

SAFFRON WALDEN – June 2007

Introduction.

Saffron Walden is a fine example of a market town. It is of the highest environmental quality with pleasant shopping streets, open spaces and numerous historic buildings of the very highest quality which attract many visitors. Saffron Walden is the largest settlement in the District with the most important shopping centre. Because of its importance and its fine environmental qualities it is therefore particularly important to assess its environmental sensitivity and capacity so as to understand the extent to which it might be able to accommodate such development.

General character.

Saffron Walden is the focal point of the northern part of the District and the largest town in it. The town lies about a mile east of the main road and rail communication corridor to London (about 40 miles) and Cambridge (about 15 miles). It is the administrative and commercial centre of the District and contains many other services including a leisure centre, a library, a museum and a number of schools. The population is currently about 15,000.

The historic core and its relationship with the built up area of the town as a whole.

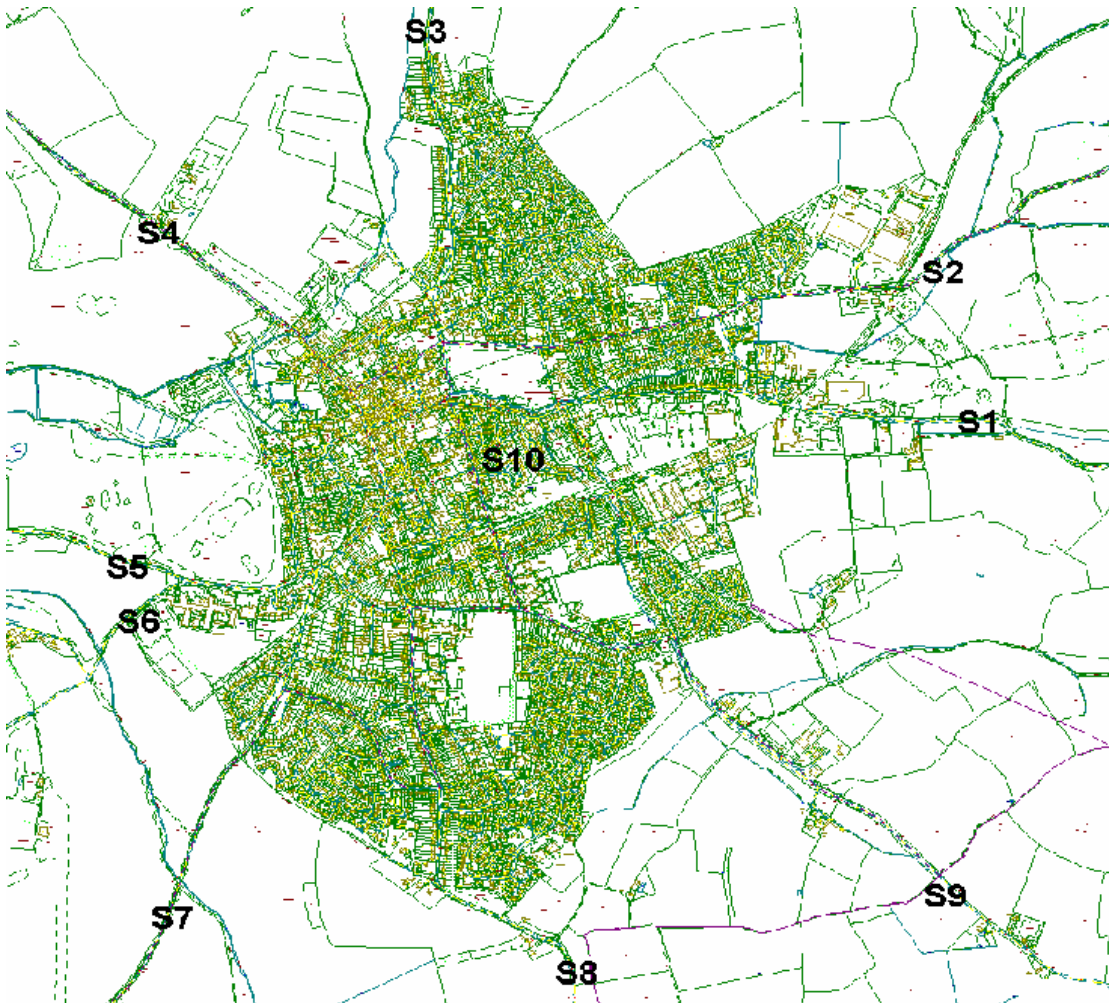
There are about 400 individually listed buildings in the parish of Saffron Walden the great majority of which are in the designated conservation area. About 10 are listed Grade 1 including Audley End House, the former Sun Inn, the 11th century Castle Keep, St Mary's Church and St. Mark's College. Some 30 are listed Grade 11* and these include houses in the village street at Audley End and the 19th century bank (now Barclays) on the Market Place. The majority of listed buildings (40%) are from the 19th century in which the influence of the Gibson family is noted. The 16th century is well represented with about 20% and the 17th century with about 10%. Other buildings of earlier dates are also represented as are several 20th century listed buildings including the water tower on Debden Road.

