

Green and natural features:



Trees grown up on east boundary of Thaxted road on edge of site of former gas works.



Old Bridleway leading from Upshires road to exit at bottom of Shire Hill road.



Trees lining the path between the former council houses and the black concrete wall on the west side of Thaxted road



Grassed area south of the entrance of Rylstone Road edged by mature trees.

Streetscape:

In general the streetscape of Thaxted road is poor especially in the more mature areas. There is a lack of seating and signage is mixed with some signs in need of repair or replacement. There are no flower beds .

Views:



View of Radwinter Road on the left at junction with Thaxted road on the right taken from west of the cross roads.



View looking south down Thaxted road from the pavement outside the general store close to the western of the cross roads.



View of the East street approach to the cross roads. Thaxted road on the right taken from northern pavement on East street.



View of the entrance to Peaslands road south side from roundabout on south side of character area.

Locally Important heritage:

There is very little local heritage to report. Some of the houses mentioned in the Buildings section earlier in this report may be worth considering for listing.

Detracting Elements:

The northern part of Thaxted Road character area is generally very shabby. The general ambiance of the area improves in the section south of the Shire Hill Industrial estate. Examples of detracting elements are given below:-

Neglected Road Signs- Located at cross road junction at the entrance to Thaxted road this sign is almost too dirty to read.





Loose and decaying render on wall on east side of Thaxted road



On the west side of Thaxted Road at the entrance to the yard behind the general store the side walls are covered with decaying white painted render and the metal gates to the yard have a mixture of black and white flaking paint the combination of which gives an air of dereliction.

A decaying black coated concrete wall on the west side of Thaxted Road extends from the yard located at the rear of the general store along the edge of the carriageway for about 120 meters there after the roadway extends southwards with no pavement almost as far as the former railway embankment. This undesirable feature is made worse by the increase in traffic density in recent times and by the shortage of car parking spaces in Thaxted road. Cars regularly park across the pavement on the eastern side of the road making it too narrow for two large vehicles to pass each other when travelling in opposite directions and causing difficulties for pedestrians.



When visiting the new Harris Yard development the house holders made it clear to me that they felt strongly that insufficient space had been allowed for car parking and access. Most houses had at least one garage several had two but Harris yard is a dead end and the roads are narrow . This has resulted in house owners frequently having to ask neighbours to move their cars in order to enable them to get out of their own premises. Some of the detached houses in this development cost in the region of one million pounds. One other point that they made was that the developer had made no provision for street lighting.



Decayed area of black concrete wall in poor repair at west side of Thaxted road



Number of lime trees planted at high level on top of black concrete wall could be pruned.

Appendix:

Additional geo-references for further observation.

Street view link for Thaxted road (Copy and paste in browser):

<https://www.instantstreetview.com/@52.022455,0.248759,156.81h,2.19p,1z>



Arial view.

Character assessment – 1st Draft
Character Area: Walden School and The Avenue
Assessors: Stephen Rapkin
October 2016

Topography

Insert map here

The landscape slopes down gently to both north and south from a high point approximately 75 metres south of Mount Pleasant Road.

Land use

Land use is almost predominantly the Walden School and its playing fields except in the south-west of the site where it is entirely residential. The only exception is the Water Tower.

Layout

The area is formed by the grounds of the Walden School (previously known as The Friends School). The Avenue residential development occupies 2.8ha. at the south-western part of the area.

Roads, streets and routes

The principal routes which bound the area are Debden Road to the west and Mount Pleasant Road to the north. The Avenue opens off Debden Road and a number of short access roads and courtyards open from The Avenue: Water Tower Place, Burgess Court, Pavilion Way, Linden Square and Tilia Court.

Spaces



There is a medium-sized public space to the north-east of The Avenue adjacent to Pavilion Way with three simple concrete benches, grass and paving, some planting with a mature beech tree at its south-eastern corner, and a 'no ball games' sign.



The Walden School has extensive playing fields to the south and east of the school buildings.

Buildings



Almost all of the Walden School buildings are in red-brick. The main school building with distinctive asymmetrical tower dates from 1879 and sits at the highest point (at one time it was informally known as 'Hill-Top School'). A plain rectangular gymnasium in unrelieved window-less red-brick with deep pediment(?) of black weather-boarding dates from the 1980s(?). A black and white half-timbered gable-end to the early swimming pool conveys a hint of Arts and Crafts. A number of mixed and fairly non-descript buildings sit behind a brick wall topped with larch-lap fencing alongside the northern part of Debden Road.

Prominent alongside Debden Road at its highest point is a red-brick Edwardian water-tower with various electronics transmitters/receivers fixed to it. This is a Grade II listed building (see photo below under 'Heritage').

