



conservation area appraisal

Introduction

The conservation area in Brent Eleigh was originally designated by West Suffolk County Council in 1973, and inherited by Babergh District Council at its inception in 1974.

The Council has a duty to review its conservation area designations from time to time, and this appraisal examines Brent Eleigh under a number of different headings as set out in English Heritage's 'Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals' (2006) and having regard to Historic England's new guidance (2016).

This brings the village in line with Babergh's other conservation area appraisals in the same format. As such it is a straightforward appraisal of Brent Eleigh's built environment in conservation terms.



As a document it is neither prescriptive nor overly descriptive, but more a demonstration of 'quality of place', sufficient to inform the Planning Officer and others considering changes or assessing proposed works there. The photographs and maps are thus intended to contribute as much as the text itself.

As the Historic England guidelines point out, the appraisal is to be read as a general overview, rather than as a comprehensive listing, and the omission of any particular building, feature or space does not imply that it is of no interest in conservation terms.

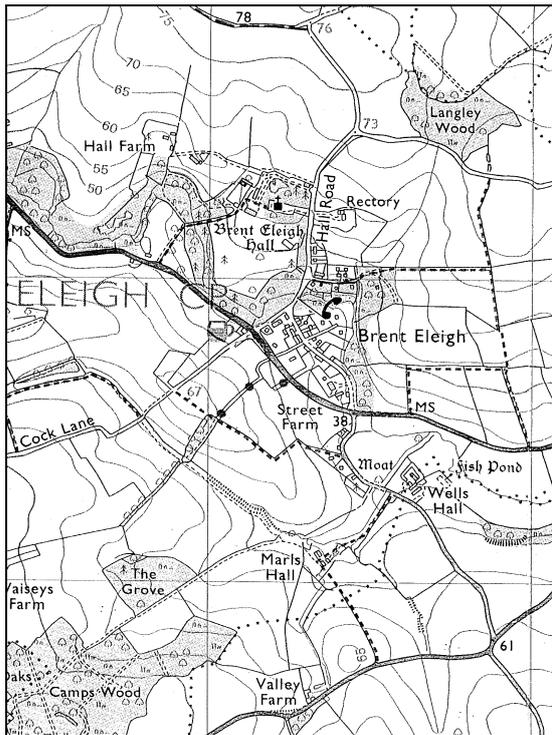
Text, photographs and map overlays by Patrick Taylor, Conservation Architect, for Babergh District Council 2019.

Topographical Framework

The village of Brent Eleigh is situated in south-central Suffolk, about seven miles north-west of the market town of Hadleigh and two miles south-east of Lavenham.

Both Hadleigh and Lavenham were at one time served by branch lines of the eastern railway, both now closed down.

The main part of the settlement sits on the north side of the main A1141 Hadleigh to Lavenham road, which runs east to west along the valley of the River Brett. Formerly passing through the village, this road now forms a by-pass with a new stretch to the south of the village centre.



South of this road the conservation area continues and includes a small portion of neighbouring Mildenhall parish, the boundary cutting Wells Hall in half.

The River Brett flows from Lavenham in the west, effectively through the parish of Brent Eleigh, down to Hadleigh and on southwards to join the Stour at Higham. At Brent Eleigh it loops to the north around the village centre, where a small tributary joins the river from the north.

The river valley has cut down some forty metres through the overlying boulder clay of 'High Suffolk' to reveal locally gravels, crags and pockets of older London Clay. The village itself is approximately 40 metres above OD, with the adjoining hilltops up to about the 80 metre mark.

Archaeological Significance

The Suffolk County Historic Environment Record lists a couple of dozen sites of archaeological interest in the wider parish, but nothing seriously prehistoric.

Two cropmarks, delineating a ring ditch and an enclosure, are given as undated, but could easily be the oldest if Neolithic or Bronze Age in origin. Actual Bronze Age remains have been found comprising an axehead and some scatter finds.

The Iron Age similarly presents a few scatter finds and the Romans have left us a quern and a short section of Roman Road north of the village, fitting within a line of other remnants, south of Lavenham and east of Bildeston, leading on east to the Roman camp on the Gipping near Coddenham.



Medieval remains include the Church and churchyard, the moated site at Wells Hall and further scatter finds, along with three areas of Ancient Woodland. The remainder of sites listed are Post-Medieval and include a milestone and three bridges.

Brent Eleigh and the adjoining village of Monks Eleigh were simply listed in the Domesday survey of 1086 as 'Eleigh'. Five separate holdings include amongst them three mills (which would have been watermills at that time) as well as a church with 22½ acres of land.

