

# LOCAL GEOLOGICAL SITES

## UTTLESFORD DISTRICT



### The Leper Stone

**Site location:** Roadside verge at the north entrance to Newport, Essex

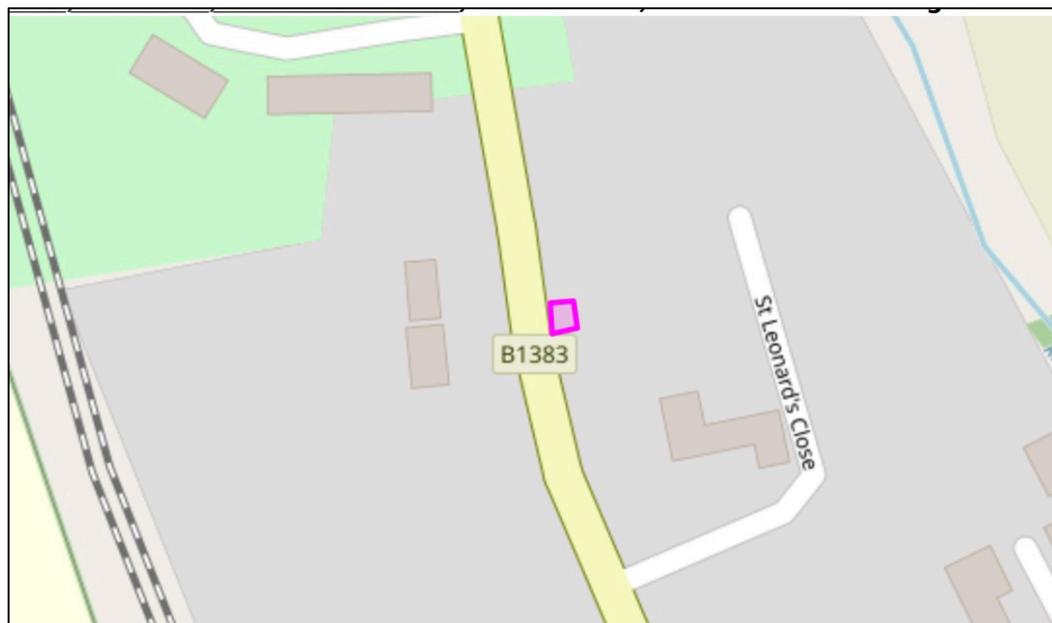
**Grid reference:** TL 5199 3496

**Status:** Accessible at all times

**Summary of the geological interest:**

On the grass verge on the Cambridge Road (B1383) at the northern entrance to Newport village is a large boulder known locally as the Leper Stone. This boulder is a sarsen stone, a block of extremely hard sandstone that was formed about 55 million years ago during the Palaeocene period in sandy strata called the Reading Beds that occur on top of the Chalk. The stone is called a 'glacial erratic' as it was carried to Essex by the Anglian Ice Sheet which covered almost the whole of Britain during the coldest period of the Ice Age, some 450,000 years ago. It probably originated on the Chalk downland of Cambridgeshire.

It is clear that the stone has been moved here by humans and may have been ploughed up from a local field. It may have been placed here as a boundary marker but when this was done is not known.



**Site Assessment.** Local Geological Sites (LoGS) in Essex are assessed using criteria based on DEFRA guidance. An assessment form is used which asks key questions under four value categories: scientific, educational, historical and aesthetic. This site has been assessed and qualifies under these criteria.

## ***Scientific interest and site importance***

Sarsens are not uncommon in Essex, but this is a very large example. Sarsens formed when the climate of Britain was hot, and a layer of sand beneath the surface of ground became cemented with quartz. They are thus very resistant to erosion and have survived the rigours of the Ice Age. The climate conditions under which sarsens were formed has been compared to the present day climate in the Kalahari Desert and parts of Australia.

The Leper Stone is of educational importance as it is the County's largest standing stone, as well as being one of the most conspicuous and best-known erratic boulders in Essex. It is also of historic interest, linking geology, archeology and social history.

## ***Other information***

Near the stone is said to have been the site of St Leonard's Hospital, founded in 1156, which is thought to have been a hospital for lepers, hence the name Leper Stone. Part of the hospital wall still remains near the stone, which consists of red bricks and blocks of hard chalk, called 'clunch'. Local legend has it that there was originally a small depression on top of the Leper Stone, which used to be filled with water and orders for food would be placed on the stone and the money put in the water, supposedly to cleanse it.

## ***References***

GEOESSEX. 2010. **Sarsen stones**. *GeoEssex Factsheet No. 1*. GeoEssex.

LUCY, G. 2000. **Newport's chilly past**. *Newport News*. No. 53. Pages 31-32.

ROWNTREE, C.B. 1954. **Legacies of the Ice Age in Essex**. *Essex Countryside*. Vol. 2(6): Pages 58-59

SEARLE T. 1994. **Our Stone**. *Newport News*. No. 41. Pages 99-100.



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