The town was a flourishing settlement in medieval times and since then and until recent times, growth has been organic with building styles from many periods being very well represented and importantly many of them still located in original and unaltered settings. Important elements in the character of the historic core are the wealth and variety of architectural detailing, the medieval roof line that is very fine indeed, the form and spatial dimensions of street widths and the overall relationship of buildings to urban spaces, including a number of very fine open spaces, brief details of a selection of which are set out below. Another important architectural feature of the town is the use of boundary walls, many dating from the 19th century.

Throughout the conservation area there are trees in abundance, some of which have been made subject to Tree Preservation Orders.

Expressed in percentage terms the historic core of the town centre and Mount pleasant Road represents about 20% of the built up part of the town. In addition to this there is the large conservation area at Audley End that embraces Audley End village and Audley End House.

The quality and general function of landscapes in and adjacent to the town by sector and a broad statement as to the effect of development in each sector.



Map of Saffron Walden showing the sectors.

Sector 1. The Radwinter Road approach from Swards End.

Quality of Landscape. This approach to the town is characterised by a sunken road that is further enclosed by tree and hedgerow cover. The landscape is arable and undulating with strong hedge boundaries and enclosed by woodland blocks in places. The edge of the town is defined by the Tesco store on the south side and the Willis and Gambier commercial buildings to the north. These large buildings and the manner in which they dominate the local scene together with the traffic they generate and the parked vehicles and signage associated with such establishments makes this area one of the least attractive edges to Saffron Walden. To the east of a track referred to below

are derelict buildings at Turnip Hall Farm. Whilst they are close to the Radwinter Road they are not readily visible from this approach.

To the south of the Tesco store the land rises to Shire Hill Farm and is defined to the west by an access track that is hedge lined for the most part. Whilst the land so defined by this track and the edge of the existing town at the Shire Hill industrial estate to the east is contained it nevertheless appears as part of the open countryside. The outbuildings to Shire Hill Farm are dominant and some are in poor condition. Part of the land near the farm complex is used as horse paddock.

Glimpses of the dominant church spire can be seen even at this distance from it.

Several footpaths and byways exist in the gap between Swards End and the town.

General function of Landscape. The landscape contains the edge of the town at the bottom of a bowl where there is a change in level and provides a rural approach to the town. Its gap maintains the separate identity of nearby Swards End on the higher ground to the east.

Broad statement of effect of development. Development in this location would have no detrimental effect on the historic core which is separated from it by modern development. The general effect would be loss of agricultural farmland and to spread urban development onto rising undulating arable farmland of visual quality, resulting in the loss of a rural approach road to the town and narrowing the already narrow gap with the freestanding village of Swards End.

