This guidance note explains why and how the special character of Osney Town should be protected. It gives the background to what is special, why such protection is necessary and how this can be achieved by respecting its special interest through understanding and sensitive treatment of the building fabric.

OXFORD CITY COUNCIL

OSNEY TOWN ARTICLE 4 DIRECTION

Advice to Homeowners

Osney Town has a recognisable special character that is worth protecting. Designation as a conservation area in July 1976 introduced tighter planning controls covering demolition, the size of extensions and works to trees. By 1993, the character and appearance of the conservation area had deteriorated because of relatively minor changes to individual houses. Additional controls were felt necessary to halt this deterioration. As a result, an 'Article 4 Direction' relating to all houses in the conservation area came into effect in January 1994 removing the 'permitted rights' which allowed such minor changes.

What does this mean?

For dwelling houses covered by the Article 4 Direction *(see Fig. 1)*, an application for planning permission is required for alterations or extensions to any roof or wall which faces onto a road or footpath, including: -

- alteration and replacement of windows, cills, arches, surrounds and changes to the dimension of the opening;
- alteration and replacement of doors, door arches, lintels and changes to the dimension of the opening;
- changes in roof material;
- the introduction of rooflights or patent glazing;
- the erection or construction of a porch outside any external door;
- the rendering, plastering or other surface texturing of external brick or stone walls not previously treated in this way;
- the painting of any unpainted external brick or stone wall;
- installation of a satellite antenna, below 90cm in any dimension.

