

Character assessment – 1st Draft

Character Area: Cromwell Rd, Winstanley Rd, Ross Close, with roads off to either side

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21st September 2016

Topography

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The landscape slopes gently from a high point to the South, North towards the town centre and more steeply down towards Peaslands Rd and Thaxted Rd.

Land use

Land use is almost entirely residential, except for a single row of shops, one further convenience store, a primary school, a pre-school and a community centre.

Layout

The area was entirely farmland until developed from the mid 1960s through to the late 1980s. The area is best assessed as four distinct zones correlating with construction by four different developers, each with its own distinctive style. These zones are Zone 1: Cromwell Rd west, Well Green Close, Reddings Close, Ross Close north-west; Zone 2: Cromwell Rd east, Ross Close south and east, Long Horse Croft, Ozier Court, The Glebe, Clay Pit Piece, Plantation Close, Mannings Close, Winstanley Rd west; Zone 3: Winstanley Rd east, Old Mill Rd, Tukes Way, Peal Rd, Ansgar Rd, Pennystone Rd, Chichester Rd, Railey Rd, Northfield Rd and Zone 4: Greenways.

Zones 1 and 3 comprise detached, semi-detached and terraced houses all with conventional front gardens and hard standing: the distinction between publicly and privately owned land is clear. Zone 1 terraced houses have garages in blocks often some distance from the properties to which they relate.

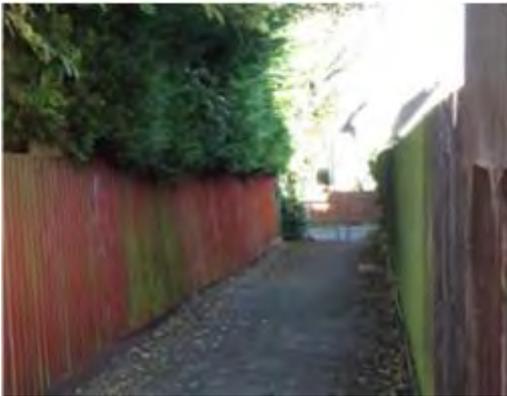
Zone 2 is higher density with several blocks of 3-storey flats and houses (all 2-storey) fronting onto pathways or courtyard areas. Many Zone 2 houses have garages in blocks.

Zone 4 comprises only detached houses, all but one with attached garages.

Roads, streets and routes

The principle route is Cromwell Rd which connects to Winstanley Rd providing a through link from Landscape View (Debden Road) to Peaslands Rd (and on to Thaxted Rd): these two roads provide the only vehicular access into the entire area. Ross Close forms a loop connecting to Cromwell Rd at both its ends with mini roundabouts. The school and pre-school are situated roughly half-way along Ross Close.

There are many pathways and alleys linking the different roads in the area and providing pedestrian shortcuts and access to many houses in Zone 2. Pedestrian access into/out of the area is also provided from Reddings Close into Hill Top Lane and from Old Mill Road into Peaslands Road; these are both well-used pedestrian routes leading to the town centre.

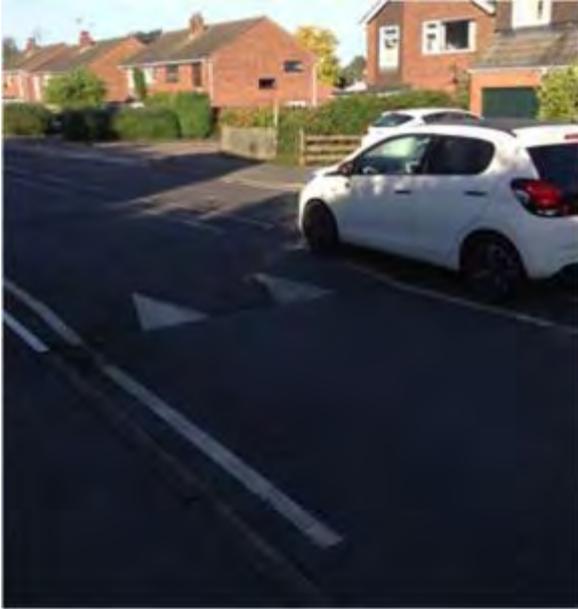


Path from Reddings Close to Hill Top Lane



An unmarked path from Old Mill Road to Peaslands Rd is a major pedestrian thoroughfare.

A Public Footpath leaves the area south from Clay Pit Piece into farmland. There are also pedestrian access points at the end of Peal Rd and two from Tukes Way providing access to a broad swathe of mown grass, which leads downhill to the Leisure Centre. This is popular with dog walkers: dog-waste bins are provided at two of the three access points.