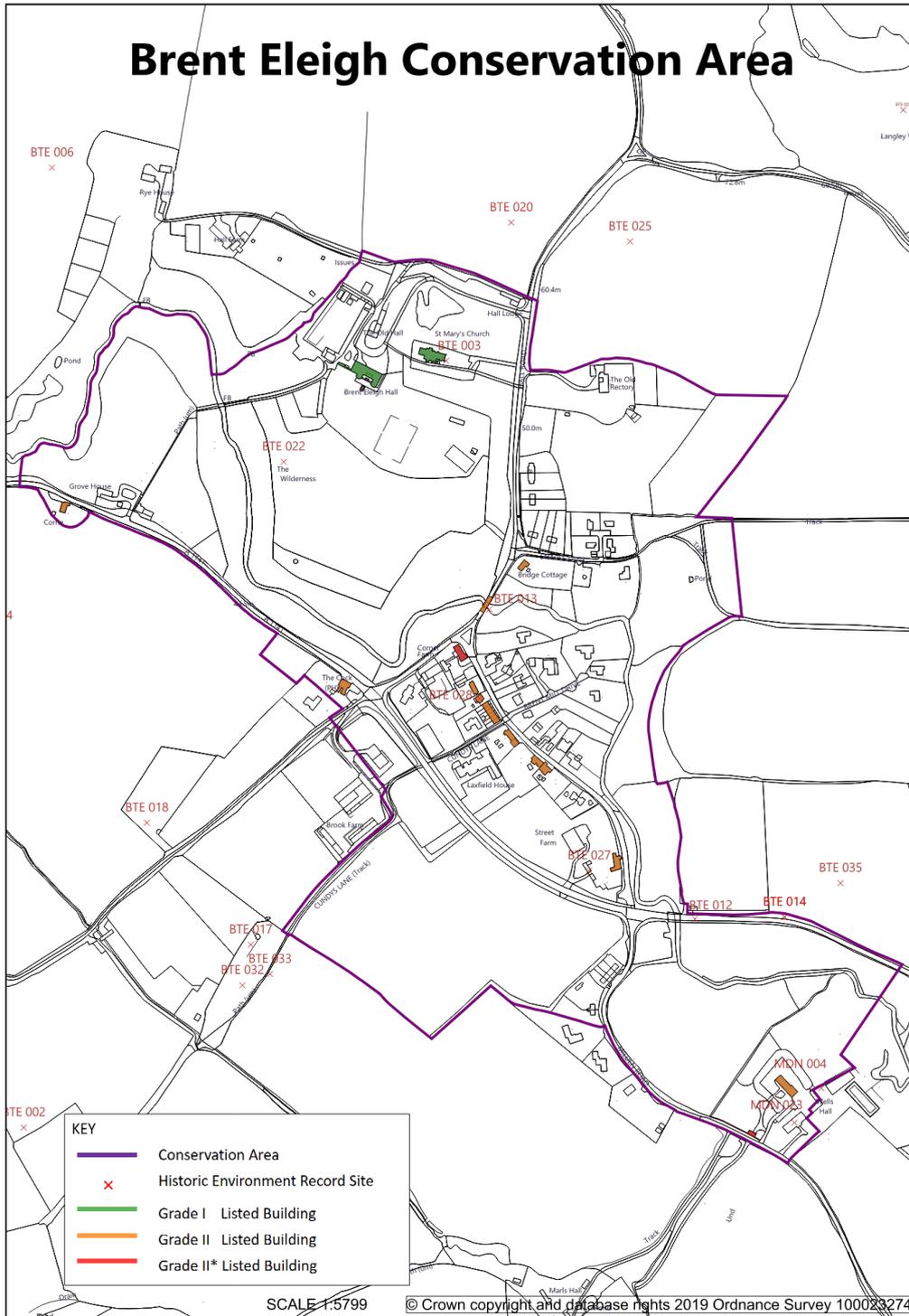
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BABERGH Two Hundreds
 Holy Trinity held ELEIGH before 1066 as a manor; 2 carucates with full jurisdiction.
 Then 21 villagers, now 13; then 13 smallholders, now 12; then 4 slaves, now 3.
 Always 2 ploughs in lordship. Then 21 men's ploughs, now 13. Meadow, 12 acres; always 1 mill. Now 2 horses, now 19 cattle, now 20 pigs, now 160 sheep.
 A church with 22½ acres.
 Value then £15; now [£] 20.
 It has 1 league in length and 5 furlongs in width; 14d in tax.