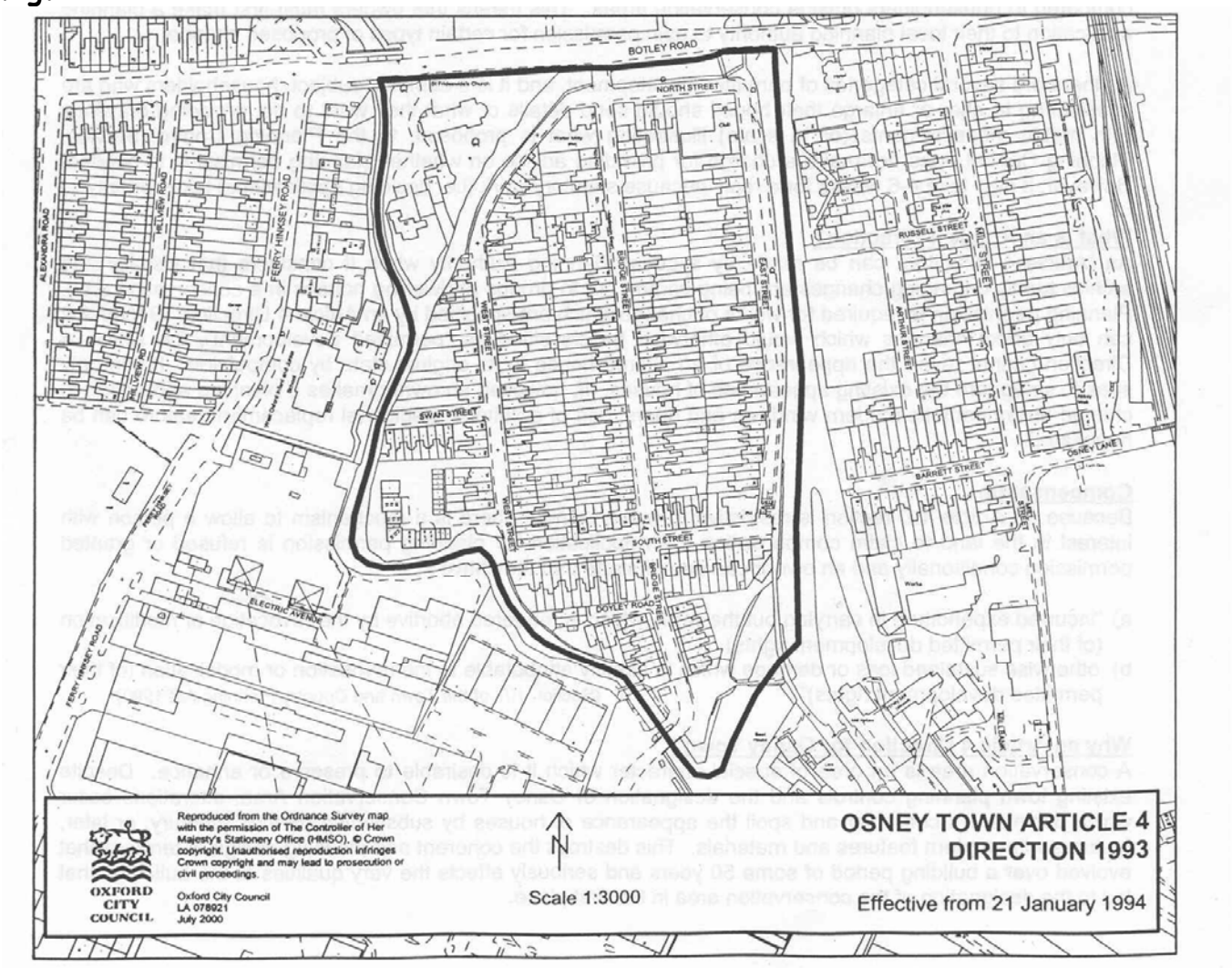
OSNEY TOWN – SPECIAL CHARACTER

Osney Town was built between the 1850s and the early 20th century as late Georgian styles changed to less unified Victorian styles. The earlier buildings can be distinguished by brick fronted terraces laid using Flemish bond and with glazed header bricks contributing a decorative element. Vertical double-hung sash windows with small panes of glass appear under stone lintels or brick arches. Later houses also used sash windows, often with larger sheet glass panes, the brickwork fronts being plain, elaborately banded or plastered. Vertically proportioned window openings with consistent glazing patterns ensured the rhythm and scale of the street were in harmony.

The survival of this architectural harmony relies upon the retention of much of the existing fabric such as the diaper Flemish bond brickwork, the pattern of vertical window openings and care for detail and scale in new buildings.

AREA COVERED BY THE ARTICLE 4 DIRECTION

Fig. 1



WINDOWS

Windows, as the eyes of a building, make a significant contribution to its appearance and character. In Osney Town, many of the original timber sliding sash windows have been replaced with modern designs and materials. This has led to the degradation of the character and appearance of both individual buildings and of the conservation area as a whole.

The Double-Hung Sash Window

The sash window developed in England during the 17th century. During the Georgian and Victorian periods, double-hung sash windows were the most common system of window opening. They provided ventilation through both sashes opening using a system of weights and pulleys. The double-hung sash was a characteristic feature of the 19th century suburbs of Oxford being both functional and attractive in appearance.

The design of double hung sashes evolved as a result of technological advances in glass manufacture. While early crown glass was thin and fragile and so required thick glazing bars, the introduction of manufactured sheet or plate glass allowed for more delicate glazing bars. In Osney Town, earlier windows appear in openings which are generally one and a half times as high as they are wide. The window is divided into two parts (the upper and lower sash), each divided into 6 panes by glazing bars of uniform size, the height of each pane being greater than the width. These precise proportions and subdivisions are an important part of the design and essential to the overall appearance *(see Fig. 3).*

By the second half of the 19th century, larger expanses of manufactured plate glass allowed the use of fewer glazing bars, and the sash stiles extended to form 'horns' to strengthen the joint with the meeting rail *(see Fig. 2)*. These windows often had only a central glazing bar to each sash, while late Victorian and Edwardian windows dispensed with glazing bars entirely. The resulting windows can lack the elegance provided by the harmonious proportions of twelve-pane sashes. During the 20th century, manufacturing technology allowed for windows glazed by a single pane of glass. This resulted in the window being almost invisible to the eye contributing to the blank and characterless appearance of some buildings.

Repair or Replacement?

If windows are showing signs of decay, or have suffered from lack of maintenance, it does not always mean that they must be replaced. Often, windows can be repaired and it is preferable to retain the original joinery and to explore this opportunity first. If in doubt, obtain advice from a reputable joiner who is willing to assess the true condition of the existing windows - there are companies who specialise in upgrading and draft-proofing double hung sash windows.

Timber sills and the bottom rails of window sashes where water collects are particularly vulnerable to decay. Check the condition of these areas regularly and try to keep them painted. It may only be necessary to carry out treatment to parts of a window frame, where needed, rather than undertake wholesale replacement. Often flaking paint makes the problem seem worse than it is. Beneath the flakes, the wood could be reasonably sound. If there are isolated areas of rot, these can be cut out, new wood pieced in, or the holes filled with one of several proprietary products on the market.