Cromwell Road speed bump aligned with a passageway to Long-Horse Croft is of questionable benefit. Some drivers treat it as a pedestrian crossing, others do not and it becomes a cause of dangerous uncertainty for drivers and child pedestrians walking to school.



Peal Rd access into field with vehicle barriers and dog-waste bin

Spaces



There are several green areas. The most significant in terms of size and usage is a field and railed off children's play area opposite Katherine Semar School and connecting to the Community Centre and its car-park. A green space planted with young lime trees forms the centre of Greenways. A small green area opposite the Cromwell Road shops provides a welcome break in the building line and should be retained. Elsewhere the nature of the planning and layout of Zone 2 incorporates a number of anonymous spaces with generally very poor quality hard surfaces. These are neither in public ownership nor owned by the residents. Poor maintenance gives a feeling of dereliction. With the exception of the field next to the Community Centre all other spaces have 'Ball-game' prohibition signs.



Ubiquitous 'No Ball Games' signs appear in every open space except the Ross Close field



Derelict, unmaintained space between Plantation Close and Ross Close

Buildings

All development dates from the late 1960s to late 80s. Each Zone has its own distinctive character.



Zone 1 Semi-Detached houses. Light red brick elevations broken up with varying areas of painted render or vertical tiling. Each house has a front garden, some enclosed by fences or hedges, others open but generally with hard standing used for car parking. Medium pitch concrete pantiled roofs generally retaining chimneys.



Zone 2 houses

Zone 2 houses have predominantly red/brown brickwork with grey roof pantiles on shallow-pitched gable-ended roofs without chimneys. Some otherwise identical houses are rendered and mostly painted white or cream. Front doors, in a variety of replacement styles, are also mainly painted white.



Zone 2 flats (Clay Pit Piece) showing finger-post 'public footpath' sign.



Zone 3 Detached and Semi-detached Houses. Detached houses are in light red brick but with a fully rendered elevation facing the road. Roofs are medium pitched, concrete pantiled and gable-ended with chimneys. There are single storey garages to the side, some of which have been converted to provide extra living space. Semi-detached houses have buff brick elevations broken up with areas of painted render or pebble-dash and white framed casement windows. Roofs are concrete pantile, gable ended, and most retain chimneys. Detached houses in this zone have integral garages, full-width first storey windows and the elevations are in light red brick, some with vertically hung tiling.



Zone 4 (Greenways) houses are all detached with integral garages. Brickwork is bright orange/red with multi-panelled casement windows with buff-coloured soldier courses and decorative fanlights. There are ground floor bay windows. The steeply pitched concrete tiled roofs have gable ends but no chimneys. The stylistic influence is postmodern hinting at neo-Georgian.



Katherine Semar School of 1970s prefabricated construction.

Landmarks

There are no noteworthy landmarks.

Green and natural features

There are few trees except for small, usually ornamental, trees in gardens. There are virtually no indigenous trees within the area except for the young limes which form the centrepiece of Greenways and are probably the only trees planted by a developer in this entire area. The only established indigenous trees are those which define the boundaries of the area to the north and north-west of the site, particularly the well-established Lime avenue of the Walden School and a number of trees along Hill-Top Lane bordering Well-Green Close. The situation is made worse by the slightly concave land contour, which all too often gives a skyline of bare roof-tops. A few indigenous trees and bushes remain to the west of the Cromwell Rd shops and to the west of the Ross Close recreation field. Whilst unremarkable as individual specimens every effort should be made to retain and maintain these as a visual amenity.



Well-Green Close: trees, bushes, grass area and informal short-cut to Hill Top Lane

Streetscape

Zones 1, 3 and 4 benefit from houses reasonably well set back with hard-standing to accommodate a car. Many front gardens are unfenced and this results in an open feel.

Zone 2 is more cramped. Some houses abut the pavement; others have brick walls to the pavement. Some with off street parking have areas too small for a car which then often block the pavement creating a hazard for pedestrians.

Views

The topography of the area means there are few views beyond the area. The exceptions are views from the eastern end of Winstanley Road across Shire Hill to the north-east of the town, from Cromwell Road across the town to the north and from Peal Road looking east to farmland to the east of Thaxted Road. The latter, in particular, creates a pleasant semi-rural feel.



Winstanley Rd looking north-east

Peal Rd looking east

Locally important heritage

There is no built heritage of any note. The entire area has been developed since the 1960s.