Wulfward, a free man under Stigand, held ELEIGH before 1066 as a manor; 3 carucates of land.
 Always 5 smallholders; 2 slaves.
 Always 2 ploughs in lordship.
 Meadow, 3 acres; 1 mill. 2 horses at the hall, 6 cattle, 20 pigs, 100 sheep.
 Value then 40s; later and now 80s.
 It has ½ league in length and 4 furlongs in width; 3½d in tax.

Brent Eleigh Conservation Area



Intrinsic Quality of Buildings

Brent Eleigh has two grade I listed buildings, both remotely sited away to the north of the main village, but within the conservation area.

The Church of St Mary is built in flint rubble with stone dressings and a roof of plaintile and slate. 'Not big' according to Pevsner, it is mostly early 14th Century in date and is an outstanding example of a manorial church, which has escaped 19th Century restoration.

The other grade I building is the manor to which the church was attached, now Brent Eleigh Hall. This has an early timber-framed core, but was much remodeled with classical features in the 18th Century and had additions designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens in the 1930's.



Two other structures in the village are of sufficient quality to justify listing at the higher grade of II.*

The first is a fine red brick boundary wall and gateway fronting the road towards Milden at Wells Hall, just south of the village and also within the conservation area, dating from the 16th Century.

The second is Corner Farmhouse within the village, which is of similar date and basically a timber-framed farmhouse with exposed studwork, brick nogging infill and some fine octagonal brick chimneys.



Traditional Building Materials

The remaining listed buildings in the village are grade II, mostly timber-framed houses with the usual Suffolk covering of render although a few have some exposed framing, and the roofs to these are mostly plaintiles or thatch.

Although the older listed buildings are generally timber-framed and rendered, overall the village exhibits the majority of other local materials found in Suffolk.

Some Victorian cottages, the former School (now used as the Village Hall) and the Colman's Cottages Almshouses are in the local soft Suffolk Red brick with slate roofs.



Black weather-boarding can be found on a number of outbuildings and barns, one example with a well patinated corrugated iron roof, liable to fail sometime soon.

In contrast white weather-boarding appears on 'Brent Mill', set back behind a black weather-boarded outbuilding with a pantile roof.

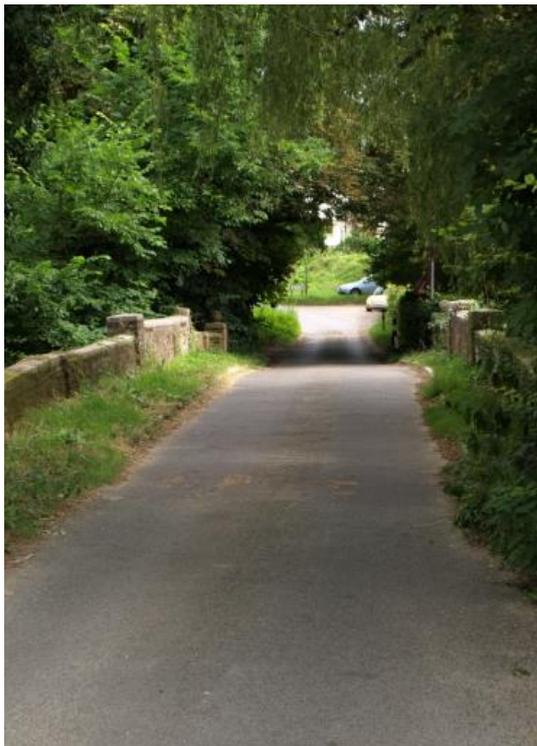
Roof finishes correlate well with wall constructions, following a similar distribution. The majority of roofs are plaintiles or thatch, mostly on the timber-framed buildings, the rest generally in slate or pantiles, usually on the brick buildings.



Hierarchy of Spaces

Brent Eleigh comprises mainly a row of listed buildings on the south-west side of The Street with a facing array of more recent buildings opposite. At one time this was the main road through with a junction at either end. Roads led off to the north (to Kettlebaston) and west (to Lavenham) from one junction and to the south (to Milden) and east (to Monks Eleigh) from the other.

The roads to the east and west are now conjoined by a small by-pass to the south of the listed buildings, leaving The Street as a cul-de-sac closed off at its south-eastern end. The absence of through traffic in the village centre makes it a relative haven of quietude.

