
Appendix D – Saffron Walden Neighbourhood Group – Character Areas

Character assessment

Character Area: Area 8 North Town Development (Estate comprising Sheds Lane, Byrds Farm Lane, Goddard Way etc)

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Topography



The area is bounded by Sheds Lane to the south, and Little Walden Road to the west. Countryside borders the north and east sides. The area broadly climbs to the north-west with the highest point at the east end of Sheds Lane, while the lowest point is Little Walden Road itself.

Land use

The area is entirely residential with no retail, commercial or community facilities.

Layout & Roads, streets and routes

All roads are residential.

There is no 'centre' to the estate, no community centre, school, parade of shops, schools or recreational areas. Rather the estate feels like a sprawl of ad hoc developments with no overall plan or design.

The primary roads are Sheds Lane, Usterdale Road and Goddard Way. A number of roads link these three roads, namely:

- Brooke Avenue
- Castle Cross
- Wynards Road.

In addition there are numerous cul-de-sacs:

Off Sheds Lane:

- Buckenhoe Road
- Howard Road
- Neville Road

Off Usterdale Road:

- Colyn Place
- Cornwallis Place
- Holmer Cross

Off Goddard Way

- Aspin Mews
- Corner Park
- Doddenhill Close
- Morris Harp
- Shrublands
- Sweetmead

Lambert Cross links one end of Goddard Way to Little Walden Road and itself has cul-de-sacs off it:

- Chalklands
- Fairleas

In addition there are two other roads off Little Walden Road which have just pedestrian access to the area:

- Byrds Farm Lane
- Pound Walk.

The area is also linked to the rest of the town by Highfields, which links Sheds Lane with Ashdon Road.

The De Bohun Court area is locally considered part of the estate but is not part of the area in terms of this character assessment designation.

There are a number of footpaths that link the estate to the surrounding countryside and are much valued by the local community, in particular Byrds Farm Lane morphs into a footpath which travels through the estate, crossing the end of Shrublands, then Goddard Way and Corner Park. In addition there is a footpath at the top of Sheds Lane running east into the countryside; and a footpath from the end of Buckenhoe Road which skirts fields and links to Whiteshot Way off Ashdon Road.

There are some footpaths that link roads within the estate (Cornwallis Place to Sheds Lane; Colyn Place to Sheds Lane) and a footpath from De Bohun Court to Ashdon Road and The Common. All are well used and generally well maintained.

Spaces

There are very few sizeable open spaces. There are a few areas of grass, for example at the west end of Sheds Lane, the junction of Shrublands and Goddards Way, and at the end of Cornwallis Place, but apart from adding some much needed greenery to the area are not well-maintained and not used for recreational purposes.

At the south-west end of Goddards Way there is a relatively attractive green with houses surrounding it on three sides. This is reminiscent of The Green off Little Walden Road.

Some roads have communal car-parking areas, such as Doddenhill Close, Shrublands and Aspin Mews. Generally these are unattractive and ill-maintained, and, it appears, not well used with residents preferring to park directly outside their houses on the roads or pavements. In addition there are communal parking areas off Byrds Farm Lane and at the south-west end of Goddard Way. These appear to be used more. There are also some garaging areas off Sheds Lane. These are earmarked for demolition with the space re-used for housing.

Buildings

The oldest part of the estate is early post-war local authority housing stock, which is generally unattractive and appears to be of poor quality. This makes up one side of Sheds Lane and the cul-de-sacs off it as well as Castle Cross, Brooke Avenue, and Byrds Farm Lane. These are terraced and semi-detached houses which sit back from their roads in relatively large plots.

The next part of the estate to be developed was probably Lambert Cross and Fairleas in the late 60s or early 70s. These are privately-owned houses, mainly detached, with sizeable plots and garages.

At around the same time the south-west end of Goddards Way was developed with local authority housing, of better quality than the earlier council houses. These properties consist of terraced houses and some low-rise blocks of flats.