Generally, the wood used in 19th century windows was well seasoned and is better able to resist moisture ingress than the modern equivalent. The main timber used today for new windows is redwood (Scots Pine) which usually contains sapwood. This is less resistant to decay than heart or well-seasoned wood, as a result the modern window is more prone to retain moisture and ultimately fail. Because the grain of modern timber is much courser, it is difficult for today's manufacturers to replicate the delicate glazing bar profiles of the past; this is another reason for keeping the existing.

Stripping Paint

Take care when stripping old paint and/or varnish from window frames. Blow lamps should be avoided by the unskilled. Even hot air torches can cause scorching, loss of surface and cracking of glass if not used with care and the aid of a window guard.

Chemical paint strippers, though effective, soften wood temporarily when first applied and enthusiastic application of a shave hook or scraper can gouge into, and damage good detail and surface. Allow the chemical stripper to soften the paint for the manufacturer's specified time, then carefully use the scraper to take off the paint layers that have obscured details and

mouldings. Often a thorough rubbing down of old paint work with sand and glass paper can have the desired effect in achieving a smooth finish to woodwork ready for fresh paint application.

Glass

Original glass, should be retained wherever possible. This glass, through its manufacturing process, has an uneven surface which adds interest and patterning with a far livelier appearance than modern plate glass.

Sometimes the original glass used in window and door panes is thinner than that recommended by the trade for replacement glazing. If just a few panes in a multi-paned arrangement need to be replaced with thicker, heavier glass or laminate there may not be a problem. However, if a whole sash window is glazed with thicker and heavier glass it may cease to slide effectively as its counter balance weight will be affected. The solution is to ask your local joiner or building firm to add extra weights to the sash cords to compensate.

Insulation

The glazing bars in multi-paned sashes and casements not only make glass replacement easier and cheaper if a major crack or total break occurs, but they help by their grid effect to minimise the passage of cold air through the glass to your home. Several approaches may be taken to further draught-proof house interiors without destroying the visual appearance of an existing sash window:-

- Internal blinds;
- Introduction of draught strips into narrow grooves made in the sash rails and the beading of the window frame;
- Secondary glazing as a separate unit comprising hinged or sliding panels set in a frame behind the front window. Care should be taken that any glazing bars or divisions in the secondary unit are hidden by, or line up with, meeting rails or glazing bars in the original sash.

Double-glazing

Any double glazing requirement can and should be achieved by the addition of internal secondary glazing. It is not recommended that original sash and casement windows be double glazed because secondary glazing can provide better sound and heat insulation than double glazed units owing to there being a greater gap between the two panes of glass. Most windows of Osney Town have slender glazing bars which are neither wide nor robust enough to accommodate double-glazed sealed units. This method can also make the sash window very heavy making it necessary to dismantle the sash box to replace or adjust the cords and weights.

Replacement Windows

If repair is not possible the original window will have to be replaced. Replacement should be made on a like-for-like basis, avoiding inappropriate modern pastiche designs such as the top hung design. New stained or varnished replacement hardwood windows are sometimes installed for speed and to reduce maintenance costs, but windows decorated in this way do need regular maintenance despite their deterioration not being so apparent as with painted surfaces.

Colour

Dark stains are historically incorrect and windows should be painted using appropriate primers and top-coat paints. Ideally, wooden windows and frames should be painted white or off-white. A contrasting colour can be used on the frame to match the colour of the front door. Other colours such as black, dark grey, dark green, or dark brown were used for windows by the Victorians and some homes may look better with these colours if the wall surface is painted a pale colour. On the whole the use of white or off-white for casements and sashes is to be preferred as these colours, unlike darker colours, tend to bring the frontage of a building to life.

Do's and Don'ts

- Always investigate repair - replacement should be a last resort.
- Always replace a sash window using its original design.
- Always retain the original opening – if it is already enlarged, investigate reinstating the original opening.
- Avoid using casement windows with integral opening lights. Many of these have unattractive horizontal glazing bars. They may also obstruct the pavement when open. Never use casements with a central vertical divide or mullion - these are particularly ugly.
- Don't alter the shape of the brick window opening or use a horizontal window on street front walls.

- Don't destroy the arch or lintel above the window opening.

DOORS

There are several door designs on the market which are inaccurate Georgian and Victorian replicas. The commonest fault is the inclusion of a "fanlight" in the top part of a door leaf. In Georgian and Victorian times the fanlight was a separate element framed and set above the door and contained within the overall door opening *(see Fig. 4).*

Osney Town has a variety of existing door designs *(see Fig. 2)*, some historically correct, others not. Doors from the mid 19th century were either painted wood of solid multi-panel design or had glazed upper panels with a solid lower panelled area. Doors were always painted, popular colours were dark blue, chocolate brown and olive green. Flush-faced doors, totally glazed doors within an outer frame, "sun-burst" 1930s glazed doors and the "mock Georgian" door with incorporated fanlight are not accurate replacements.