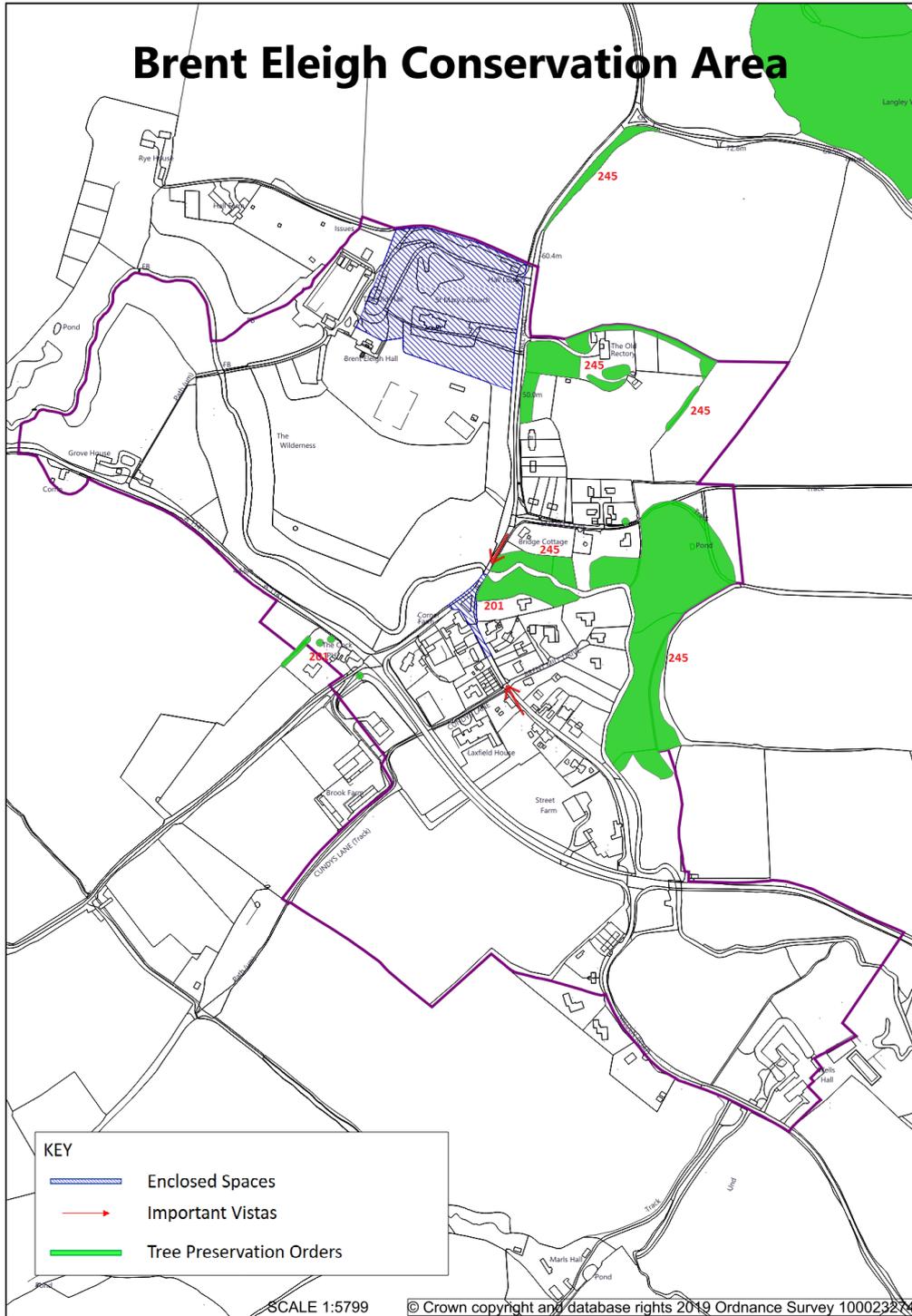


From the north-western junction with its surviving small triangle of green, the road to the north crosses the river and then climbs a hill out of the valley, with a few houses on its eastern side.

Further up the outlying Church and Hall lie to the west of this road, their associated outbuildings comprising the main area of historic development within the north part of the conservation area.

A third focal point of development is around Wells Hall which sits beyond the by-pass, just within the southern edge of the conservation area, but partly in the adjoining parish of Milden.

Brent Eleigh Conservation Area



Trees and Planting

The majority of trees in the conservation area are to be found in the wetland areas either side of the central river. The entire river valley here is designated in the Babergh Local Plan as part of the River Brett Special Landscape Area.

