Draft Local Plan is available for consultation in June 2001 the Countryside Policy paper is studied in depth in relation to the Parish as a whole. Of particular importance are the countryside elements outlined in this document that relate to the town.

The views into and out of Lavenham (Figs. 8-21) are a notable element of enjoyment for residents and visitors. Care needs to be taken to preserve and enhance the countryside elements, which are a significant part of the identified views. Future development should not be allowed to disrupt the harmony of these views.

Recommendations

1. The permanent grassland fields adjacent to Lavenham should be preserved. They are an essential element of the views into and out of the town. B 11
2. The identified hedges and woodland are also an important element of the views and every endeavour should be made both to retain them and improve their visual contribution to the landscape. Individual hedgerow trees contribute to the landscape and should be retained. B 12
3. Maintenance work is required to the Railway Walk and it is suggested that provision is made for a length to be accessible by people with disabilities. Peek Lane also requires maintenance. The SCC should be encouraged to improve the appearance of their Depot and take action to prevent any pollution runoff. B 13
4. It is suggested that additional wildlife interpretation boards on the Railway Walk County Wildlife Site would be of benefit to visitors. B 14
5. A strong recommendation is made that Babergh DC consider joining the two Special Landscape Areas to the east and west to include the countryside around Lavenham, which has high landscape value. B 15
6. The historic features in the Parish that do not benefit from official classification should be recognised and researched before any works that may affect them are carried out. It is suggested that the Parish magazine should contribute more towards public awareness of these features.
7. It is recommended that action should be taken to improve the visual aspect of the River Brad with due regard for the fauna and flora.

- B 10
8. The exceptional views into and out of Lavenham should be retained and it is essential that no development or significant land use change be allowed to detract from them.
 9. Considerable benefit would accrue from identified work in the countryside being undertaken and it is suggested that local volunteers could be organised to carry out such work with the agreement of the landowners.

Acknowledgements

The assistance given by Lorna Waller, Graham Pattrick, John Gurling and John Knight is gratefully acknowledged.

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C O U N T Y W I L D L I F E S I T E S

SITE SHEET - BABERGH DISTRICT

Site Name: Lavenham Railway Walk Parish: Lavenham

Grid Ref: TL 900491-TL 916497 Map No: 94NW

Area: -

Description of Features:

A section of the disused railway line which runs north west of Lavenham and through Lineage Wood has been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The remainder of the dismantled line which extends from the SSSI boundary ie Bridge Street road bridge northwards to the A1141 road bridge is also of high conservation value and has therefore been designated as a County Wildlife Site.

The embankments of the old line are colonised in part by species-rich dense scrub, mainly field maple, hazel, bramble and dogwood. These areas provide valuable breeding habitat for woodland birds in an intensively farmed landscape. Small glades which are present amongst the scrub support a good range of plants which require less shaded conditions for example perforate St John's-wort, bird's-foot trefoil and the rare common cow-wheat.