Authentic replacement door furniture is sometimes difficult to obtain, while reproduction features are often over elaborate for use in modestly designed buildings. If an existing door is beyond repair, salvage its door knobs, door knockers, letterboxes and keyhole plates for re-use.

On the whole, maintenance of original doors is similar to that of windows and regular painting will increase their longevity. The lower part of the door generally requires more attention because it bears the brunt of wear and tear, and water damage. To improve light in the hall it is acceptable to replace the top two panels of a six or four panel door with glass. (Please note that planning permission is required before carrying out this type of alteration.)

UNPAINTED STONE AND BRICK HOUSES

If you live in one of the few unpainted stone houses or one of the several unpainted brick houses in Osney Town, then you should aim to keep it in its natural state by not applying render, paint or colourless damp-proofing sealants. These can trap moisture within the wall and alter the surface appearance of the natural material.

REASONS FOR KEEPING BRICK OR STONE IN ITS ORIGINAL STATE

Visual appearance: Brick and stone are attractive materials that enhance the interest and character of streets and individual properties.

Preventing damp and decay: Before taking action to 'weatherproof' brick or stonework, the cause of any dampness should be thoroughly investigated. Very often the repair of leaking rainwater goods or the lowering of the soil level around the building is sufficient to eliminate such problems. Rendering and painting can prevent brick or stonework 'breathing' and moisture can become trapped in the walls. This makes damp problems worse and further aggravates the breakdown of the covered bricks and external wall surface.

Pointing: Traditionally the mortar used in the construction of brick and stone walls in Osney Town comprised a lime mix. When repointing brick or stonework a similar approach is to be encouraged, rather than using cement rich mortars. Not only does a wall repointed with lime mortar have quite a more pleasing appearance to one where modern cement has been used, but it protects a building since it is a relatively soft, porous mortar that takes the brunt of the weather, while allowing the building to breath and accommodate movements without cracking. Cement mortar, on the other hand, is an undesirable material since it is a rigid material which does not allow the building to move without cracking. What's more, cement rich mortar has a low porosity, which means that it does not allow the building to breath and water can become trapped in the walls, causing damp problems inside the building and will accelerate decay of bricks or stone.

Preserving surface detail: Covering original external wall surfaces can affect the detailing of buildings. Decorative and functional features, such as brick window and door arches, patterning and contrast in materials, can be lost.

Removal of modern render/cladding: The process of covering original external wall surfaces with renders and paints is not easily reversed. In order for the render to "take", the wall surface may have been scored to provide a key. In attempting to remove any surface coating it is difficult to keep the face of the stone or brick undamaged. Abrasive and chemical

methods of removal are possible under the strictest supervision by a qualified operator, but are not easily controlled and there is no absolute guarantee of their success.

MAINTENANCE OF RENDERED OR PAINTED HOUSES

Regular maintenance: Decorate on a regular basis making sure that rendered surfaces are sound and are not subject to cracks which may allow moisture into the building. Check to see that pointing on painted brick walls is intact and repair it if it is failing.

External masonry paint: Choose a paint which is suitable for external use on walls. This will usually be a masonry paint with a smooth surface. Avoid paints which have gritty particles or other textured effects, as these detract from the appearance of the wall surface and fail to give the intended impression of plaster or stucco.

Use a paint which has a matt surface. Glossy and semi-sheen finishes are not historically correct for wall surfaces such as those at Osney Town. Glossy surfaces have reflective properties which show up any defects such as uneven brickwork, while matt paint minimises them and is more visually pleasing.

Colour schemes.: The Council does not wish to impose colour schemes for existing or previously painted buildings in Osney Town because it is aware that part of the attractive charm and character of the street-scape is due to the individual's choice of colours. There are, however, certain colours which are more compatible with the terraced, tight-knit streets, and to an extent these are the natural tones with particular emphasis on earth hues.

Acceptable colours: Creams and off-whites, warm greys, stone hues, pale greens with a hint of stone hue, drab greens, sandy hues, light browns, terracotta and brick colours, blue-greys or stone/pink.