In broad summary it is considered development in this sector would significantly diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of not only Saffron Walden but potentially also that of the nearby small village of Swards End. This is especially true in respect of the rural approach road from Swards End. However it is acknowledged that the large buildings that introduce the town in this location make this edge one of the least attractive of Saffron Walden.



Sector 1 looking north along track accessing Shire Hill Farm.

Sector 2. Ashdon Road approach.

Quality of Landscape. This is a wide undulating landscape with large fields framed by hedges and woodland blocks. The approach road is sunken in places, winding, tree lined and very rural in nature. The edge of the town is defined by the large and ugly Ashdon Road commercial centre to the north east and to a lesser extent by the Serco Gulf Engineering Depot to the south. Closer to the town open land between De Vigier Avenue and the Ashdon Road commercial centre is identified in the Local Plan as a safeguarded existing employment site whilst land south of Ashdon Road is allocated for residential development, part of which is held in reserve. The latter two sites are surrounded by development and appear more associated with the urban framework as opposed to the rural nature of the approach road.

A footpath and a bridleway provide limited access to parts of the countryside in this general location.

General function of Landscape. . The landscape contains the edge of the town and provides an extremely rural approach to it.

Broad statement of effect of development. Development in this location would have no detrimental effect on the historic core which is separated from it by modern development.

The general effect would be to spread urban development onto undulating arable farmland of considerable visual quality resulting in the loss of a rural approach road to the town in this location.

It is considered development in the rural part of this sector beyond the town edge would significantly diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness. However it is acknowledged that the large buildings that form the edge of the

town in this location make this edge one of the least attractive of Saffron Walden. It is also considered that the effect of development of the safeguarded employment land and the housing site would be neutral, neither enhancing nor diminishing the sense of place and local distinctiveness.



Sector 2 looking west towards Ashdon Road commercial centre.

Sector 3. The Little Walden Road approach.

Quality of Landscape. This approach is characterised by an arable agricultural landscape accessed by a country lane, narrow in places that is tree and hedge lined for the most part with intermittent groups of buildings. There is a clear demarcation between countryside and the ribbon of development that is the start of the built up area in this location. At this point the church spire intermittently comes into view. The agricultural land continues to the west of this ribbon of development down to the Slade brook in which general location land is identified in the adopted local plan for a community centre, playing fields and some affordable housing.

Land to the north east of Sheds Lane is part of a very wide open undulating arable landscape defined by very clear edges of 20th century development from which the land gently rises to the north east but falls away to the north west and south east.

Several footpaths, including one from Caton's Lane leading north, provides access to the general area of the Slade Valley.

General function of Landscape. The general function of the approach road north of the built up area is to provide a rural approach of quality.

Broad statement of effect of development. Development in this location would have no detrimental effect on the historic core which is separated from it by significant areas of modern development. The effect of development would result in loss of open arable farmland and to spill out into the same open countryside beyond the clearly defined northern edge.

In broad summary it is considered development in this sector would significantly diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of this part of Saffron Walden.



Sector 3 looking south from Byrds Farm.



Sector 3 looking north along town edge.

Sector 4. The approach via the B184 and Windmill Hill.

Quality of Landscape. To the north east the countryside is one of an arable rolling open countryside. To the south west the golf course and blocks of extensive woodland are defined by a tall quality brick and flint wall. The road approach particularly at Windmill Hill is enclosed with trees and hedges. The wall referred to above provides an important environment feature beyond which are the first glimpses of the historic core of great quality and the dominant church spire. There are well used allotments to the east of Windmill Hill beyond which lies Bridge End Garden (see Sector 10 below).

A footpath running south west /north east links with Catons Lane and

follows an alignment immediately to the north of Bridge End Garden.

General function of Landscape. . The general function of the approach road is to provide an enclosed approach of great environmental quality.

Broad statement of effect of development. Development in this location would have a seriously detrimental effect on the historic core which is immediately adjacent to the south. The effect of development would result in loss of well used allotments or woodlands and spill up the slope destroying an enclosed approach road of great quality.