'The Avenue' and roads opening off were built by one developer. There is a range of housing types, all in a broadly contemporary style, which is unusual for recent developments in Saffron Walden. The style is characterised by steeply pitched roofs, to provide second floor accommodation, with no eaves overhang, solar panels (even on roofs not facing south) and simple large windows with no subsidiary glazing bars. Elevations comprise large areas of, variously, render, buff or red brick, grey or black weatherboarding or cedar shingles. Balconies feature on many of the houses. Detached and

link-detached houses are provided with garages, terraced houses with parking in front of each house and apartments with a car park with reserved spaces.



Row of terraced brick and rendered houses in Pavilion Way.



Rendered and cedar shingle-clad detached houses.



Car park for residents' and visitors' cars: The Avenue apartments



Water Tower Place (shared ownership? Is this correct?) housing

Landmarks

The Water Tower and The Walden School's main building and tower are prominent on the skyline from many vantage points on the northern side of the town. The Avenue of lime trees is the most extensive and visible formal planting in the town and could be considered to provide a thematic link with the tree avenues outside the town associated with Audley End House – the Beechey Ride and Chestnut Avenue.



The Walden School's tower and roofline and the Water Tower are visible from many northern areas of the town.

Green and natural features

The Walden School has extensive playing fields of mown grass. However topography means that the playing fields are only visible from properties directly overlooking them. At the south-eastern limit of the Walden School site there is a woodland area which is understood to be retained and used by the school as a 'Forest School'. To the south and east of the playing fields there is an Avenue of mature (c.60 years old) lime trees. Most of the western section of this avenue now forms the centrepiece of 'The Avenue' development where there is also a number of other mature trees, such as beech and sycamore.



Streetscape

The southern side of Mount Pleasant Road is bounded entirely by the school. The western end has a low brick wall with pillars and hedge infill presumed to date from the building of the school in 1879. This wall is punctuated by a formal entrance and exit. To the east is the entrance into the car-park with associated yellow lines and hazard markings on the road. Further east from this point is a low bank with hedge above it. A pavement extends the whole length of Mt Pleasant Rd. Opposite the school, on the north side, is a mixture of semi-detached and one detached, large, late Victorian and Edwardian houses which are in part of the Conservation Area of the town.



Mount Pleasant Road (east). Behind a low bank, trimmed hedge and mature trees are the school playing fields.



Walden School car-park entrance



Untidy street furniture, uninviting seat and poor quality grass on the corner of Mt Pleasant Rd and Debden Rd.



Entrance to 'The Avenue' off Debden Rd.

The Avenue starts as a conventional metalled road with pavements to either side. At the point where it meets the avenue of lime trees there is a short section of rough granite setts. Thereafter it turns south, parallel with the line of trees, and from there is paved in concrete setts emphasising that this is no longer a road but a driveway. Space for visitors' parking is provided alongside with 'grow-through' open setts (what's the proper word for these?).

Views

The topography of the area means there are few views. A notable exception is the important view from Debden Road to the fields north of the town.



Locally important heritage

The Water Tower (listed Grade II) and the School main building (unlisted) are significant in the history of the town. The western elevation of the Water Tower incorporates a foundation plaque naming those involved in its design and construction.



Positive Elements

The incorporation of a right-of-way into the layout of The Avenue is an important positive element for pedestrians walking to town from areas to the south, providing a pleasant alternative to the busy pavements along Debden Road. This access means that many more than just residents of The Avenue can enjoy the mature trees and well-maintained planting. Bird and bat boxes have recently been attached to the mature trees along The Avenue.

Detracting elements

The frontage of the houses of Water Tower Place onto Debden Road is not wholly successful. The height of the houses, exacerbated by much unrelieved black weatherboarding, and the topography means that they are overly dominant in the street-scene.



Houses in Water Tower Place dominate the street scene.

A few metres further north, to either side of the Water Tower, the mixture of broken chain link fence, low concrete walling and planting of (inappropriately wild?) hedgerow plants such as blackthorn results in a unkempt appearance at odds with the general tidiness of the other parts of The Avenue development.



Affordable Housing (?) in Water Tower Place, seen across Debden Road. The juxtaposition of low concrete wall and an attempt to establish traditional rural hedging is not successful.

As elsewhere in the town a major detracting element is the twice daily delivery/collection of children to and from school for which the existing roads and car-park layout are totally inadequate. The school has land which could be used for improved access and parking arrangements and changes could be possible although design would need to be handled carefully to avoid degradation of heritage and street-scene elements.



Congestion in Mount Pleasant Rd at 08.20 on Monday 10th October 2016. Parked vehicles, cars turning right into and out of the Walden School car park and the Debden Rd traffic lights frequently result in grid-lock.

Summary of key defining characteristics/other observations

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Opportunities for development or other improvements

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