Colours best avoided: Black, dark brown, bright pink, bright sky blue, stark white without a tint and primary colours of red, yellow or blue.

ROOFS AND DORMER WINDOWS

The first terraced houses of Osney Town were built just after the coming of the railways to Oxford which meant that quantities of Welsh slate were available for the first time as a cheaper roofing alternative. Also, it allowed a lower pitch so that less timber had to be used in the construction. Welsh slate is thus the predominant roofing material. Most of the houses in Osney Town have roofs of a simple, double pitched construction with low pitch and a few have single dormers with slate covered pitched, or lead flat roofs to their street elevation. Part of the character of some streets is created by terraces with continuous uninterrupted lengths of roof, punctuated only by the line of chimneys. In such situations, dormers will be resisted as the introduction of such features will undermine one of the qualities of those streets.

In terraces, consistency of material and profile is crucial to the overall visual effect of roofs in a street and artificial or replica roofing material (although technically advancing in terms of colour, texture and appearance) has yet to achieve a totally convincing appearance when put to use. Careful consideration will be given by the Local Planning Authority to alternative materials but the presumption will generally be in favour of replacing original roofing material like with like. Very often a good proportion of the existing, natural material can be salvaged for re-use on the public side of the roof. Your roofer or builder should also take into account the additional weight of some replacement materials and its effect on the existing timber roof structure.

SKYLIGHTS AND ROOFLIGHTS

Small skylights and rooflights were originally a means of enabling light and ventilation to confined attic spaces. However, today's need for such features through the increased conversion of attic spaces is more prevalent. The modern counterpart of the skylight is more conspicuous as it stands proud of the roof, although some manufacturers are experimenting with a thinner less obtrusive frames such as the reproduction Victorian skylight now available on the market. Where possible, the rooflight should be positioned on the rear slope so that it does not punctuate the overall simple uncluttered sweep of the roof mass. It is, however, recognised that rooflights may be required in the front roof-pitch of converted loft spaces for purposes of an escape route if it is not possible to provide fire safety measures internally by upgrading doors and partitions In such cases, it is acceptable to provide one conservation style rooflight on the centre of the front elevation in order to provide a means of escape from the

attic room. The visual appearance of these features is improved with the introduction of a central, vertical glazing bar in the roof light.

SOLAR PANELS

Solar panels have come onto the market since the Article 4 Direction was made. Their effective location on a building, or on the ground is dependent on the buildings orientation to sun and daylight. Like rooflights, their position can have a disruptive visual effect on the solid roof appearance of a building or terrace. Careful siting needs to be considered and advice should be sought from the Planning Control and Conservation Section.

CHIMNEYS

In Osney Town, the retention and rebuilding of external chimney stacks is encouraged by the Council because they are very much part of the silhouette and rhythm of terraced housing roofscape. Their presence may be emphasised by the use of elaborate brickwork, or additional mouldings and detailing.

RAINWATER GOODS

Historically, cast iron was widely used for gutters and downpipes and these features may now be showing signs of failure through cracking. It is still possible to get new cast iron rainwater goods. Cast aluminium or other alloys painted black where pipes pass in front of brick wall surfaces, or decorated to match painted walls of other colours are acceptable alternatives. Try to avoid using grey plastic pipework and guttering on street facing elevations of the building. Not only is this visually unattractive, it is more difficult to decorate if you wish to “lose” it against a background surface.

GLOSSARY

Casement window	A window with opening lights hung on hinges
Fanlight	A window over a door, often semi-circular and decorative (in the shape of a fan)
Flemish bond	Method of laying brickwork so that headers and stretchers are laid alternately in each course
Header	Brick laid with its end appearing on the face of the wall
Horn	A extension of the stile of a sash window to strengthen the joint with the meeting rail *(see fig. 2)*
Lintel	Horizontal beam or stone bridging an opening such as a door or window
Mullion	Vertical posts which divide a window
Sash window	A window which opens by being raised or lowered in vertical grooves
Stretcher	Brick laid with its side appearing on the face of the wall

Application Forms

There is no fee for an 'Article 4 Direction' application for planning permission. Application forms are available from:-

Oxford City Council
Planning Control and Conservation
Ramsay House
10 St Ebbes Street
Oxford OX1 1PT

Tel. 01865 249811
Fax. 01865 252144

Further advice

If you would like further advice before submitting an application for planning permission, please contact a member of the Historic Buildings and Conservation team at Oxford City Council:-

Nick Worlledge *Tel.* 01865 252147
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