In broad summary it is considered development in this sector would very significantly diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of this part of Saffron Walden.



Sector 4 looking down Windmill Hill.

Sector 5. The B1383 approaches and Audley End Road.

Quality of Landscape. The landscape is open and arable with the approach road being hedge and tree lined before Audley End House comes into prominent view. On this approach there are quality brick and flint walls, mature trees and woodland blocks that combine with the magnificent view over to Audley End House, a Grade 1 listed building built in the 17th century for Thomas Howard, first Earl of Suffolk. Extensive works were undertaken by Christopher Wren following which demolition of part of the house took place. Further works to the house were undertaken by Baron Braybrooke from the mid 18th century during which time Lancelot Brown was commissioned to landscape the grounds. The parkland is listed Grade 1. The gardens and pleasure grounds lie to the south and east of the house and are enclosed by a Ha-ha created by Brown in the mid 18th century. The Mount garden was also altered by Brown at the same time and laid out in its present form of undulating lawns leading to paths through trees and shrubberies.

Several footpaths provide access to this general area including two well used ones terminating on the edge of the town at Abbey Lane.

The Park extends to the west, south west, east and north east of the House and is bounded by tree belts. It is partly wooded and partly open. Where the parkland adjoins the edge of the town at Abbey Lane it is possible to view the landmark building of the parish church when standing in the mixed rough grassland on the public footpaths that traverse the parkland.

The conservation area includes Audley End House and the fine landscape up to the B1383 frontage and the properties on Audley End Road including the village street leading down to St. Marks college, which as previously noted is itself a Grade 1 listed building. Many of the cottages at Audley End village are listed Grade 11* as is the wall to the north of Audley End Road, the Adam bridge nearby, the Temple of Concord, the Ring Temple and the column to the north east of the mansion. Overall this area with its unique combination of quality buildings and man made and natural landscapes is sublime and of the highest quality.

General function of Landscape. The essential function of this most important landscape, of great importance in its own right, is to frame a diverse range of extremely important buildings that probably represents the finest grouping of a country house and its estate in the District. Nikolaus Pevsner notes *the grounds of Audley End were landscaped by Capability Brown. As was the fashion of the day pieces of garden furnishing were scattered about, exquisitely hidden, half-concealed, or thrown into relief by planting.*

Broad statement of effect of development. Development in this location would have profoundly detrimental effects on this part of the historic core and the general effect of urban development onto this historic landscape would be highly damaging. Even development of a relatively minor nature should be considered very carefully.

In summary almost any development would very significantly diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of an area most would recognise as being of the very highest quality, not only of local, but also of regional and national importance.



Sector 5 looking east at junction to Audley End village.

Sector 6. The approach from Wendens Ambo.

Quality of Landscape. The road approach to this open arable landscape is hedge lined for the most part and very rural in character, being sunken and enclosed in places. There is a length of flint walling. Land is undulating descending and rising to and from the valley bottom. Fields are often defined with trees in prominent blocks in some locations. The road meets Audley End Road at a clearly defined edge of Saffron Walden defined by the prominent wall of Audley End House and parkland. The buildings of the County High School to the south and east, although large, are barely visible when approaching the town from the countryside beyond.

A footpath follows the line of the Fulfen Slade running north/south in the valley bottom.

General function of Landscape. The principle purpose of the landscape is to provide a rural approach and contain the western edge of the town.

Broad statement of effect of development. Development in this location would have no detrimental effect on the historic core which is separated from it by modern development. The general effect would be loss of agricultural land and to spread urban development onto undulating arable farmland of considerable visual quality and resulting in the loss of a particularly rural approach road to the town.

In broad summary it is considered development in this sector would significantly diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of this part of Saffron Walden.



Sector 6 looking north east towards town.

Sector 7. The Newport Road approach.