However, some ancient hedgerows remain and deserve to be properly maintained, in particular the hedge to the west of Greenways (the back garden boundary of several of the houses) and the hedge boundary to the east of Tukes Way (pictured).

Positive Elements

Easy access to open country via the footpath which leaves from Clay Pit Piece is enjoyed by many residents, as is the broad swathe of grassy hill-side accessed from the end of Tukes Way and Peal Rd leading down to the Leisure Centre.



For families with children the closeness of a primary and pre-school within walking distance is of benefit. More should be done to encourage parents to walk their children to school (see 'detracting elements below'). The playground opposite the school is well maintained and well used.

The Community Centre has the potential to be a major benefit but is little used at present (??? Is this correct).

Detracting elements

The 1970s-style urban planning with its informal arrangement of houses rather than a standard road frontage for each (in Zone 2) leads to a number of problems. Provision for parked cars is inadequate leading to cluttered roads.



Small areas of land (in Zone 2) are owned by a management company. In many places these are poorly maintained and a lack of demarcation between privately (residentially) owned space and that owned by the management company (over which the residents have no control) creates a sense of decay and lack of care.



Parking in Cromwell Rd outside the supermarket is frequently chaotic and dangerous as this is the main thoroughfare. It also inconveniences neighbours. A car park would improve the situation.

The high percentage of schoolchildren delivered and collected from school by car creates major traffic problems in Long Horse Croft and Ross Close at school times, despite the use of the Community Centre car-park by many parents.



cross-pavement parking in Long Horse Croft



Blocks of garages for Zone 1 terraced houses and various Zone 2 houses are little used for garaging, garages being too small for modern cars. Some of these areas have become rubbish dumps, unsightly and a waste of space.

Summary of key defining characteristics/other observations

Mixed, late 20th century residential development. The informal and irregular but also cramped layout is the defining feature of Zone 2, distinguishing it markedly from the rest of the area with its more traditional layout of front garden and standard road-frontage for each house. There is a lack of trees throughout the area which is particularly noticeable in Zone 2.

Opportunities for development or other improvements

The problem of general maintenance of Zone 2 could be ameliorated by a Residents' Association determined to improve and maintain the common areas.

Heritage & Character Assessment

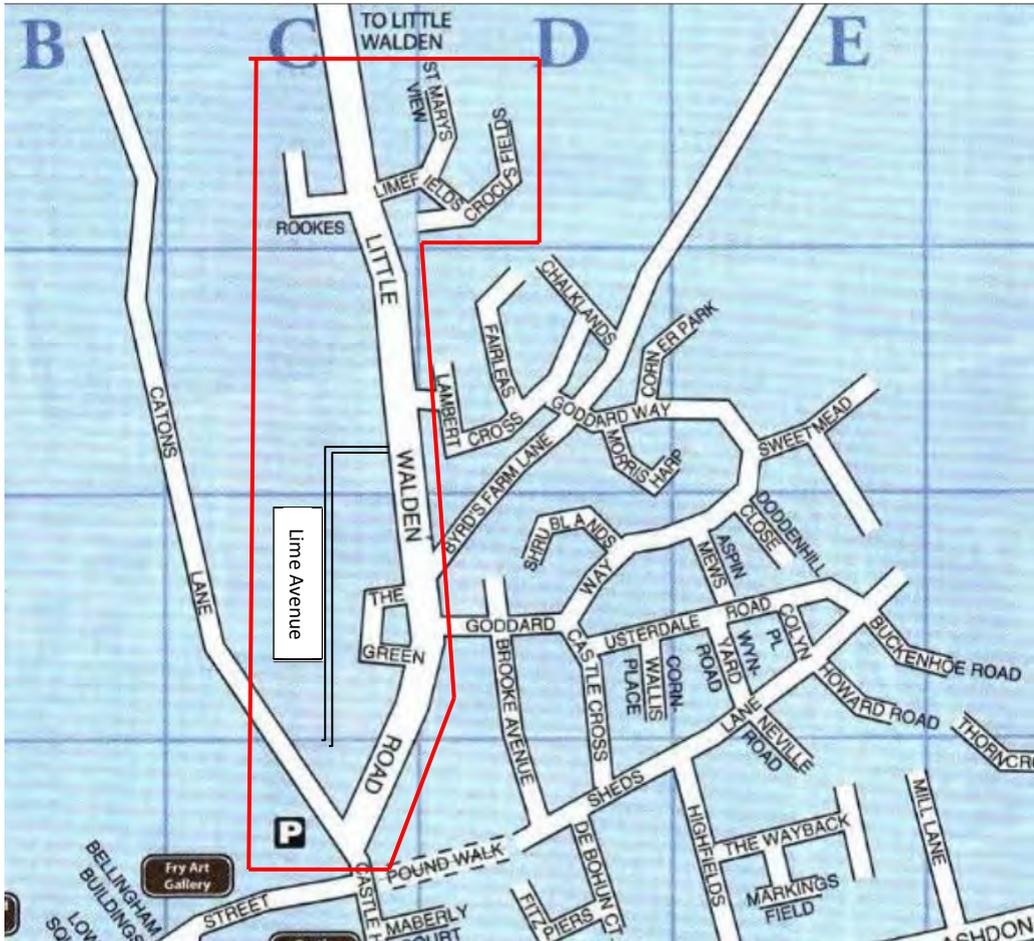
Character Area: Little Walden Road
Catons Lane / Lime Avenue
Limefields / St Mary's View / Crocus Fields

