

LOCAL GEOLOGICAL SITES

UTTLESFORD DISTRICT



UfdG27 Newport Road Cutting, Saffron Walden

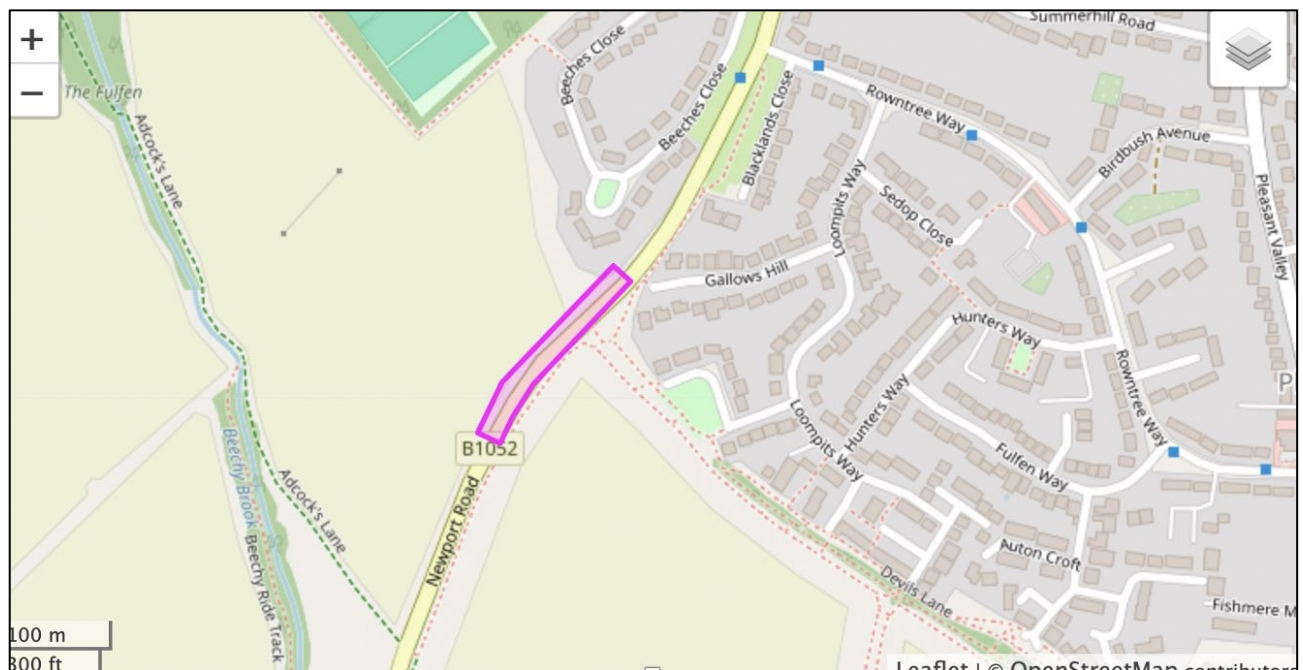
Site location: Cutting on the Newport Road (B1052) south-west of Saffron Walden.

Grid Reference: TL 5327 3721

Status: Publicly accessible

Summary of the geological interest:

The eastern side of the cutting is a vertical cliff in Upper Chalk about 4 metres high. The cliff was cut back and cleaned in 2019 to prevent cliff falls which had led to road closures. Road cuttings like this are rare in Essex.



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

The eastern side of the cutting is a vertical cliff in Upper Chalk about 4 metres high. No access is possible as the cliff is adjacent to the carriageway. The cliff can, however be viewed from the pavement on the opposite side of the road. Road cuttings like this are rare in Essex.

Falls of chalk occasionally led to road closures and so the cutting was cut back in 2019. It now exists as quite a fine cliff of chalk, showing considerable ice shattering from when it was in the permafrost zone during the Anglian glaciation 450,000 years ago.

Chalk is a special type of limestone formed on the floor of a tropical sea about 80 million years ago during the Cretaceous period. The Chalk Sea is thought to have covered most of northern Europe, the purity of the chalk being evidence that coastlines were then far away and sea level was very high. At this time the European continent had not yet separated from North America. Fossils of creatures that lived in the Chalk Sea have been found in the Chalk here but they are rare and difficult to spot.

The chalk is soft, white and blocky. There are widely-spaced courses of nodular flint and layers and oblique veins of tabular flint. Flint is an extremely hard, black form of quartz that originates from the skeletons of sponges that were dissolved by sea water and precipitated as mostly horizontal layers.



The Newport Road cutting during the clearance work in 2019. Photo: G. Lucy