Quality of Landscape. This large wide open arable rolling landscape is framed in places by blocks of woodland. The road approach from the B1383 junction is defined by brick and flint walls and hedges. In one location the road is sunken and enclosed. The landscape is more open at the edge of the town and this meeting point between countryside and urban development is clearly defined.

The same footpath as previously referred to also follows the line of the Fulfen Slade running north/south in the valley bottom. Additionally another skirts the edge of the town linking with Seven Devils Lane to the south east.

General function of Landscape. The principle purpose of the landscape is to contain the western edge of the town, clearly define its edge and provide a rural approach in this location.

Broad statement of effect of development. Development would have no detrimental effect on the historic core which is separated from it by modern development. The general effect would be loss of agricultural land and to spill urban development down a visually prominent slope onto rolling arable farmland of considerable visual quality and resulting in the loss of a rural approach road to the town.

In broad summary it is considered development in this sector would significantly diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of this part of Saffron Walden.



Sector 7 looking north to town edge.

Sector 8. The Debden Road approach.

Quality of Landscape. This large open rural arable landscape is undulating. The edge of the town is clearly defined by the Herbert's Farm development in the vicinity of Ross Close. The Herbert's Farm sports field to the south east of the urban edge appears as part of the countryside. To the south west, Seven Devils Lane provides a clearly defined edge beyond which an extensive wide landscape falls away.

Several footpaths provide access to the countryside south of the town in this general location.

General function of Landscape. The landscape provides a rural approach of quality and clearly defines the edge of the town.

Broad statement of effect of development. . Development in this location would have no detrimental effect on the historic core which is separated from it by significant areas of modern development. The effect of development would result in loss of open arable farmland and to spill out into the same open countryside beyond very clearly defined edges.

In broad summary it is considered development in this sector would significantly diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of this part of Saffron Walden.



Sector 8 open countryside near farm track leading to farm east of Herbert's Farm playing fields.

Sector 9. The Thaxted Road approach.

Quality of Landscape. This approach is characterised by a landscape that is generally open. The approach road is open in character in the vicinity of the water tower whilst enclosed elsewhere by hedges further north. Closer to the town the character changes and countryside gives way to a more urban identity expressed by the mediocre industrial buildings at Veerman Park and the adjacent civic amenity site. The new live/work units at the Kilns development have introduced a distinctive modern urban element into the area.

Between the latter and Rylstone Way is an area of rising agricultural land beyond which peep the roofs of modern 20th century housing development, enclosed by a hedge to the Thaxted Road.

As described in relation to Sector 1 and beyond this area to the north, stretching up to the Tesco store is an area of open countryside beyond the clearly defined edge of the town defined in this location by the western boundary of the Shire Hill industrial estate and to the east by a track leading to Shire Hill Farm.

To the south west of the Thaxted Road is the Lord Butler Leisure centre and Turpin's indoor Bowling Club, together with the newly completed skate board complex. The edge of the town is clearly defined in this location associated with changes in level where the land rises in a south easterly direction.

A considerable number of footpaths and a byway give access to the countryside in this location.

General function of Landscape. The two distinct types of landscape are firstly the open approach south east of Veerman Park and the open arable farmland to the south west of the Thaxted Road and secondly the industrial and new live/work units and the enclosed field between the Kilns development and

Rylstone Way. In respect of the former the general function is to provide a rural approach to the town, an aspect that is not apparent with the latter. The industrial buildings that form the edge of the town in this location make this edge one of the least attractive of Saffron Walden.

Broad statement of effect of development. Development in this location would have no detrimental effect on the historic core which is separated from it by significant areas of modern development.

For the most part the effect of development would result in loss of open arable farmland and to spill out into the same open countryside beyond very clearly defined edges and in broad summary it is considered development in these locations would diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of this part of Saffron Walden.

However in respect of land between the Kilns development and Rylstone Way it is considered the effect of development would be neutral.



Sector 9 looking north from The Kilns development towards Rylstone Way.

Sector 10. Selected sites within the built up area.

(a) The Common.