The Fairview part of the estate was likely developed next and comprises mainly detached houses from the Fairview design book. Again most of these are detached and sit in their own plots with separate or adjoined garages. These houses comprise the north-west end of Goddards Way and Corner Park as well as the start of Morris Harp.

In the late 80s more local authority houses and bungalows were built along the north side of Sheds Lane, Usterdale Road and its cul-de-sacs. These are of varying sizes. Roughly contemporary to that more private houses were built along the rest of Morris Harp and Goddard Way and cul-de-sacs off it. These houses on Goddard Way are mainly detached three- or four-bedroom homes. There are also some smaller houses and maisonettes in the roads off Goddard Way.

I think all the housing is of brick and block construction with concrete tile roofs, of mixed styles. Some houses are rendered, most notably in Morris Harp. None of the buildings are of any historical importance although there are some things of note:

1. the Fairview-built houses are built from an unusually dark brick.
2. Some of the Fairview houses are of a chalet style with weatherboard facing.
3. This weatherboard facing has been mimicked in many extensions made to the housing, which increases the aesthetic of the area.
4. The houses on Usterdale Road and the roads off it have some interesting terracotta-coloured tiles in details around the windows.
5. The houses in Lambert Cross and Fairleas have different styles of facing, such as hanging tiles, which is reminiscent of some buildings in the town centre, notably King Street.

Landmarks

None.

Green and natural features

There are no planned areas of planting but the larger privately-owned properties are well-stocked with mature trees. Areas such as Neville Road and Howard Road are less leafy. Both of these roads only have pavements along one side of them, which makes them particularly unattractive.

There are green verges along the east end of Sheds Lane but these peter out as one travels west. Likewise Brooke Avenue has some trees and grass verges, but again these peter out the further one walks away from Sheds Lane.

The area at the end of Corner Park is planted with a number of birch trees which gives it a curiously sylvanian ambience. Chalklands has a number of trees which appear to pre-date the houses.

The grass area at the junction of Shrublands and Goddard Way has some much needed mature trees.

Streetscape

The area has a number of “mews”; that is small side roads, some with road-calming measures at their start. In particular, off Goddard Way and Corner Park. The same idea has worked less well off Usterdale Road.

Because of the number of housing styles used over the years and the ad hoc development there is no particular streetscape style to the area. Owners and residents have made their own choices about their property's boundary with the public highway and hence there is a mismatch of low and high hedges, fences, paved parking areas and front lawns.

The jarring mismatch of housing styles built close to one another is particularly evident around the junctions of Usterdale Road, Castle Cross, Holmer Cross and Goddards Way.

There are a number of semi-detached house/bungalow combinations on Usterdale Road which is unusual but visually unpleasing.

Views

The estate does have some fine views across the countryside, particularly looking west along both ends of Goddard Way. In addition, the view of the church looking west down Sheds Lane is attractive.

The views into the estate from Little Walden Road are very different. The view up the south-west end of Goddard Way is unpleasing to the eye with its large expanse of brick walls flanking the entrance to the estate and its mismatch of house styles and types as one's eye travels up the road. (The expanse of brick walls is repeated on the entrance to one of the mews off Goddard Way too.). The view from Little Walden Road to Lambert Cross is much more appealing with its large areas of green and trees.



View from Little Walden Road up Goddard Way



View from Little Walden Road of Lambert Cross

Locally important heritage

None

Detracting elements

There are no recreational amenities, no community centre or playgrounds and no retail areas, such as a convenience store. There is only one post box (at the junction of Highfields and Sheds Lane). This is surprising as the estate on the other side of the town has numerous shops and recreational areas, such as playing fields and playgrounds, as well as a school, community centre and leisure centre. The lack of shops means residents have to walk or, more likely, drive into town to buy essentials such as a pint of milk.

Some of the communal parking and garaging areas are particularly unattractive as mentioned.

The Byrds Farm Lane footpath, although well used is not particularly well maintained and its verges get overgrown with weeds in the summer.