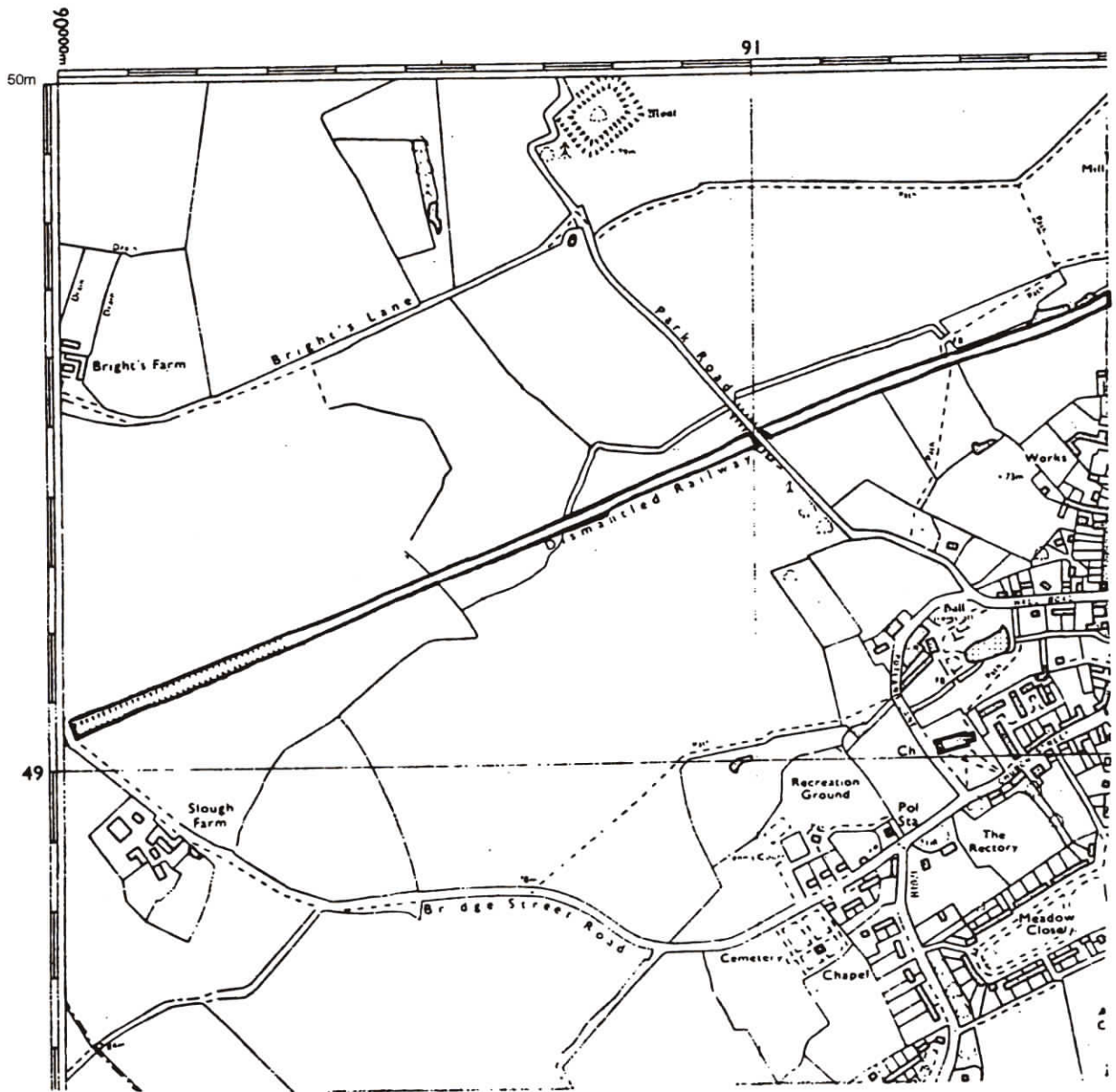
In addition, this site is also of importance for invertebrate conservation, particularly butterflies. The sunny glades provide sheltered conditions and there is an abundance of food plants for example bramble, knapweed and bird's-foot trefoil. A total of sixteen species has been recorded including a number of uncommon species for example, speckled wood butterfly.

This section of the disused railway line is owned and managed by Suffolk County Council and is promoted as Lavenham Walk. It is designated as a public footpath and is well used by local people.

SITE BOUNDARY MAP

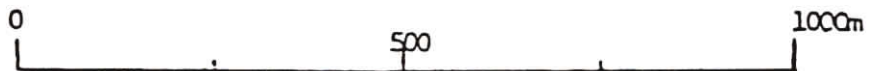
SITE NAME: Lavenham Railway Walk

GRID REFERENCE: TL 900491 - TL 916497



SCALE:

1: 10,000



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C O U N T Y W I L D L I F E S I T E S

S I T E S H E E T - B A B E R G H D I S T R I C T

Site Name: Lavenham Wood

Parish: Lavenham

Grid Ref: TL 910478

Map No: 94NW

Area: 6.0ha

Description of Features:

Lavenham Wood, an ancient wood listed in English Nature's Ancient Woodland Inventory, is set amidst arable fields to the south of Lavenham. The wood still retains a sinuous boundary which is a characteristic feature of medieval woods.

The semi-natural structure of the wood was destroyed in the 1930's when a large proportion of the wood was cleared and replanted with oaks and conifers. Since that time, the wood has been neglected with the exception of the thinning of some planted timber.