Quality of Landscape. This open space of major environmental, communal and recreational importance lies within the heart of the historic core. The ground slopes from its highest elevation in the north to its lowest in the south formed by the Slade brook. Maturing trees define the boundaries. There is an ancient turf maze of significant historical importance that is a scheduled ancient monument and a fountain dated 1887. To some extent its fine quality is marred by a car park, operated by the District Council in the south west corner. The latter could be improved by additional tree planting.

A number of dedicated footpaths traverse the Common.

General function of Landscape. The area and its footpaths are extensively used by townspeople for access to the town centre and for general recreational purposes and for events such as circuses. The open nature of the Common introduces a visual contrast to the dense urban qualities of the built environment that surround it.

Broad statement of effect of development. . Development in this location would have a severe detrimental effect on the historic core which surrounds it and would result in the loss of the major open space in the heart of the town that significantly adds to the environmental diversity of the area.

In broad summary it is considered development in this location, including any extension to the car park would very significantly diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of the historic core.



Sector 10a The Common.

(b) The Castle Keep and Museum site.

Quality of Landscape. The character of this site is entirely different to the Common adjacent but equally important. The scheduled Ancient Monument and Grade 1 listed building consists of the remains of a Norman Keep, built in the late 11th/early 12th century, which although deteriorating is of major historical and visual importance. The Saffron Walden Museum is a 19th century grade 11 listed building. The flint and brick wall encloses an undulating site containing these important buildings and a number of quality mature trees.

General function of Landscape. The landscape sets off two important listed buildings extensively used by the general public and visitors and adds to the rich diversity of this part of the conservation area.

Broad statement of effect of development. Development in this location would have a severely detrimental effect on the historic core which surrounds it on all sides and would result in the loss of an open space in the heart of the town that significantly adds to the environmental diversity of the area.

In broad summary it is considered development in this location would very significantly diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of this part of the historic core.



Sector 10b the castle keep and museum site.

(c) The Parish Churchyard.

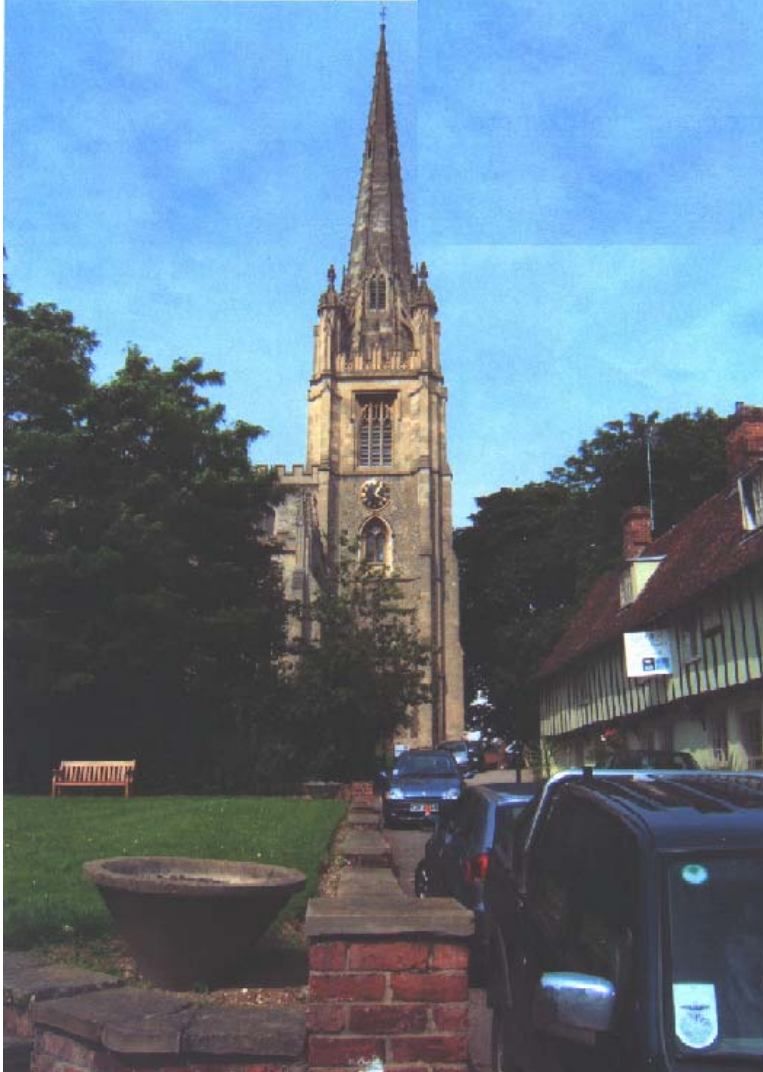
Quality of Landscape. This open space in the heart of the historic core is of immense visual and historic significance containing the church of Saint Mary's the Virgin, a grade 1 structure dating from the late 13th century with the spire being added in 1831 by Rickman and Hutchinson. A number of enclosing walls and buildings are also listed. The churchyard itself contains monuments of quality including several that are listed and trees that add significantly to the local environment. The church is the largest and many would say the finest in the District.