Assessor: Dominic Davey

22nd January 2017

Overview

Little Walden Road runs north-south; from the northern edge of Saffron Walden, southwards to Castle Hill and the junction with Castle Street and Pound Walk. Limefields, St Mary's View and Crocus Fields are new developments at the north end of Little Walden Road. Catons Lane and Lime Avenue are at the southern end of Little Walden Road.



There are two additions, or changes, to the roads as marked on the original basemap.

- 1) Lime Avenue is a new road which runs just to the west of Little Walden Road in the south of the character area. There are new houses at the south end of Lime Avenue.
- 2) Catons Lane stops close to the marked edge of the character area. The extension northwards is a footpath, with no vehicular access.

These two changes are further annotated on the map below.

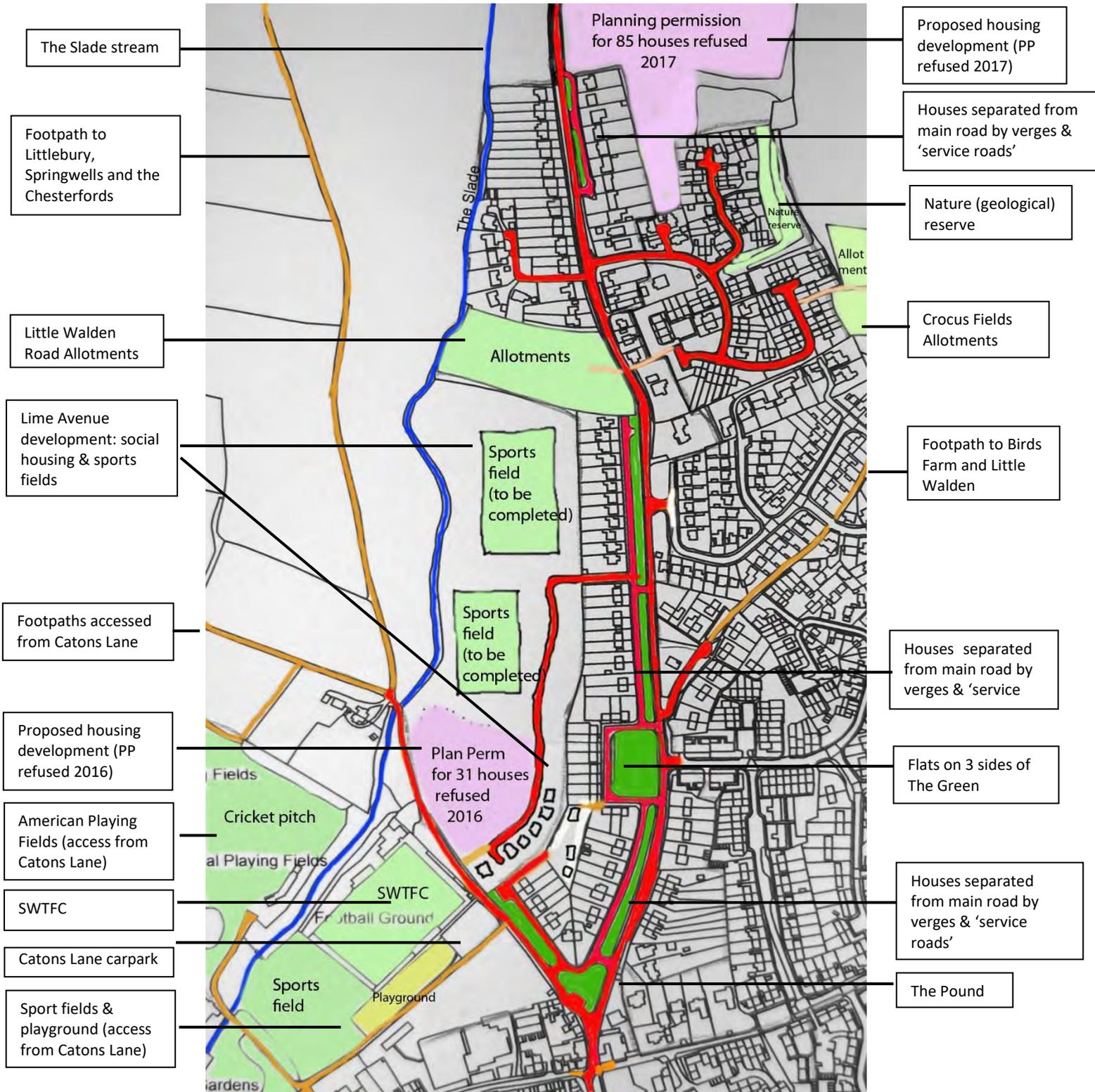
Topography

The character area is on the east side of the valley of The Slade stream, parallel with The Slade stream and sloping downwards from east to west, towards the Slade (see map below).

Land use

Land use within the character area is residential, recreational (sport) and community (allotments). The area abuts agricultural land to the north and west, late C20th residential developments to the east and the fringe of Saffron Walden centre and conservation areas to the south.

Agricultural and/or unused land adjacent to Little Walden Road has been subject to planning applications for housing development. The larger recent planning applications are noted on the map below.



Layout

The layout of the Little Walden Road area is varied, as building and development have been piecemeal throughout the 20th century and is interspersed with sports and community facilities:

- On the east side of Little Walden Road, from the south going northwards, local authority housing leads on to individual detached houses in their own plots and a small row of terraced cottages. The houses are set back from the road by their own gardens and/or grass verges, hedges and trees. As the south-east side of Little Walden Road is upslope of the road, this enhances the separation of the houses and road. Overall this makes a varied frontage to many parts of the road.



- East of the houses on Little Walden Road are extensive late C20th residential developments (Lambert Cross / Goddard Way / Sheds Lane). These developments impact the layout and appearance of Little Walden Road where their hedges and trees border the road.



- The east side of Little Walden Road has four junctions with roads feeding the housing developments of Goddard Way, Birds Farm Lane, Lambert Cross and Limefields. These impact the appearance and layout