Summary of key defining characteristics/other observations

Post-war residential estate which has been developed with, seemingly, no overall plan.

Housing stock of various sizes and quality.

Curiously, and unfortunately, devoid of any community assets.

Opportunities for development or other improvements

Recreational, community and retail amenities for local residents.

Tidying up of unattractive parking and garaging areas.

Street lighting along Byrds Farm footpath until junction with Corner Park.

Provision of benches, litter bins etc in green areas.

Character assessment

Character Area: Ashdon Road, with roads off to North and South

Assessors: Mike Hibbs and Isabella Warren

2nd September 2016

Topography

Insert map here

The landscape slopes from a high point to the North, South to the Slade seasonal river. The gradient is fairly constant. The OS gives a high point of 102m, and the Slade is at approximately 60m.

Land use

Land use is principally residential, with some light industry and out of town retail. There is a pub, a small office block and a private primary school.

Layout

Early development is high density, changing to detached houses in their own plots by the mid-20th century, and 'Essex Design Guide' housing in recent years. The Common can be seen to be part of the Historic Town Centre, with the expensive villas on Chaters Hill as the defining edge of the town. Although as a general principle the housing is older the closer to the centre, there are prominent exceptions, particularly Highfields (1930's) and Mill Lane (early 19th century). Early housing (both rich and poor) is built up to the pavement. Small front gardens appear with the Victorian terraces. Twentieth century housing moves back to create more privacy, a process reversed in recent years. The area has no continuity overall, but within each discrete area there is a high degree of conformity of style.

Roads, streets and routes

The principle route is the Ashdon Road, which runs East West, as a feeder route from the surrounding countryside. It more or less follows the contour, but gradually slopes towards the town centre. Roads off run North South, with one exception, and are 19th or 20th century residential development. There are some passages, including from Ashdon Road to Copt Hall Cottages; to Dawson Close; and the footpath from Whiteshot Way to Buckenhoe Road.

Spaces



The grounds of the Primary School make an important contribution to the area, mostly because of the mature trees, but also as a green space reducing the density of Harvey Way and Dawson Close. This is supplemented by a small area of land owned by Saffron Walden Town Council. A privately owned triangle of land defines the entrance to Harvey Way, and a second triangle, in public ownership, defines Whiteshot Way. There is a small wood on land to the west of Elizabeth Way, and an area of planting to the east, between Elizabeth Way and Lavender Fields. There is a large area of car parking and poor quality grass at the end of Carnation Way, at the junction with Elizabeth Way. There is a meadow in front of the Ridgeons development.

Buildings

There is very little development earlier than the start of the 19th century other than a pair of late Georgian houses, and an isolated timber framed building in Mill Lane.



Early workers cottages make a notable contribution to the feeling of a route into the town, an impression supplemented by later Victorian and Edwardian terraces. Early buildings are

mostly rendered, but by the Victorian period brick predominates, with shallow pitched slate roofs.



The terraces and semi-detached houses of this period have a number of good details including terracotta string courses and cartouches, cast iron columns and delicate wooden porches.



20th century Council housing is mostly rendered, with concrete tiled roofs. A number of interesting flat roofed houses line one side of Highfields (the last pair remained incomplete at the outbreak of the Second World War and were only roofed in 1948).



Detached houses in Shepherds Way are now dated, and are being renovated. Terraced housing in the same street is visually unsatisfactory with narrow floor plans and irregular fenestration. Mid to late 20th century housing features Tyrolean render, hard grey bricks and concrete tiles, with poor quality joinery, now largely replaced with uPVC. Whilst these side roads have little character of their own, they are mostly cul-de-sacs, and are reported to be safe places to live (the Wayback, Harvey Way).



Modern extensions in different materials to the original building mostly sit well, but there are exceptions. The Persimmon development?

Landmarks

The Primary School used to be the Town's Grammar School and still has an air of importance, and the grounds interrupt the otherwise dense housing.