General function of Landscape. To enclose and set off one of the finest buildings in the District and provide an oasis of tranquillity.

Broad statement of effect of development. Development in this location would have a severe detrimental effect on one of the very finest parts of the

historic core and would result in the loss of an open space in the heart of the town that significantly adds to the environmental diversity of the area.

In broad summary it is considered development in this location would very significantly diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of this part of the historic core.



Sector 10c the parish churchyard.

(d) Bridge End Garden and surrounding land to the north east and south east.

Quality of Landscape. Bridge End Garden is a Grade 11* listed garden on English Heritage's list of Parks and Gardens. It was laid out by Francis Gibson in about 1840 and is in the final process of restoration. It is recognised as being one of the finest gardens of its type and contains a sunken 'Dutch' garden and a Maze that are examples of the rich diversity of different landscape features contained by the site. There are a number of enclosing walls and other structures that are individually listed together with a number of interesting statues. It is recorded that the renowned landscape architect Gertrude Jekyll visited the site early in the 20th century. A number of fine trees add to the quality of the local environment.

The Anglo American war memorial and cricket pitch lies to the north east whilst Borough Meadow, a pleasant open pasture land accessible to the public and containing very fine trees, is to the south east.

A footpath runs immediately to the north.

General function of Landscape. The landscape of the Garden itself contains an environment of special historical significance and provides a facility of particular landscape interest in its own right, extensively used by visitors. The war memorial contributes to the diversity of local historical association whilst the cricket field provides a well used sports facility and Borough Meadow provides a recreational with public access providing links with other parts of the town.

Broad statement of effect of development. Development in this location would have a severe detrimental effect on a fine historic landscape and would result in the loss of a variety of open spaces on the edge of the historic core, actively used by a wide range of users.

In broad summary it is considered development in this location would very significantly diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of this part of the historic core and areas of open space close to it.



Sector 10d Bridge End Garden and Borough Meadow beyond.

(e) Ground to Walden Place.

Quality of Landscape. This quality private garden to the grade 11 sheltered accommodation slopes east to west and is enclosed by walls to both east and west that are individually listed. Some mature trees add variety to a site that is generally open in character.

General function of Landscape. Sets off the listed property and provides an open space whose qualities contribute to the historic core in which it lies.

Broad statement of effect of development. Development in this location would have a detrimental effect and would result in the loss or erosion of open space whose qualities add to the diversity of the historic core.

In broad summary it is considered development in this location would diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of this part of the historic core and areas of open space close to it.



Sector 10e the ground to Walden Place.

(f) County High school playing field.

Quality of Landscape. These extensive playing fields are directly associated with the large school complex that fronts the Audley End Road. The open nature of the landscape to the south west of the school buildings is framed in some locations by trees and to the south west particularly, appears as part of the open countryside.