of the road in varying ways as the sides and frontages of the houses on the side-roads tend to dominate the junctions. Three of the junctions have mini-roundabouts which impact the layout of Little Walden Road.



- On the west side of Little Walden Road, from the south going northwards, there is ribbon development of local authority semi-detached houses, local authority flats on three sides of The Green and then 1980s detached houses. These developments are separated from the road by grass verges and/or greens and have their own 'service roads'. A high hedge screens the 1980s detached houses and extends to screen the allotments.





- On the west side of Little Walden Road, and north of the allotments, are semi-detached and detached houses to the northern edge of the town. There is a pavement and narrow verges and the mature front gardens often have shrubs and trees to screen the houses.



- Rookes, a small cul-de-sac on the (north) west side of Little Walden Road, is an enclave of large (1990s?) detached houses built on land west, and down-slope, of the 1930s semi-detached ribbon development on Little Walden Road. The rear gardens of these houses border The Slade stream whereas the rest of the housing on the west side of Little Walden Road is upslope of The Slade.



- Limefields, St Mary's View and Crocus Fields are varied residential developments of detached houses, semi-detached houses and flats which border the agricultural land of Birds Farm and the Crocus Field allotments to the north and east, and other housing developments to the south. Vehicular access to the allotments is from Crocus Fields. Bordering St Mary's View is a small geological nature reserve, on the site of an old chalk quarry, with an adjacent grassed area suitable for walking dogs. There is a short path/alleyway from Crocus Fields to Little Walden Road.



- Catons Lane: The south east side of Catons Lane is flanked by older cottages and the Victory pub, which are part of an adjacent character area and are the edge of the Castle Street conservation area. On the south side of Catons Lane are the grounds of St Marys lower school and nursery, Catons Lane car-park and Saffron Walden Town Football Club's ground.



- On the north side of Catons Lane are local authority housing, the new development on Lime Avenue and unused land which has been the subject of a recent planning application for 31 houses. Adjacent to Lime Avenue, in the valley of The Slade, are sports fields which have been laid out but not completed.