These trees are very much the typical wetland species of Alder, Poplar and Willow, but include a proportion of other species.

Some on the south bank of the river just north of the village centre were given the protection of Tree Preservation Order (TPO) 201 made in 1972 by West Suffolk County Council. This also protected further trees west of the village including a Horse Chestnut, a Thuja and several Scots Pines behind The Cock.



Following on most of those on the north bank of the river opposite the village centre were given the protection of Tree Preservation Order 245 made in 1972 by West Suffolk County Council. This also protected further trees up Hall Road to the north and the large areas of Oak, Ash and Birch comprising Langley Wood further north, one of the parish's ancient woodlands.

The two other ancient woodlands, Spragg's Wood, approximately 250m to the north of the conservation area boundary, and Camps Wood, approximately 600m to the south, are also protected this way by the 1973 TPOs 279 and 310 made by the same Council. A number of these TPO trees have been lost over the intervening years and current policy is to require replanting with suitable species.

Relationship to Open Countryside

The central river valley is mostly only glimpsed and can only be inspected close up at the two road bridges or the south-eastern end of The Street. It does however have an element of wilderness about it, which the agricultural fields on the northern and southern hillsides lack.

Because of Brent Eleigh's linear form and mainly single plot depth development, most of the properties there have either this valley or farmland to the rear.

One exception to this is the north-east side of The Street which has in behind it some infill development stretching as far as the river bank.



Excepting the modern by-pass, the road pattern is essentially radial from the village centre. Cundy's Lane south-westwards off The Street crosses the by-pass and definitive Footpath 6 eastwards off Snape's Lane further augments this.

The rest of the footpath network links these radial routes together. To the south Footpath 11 joins Mildens Road to Cock Lane, whilst to the west a little further out Footpath 3 joins Cock Lane to the B1070 Lavenham road.

Further in again this last road is joined to Hall Road by Footpath 8 through The Wilderness south of the Hall, and then in the east the B1070 Monks Eleigh road is linked northwards to the road towards Monks Eleigh Tye by Footpath 4.

Prevailing and Former Usage

As one of several villages along the River Brett below Lavenham, Brent Eleigh was surprisingly little involved in Suffolk's woollen cloth industry that thrived until the 17th Century.

Indeed early 17th Century records show the presence in the village of mainly agricultural occupations: 4 yeomen, a husbandman, a blacksmith and a carpenter.

Later evidence from 1844 directories indicates a more general agricultural economy, with 7 farmers, a carpenter, a shoemaker, a wheelwright, a miller, a blacksmith and a beerhouse keeper present.



There were two windmills on higher ground to the south-east, either side of Cock Lane. The Tithe records of 1839 confirm these sites and also show two possible watermill sites on the river, one just north of the village centre, the other near Wells Hall further south.

The Tithe records also present a picture of a wider economy with field names indicating the presence of a hop ground, a dovehouse and an ozier ground. There is also an instance of 'Winding Field' indicative of a one-time cloth trade.

A number of extractive industries are also indicated by the likes of 'Sand pits', 'Tile Pit Lay', 'Gravel Pit Field' and 'Brick Kiln Field'.



Losses and Possible Gains

Overall Brent Eleigh has suffered relatively little loss of historic fabric in recent times. The conservation area boundary as originally designated is therefore still considered adequate for its purpose.

There are however a few minor visual intrusions, which should perhaps be removed, and certainly not repeated. The most intrusive of these is probably the overhead wiring that ever present above the rooflines mars the enjoyment of the fine listed buildings along The Street. This would benefit from being put underground when funds permit.

Corrugated roofing is also a less than ideal roofing to the barn that backs onto grade II Corner Farmhouse:*



It has already mellowed in time, but now presents the prospect of failure as the rust progresses. Elsewhere a listed building on The Street remains in need of the completion of repairs to a gable end.

The suburban nature of some of the infill development in the village should be questioned, such as off Snape's Lane and off Brent Mill Drive where new houses do not respect the local vernacular.

Two areas of streetscape could also be improved: the parking areas at the Snape's Lane junction on Hall Road would benefit from a more formal layout, maybe using a bound aggregate finish, and the turning head at the east end of The Street would benefit from better landscaping and perhaps screening from the by-pass with a narrower visual link to the road continuing beyond.

References and Further Reading

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Tithe Map and Apportionment 1839 Brent Eleigh Suffolk Records Office

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Supplementary Planning Guidance by
Babergh District Council Cabinet
7 March 2019*