A footpath skirts the south west boundary, linking Wenden Road and Beeches Close.

General function of Landscape. The principle function is to provide playing fields in association with a large educational facility.

Broad statement of effect of development. . Development in this location would have no detrimental effect on the historic core which lies to the east and is separated from it by development. The effects of development would

be the loss of playing fields and to detrimentally extend development onto land that to the west and south west appears as part of the open countryside. Because of the latter and in broad summary, it is considered development in this location would diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of this part of the town.



Sector 10f County High School Playing Fields.

(g) Friends school playing field.

Quality of Landscape. A large flat open sports field visually enclosed by boundary trees. The sports field where it fronts Mount Pleasant road adds to the quality of the conservation area in this location. The playing fields which are very extensive, being about the same size as the Common are flat with mature trees to their boundaries that to the south and east form a common boundary with adjacent housing development.

General function of Landscape. Provides playing fields for school and acts as a green lung in part of the town, the majority of which lies beyond the historic core.

Broad statement of effect of development. Development in this location would have limited detrimental effect on the historic core which for the most part lies beyond the playing fields. Development of the frontage at Mount Pleasant Road and loss of the trees in this location would however have a detrimental effect on the historic core nearby. The loss of the extensive playing fields would be a serious loss to the school and would also result in an environmental loss in this part of the town where the surrounding housing development is relatively dense and characterised by a real shortage of open space.

In broad summary it is considered development in this location would diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of this part of the town.



Sector 10g Friends School playing fields.

(h) Bell College playing field and the adjacent R.A. Butler school playing field and adjacent land formerly part of the railway embankment.

Quality of Landscape. These playing fields are directly associated with their respective schools and in part on slightly sloping ground. In some locations their boundaries are tree lined. The R. A. Butler playing field is a combination of hard and soft surfaces. The characteristics and function the Bell College open space and playing fields have significantly changed with recent residential development that has taken place.

The land which was formerly part of the railway line consists of an extensive belt of mixed deciduous trees.

General function of Landscape. Provides playing fields in direct association with the respective schools.

The extensive and elevated tree belt on the former railway line provides an environmental and ecological feature of quality in this part of the town largely barren of such characteristics.

Broad statement of effect of development. Development in this location would have no detrimental effect on the historic core which lies to the west of the playing fields and is separated from it by development. The principle effect of further development would be the loss of playing fields associated with the respective schools. Some would argue that should either school cease to

function the 'raison d'etre' for the associated playing field also ceases. Whilst this is true in part, it has to be recognised that such open spaces are visually important to surrounding residents in an area of modern and sometimes relatively high density housing developments. In such circumstances retention of open space, at least in part, will need careful consideration.

Erosion of the tree belt on the former railway line would represent an environmental loss and would diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness. In broad summary it is otherwise considered that development on these playing fields if their principal function ceased, would be detrimental to the general amenities of the area and also diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness of this part of the town. However an option for limited development could reduce the impact.

It is important to note there is an identified shortfall of playing fields in the town as a whole.



Sector 10h Bell Collage playing fields.

Overall summary.

The detail is contained in the findings above that should be referred to. However In broad summary it is considered that:

- (1) Development in Sectors 4, Sector 5 and sector 10(a), (b), (c), (d), (e) and in part (g) would have a particularly seriously detrimental effect on parts of the historic core.
- (2) The sites identified in the adopted local plan at Ashdon road for employment and housing are appropriate designations in terms of their visual impact in respect of the historic core and the town as a whole.
- (3) The visual effect of development between the Kilns development and Rylstone Way would be neutral.
- (4) The visual effect of development in other locations would be damaging and would diminish the sense of place and local distinctiveness in their respective locations.
- (5) The edges of the town at Radwinter Road (Sector 1) Ashdon Road (Sector 2) and Thaxted Road (Sector 9) are the three least attractive edges where commercial buildings, generally of mediocre to poor visual quality, detract from their immediate surroundings.