There is a curious retaining wall in Whiteshot way, formed of granite kerbs, that gives a curiously northern feeling to the area.

Green and natural features



There are a number of trees that line the road: trees in private gardens on the south side of Ashdon Road, particularly number 49; the grounds of Dame Bradbury's School; the triangle of land at the entrance to Harvey Way; trees on the northern boundary of the Elizabeth Way business centre.



The view of the cemetery (see below). There are grass verges to Shepherds Way, and at the entrance to Whiteshot Way and De Vigier Avenue green banks and hedges make a noticeable change from the hard landscaping closer to the town, managing the transformation to the countryside east of the roundabout.



There are street trees in Highfields, and apple trees in the access road to Copt Hall Cottages. There are areas of green space in De Vigier Avenue that are much valued by residents – a wooded area at the top of the hill and a grassed area to the south. The adjacent fields are important to the residents of the houses overlooking them, along the northern edge of the developed area (De Vigier Avenue, Whiteshot Way and Harvey Way). There are three new green areas in the Persimmon development which are to be handed over to the Town Council. There is an important green edge to the south of the Persimmon development formed by the edge of the Slade River. The fuel dump?

Streetscape

Ashdon Road has a fine collection of boundary walls and railings, which have in most cases survived the desire to create parking spaces in front gardens, partly because of gradients, and partly because the early buildings are built close to the road. Where off street parking exists there are often areas of concrete that do not contribute to the street scene. Street lights and road signs are cheap, dated and in poor condition.



Telecommunications boxes opposite the cut through to Dawson Close are unattractive. There is a newly installed roundabout (see detracting elements).

Views



The most important view is to the south, of the trees in the cemetery, and of arable land with isolated trees on the ridge above – Herberts Farm close to the town, and Shire Hill Farm further east. As these are on rising ground on the other side of the river, they are visible whenever there is a break in the road frontage of the Ashdon Road. The view down Ashdon Road, looking east, benefits from the trees in the grounds of the primary school.

Locally important heritage



Numbers 68 and 70 Ashdon Road are a pair of Georgian houses of fairly high status, in what must have been a curiously isolated position. They have a very urban quality. Number 70, in particular, retains its sash windows, adjoining stable and coach house (now converted to residential) and window railings. It, and the adjoining Grammar School, should be considered for listing.



Residents should be encouraged to maintain the iron railings, and if possible reinstate them where they have been removed. The Public House makes a welcome break in the residential use, and should be retained.

Detracting elements

The most important issue is the absence of any traffic control on Ashdon Road, Vehicles regularly mount the pavement to avoid oncoming traffic, or to avoid the poor quality surface. On street parking is not controlled, and contributes to this problem. At the Western end of Ashdon Road, parking by business employees causes problems for the residents. Where yellow lines have been painted they are wide, and often irregular. Street furniture is poor quality and poorly maintained. Poor quality boundary fences, particularly on prominent sites such as the raised bank on the corner of Ashdon Road and Highfields, and at the entrances to Shepherds Way. Poorly constructed garages on the access road to Copt Hall Cottages. Overhead wires at the Eastern junction of Shepherds Way.



Railings designed to stop people running or cycling out of the link to Dawson Close are galvanised metal inserted with little thought for the viewer or the user.



The grass verges in Shepherds Way are being parked on, and contribute little to the street. Their replacement with dedicated parking could help in the introduction of a residents parking scheme. The area at the end of Carnation Way is very poor space, with cheap paving and fencing, and no clear footpaths. The roundabout at the junction of Ashdon Road with De Vigier Avenue is not used: vehicles ignore it, driving over the raised circle of tarmac and not necessarily waiting for traffic from the adjoining roads. The intended grass areas around the junction are mostly weeds, and the quality of the paving is very poor.

Summary of key defining characteristics/other observations

Mixed residential development of different periods, some good, some poor.

Opportunities for development or other improvements

Better street furniture. Traffic management in Ashdon Road. Parking restriction/control. Wiring underground. TPO's for some trees. Listing.