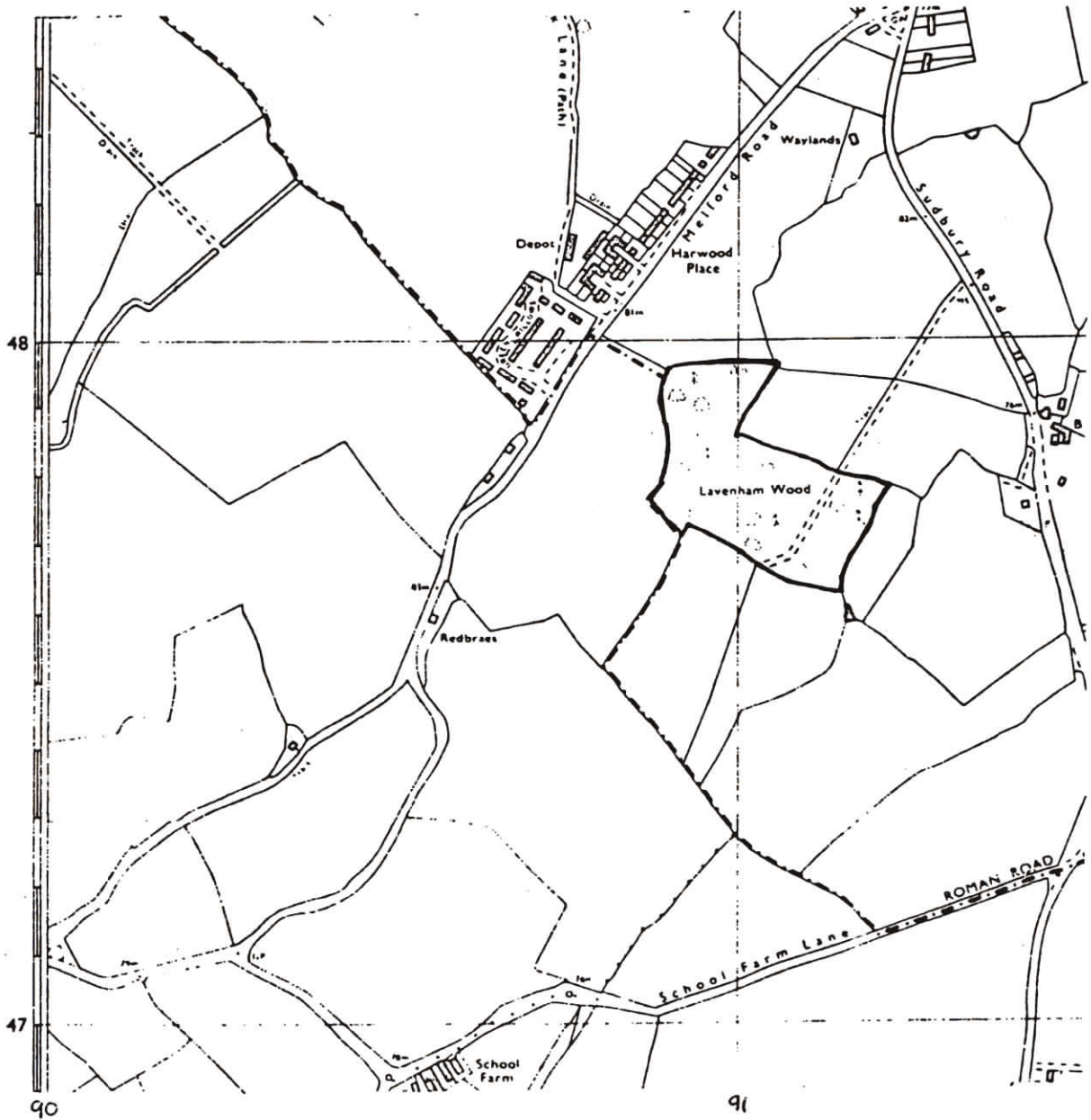
The remainder of the wood consists of derelict hazel coppice with ash and oak standards. In addition, there is an area of small-leaved lime coppice in the north-eastern corner.

Due to the dense shade cast by the tree canopy, the field and shrub layers are rather impoverished. Flowering plants are generally restricted to the wide ride (approximately 10m across) and glade which cross the wood. These open areas also attract good numbers of butterflies.

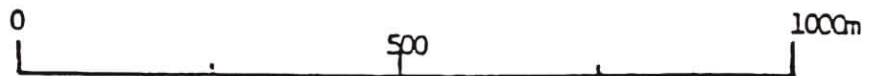
S I T E B O U N D A R Y M A P

S I T E N A M E : Lavenham Wood

G R I D R E F E R E N C E : T L 910478



S C A L E :
1 : 10,000



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