

# Oxford Central (City & University) Conservation Area Appraisal

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Oxford Central (City & University) Conservation Area

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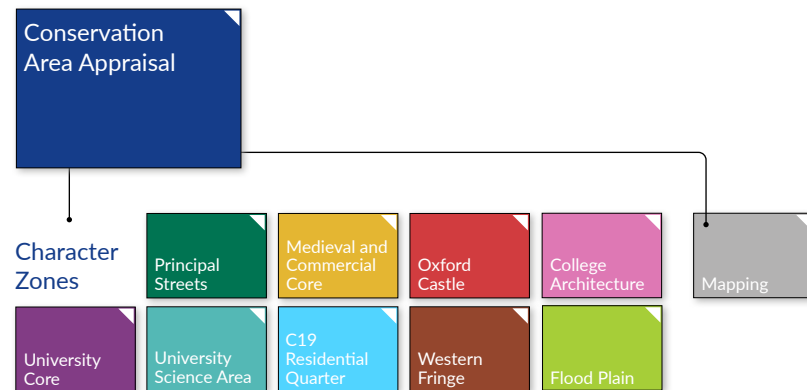


# Structure of this appraisal

## Oxford Central (City & University) Conservation Area

### How to use this document

This appraisal comprises a number of parts, as shown in the diagram below. This is the principal document, containing an overview of the significance of the conservation area, together with management guidance and design advice. It has been informed by and extends to include nine individual Character Zone statements which provide detailed analysis of the different parts of the conservation area. Maps throughout all the documents provide multiple layers of information about the conservation area.



### Contents

The Conservation Area Appraisal (this document) describes:

- The methodology used.
- Significance: the characteristics of the conservation area that make it special and worthy of protection.
- Management guidance for conserving and enhancing these characteristics.
- Design advice for new buildings and alterations to existing ones.

Character Zone statements:

- Detailed analysis of the conservation area, organized into nine different character zones. If a site is close to or on the boundary of a character zone, it may be necessary to consult more than one character zone statement.

### Mapping

- Dozens of layers illustrate many facets of the conservation area, such as heritage designation, landform and geology, history and archaeology.
- By comparing these layers in different combinations, it is possible to study, for example, how geology, topography and medieval fortifications have shaped the city centre.

### Statement of Community Engagement:

- A record of what consultation has been undertaken, what people told us and how the document reflects these comments.
- A record of what consultation has been undertaken, what people told us and how the document reflects these comments.

### Policy References

- Local Plan policies and related Technical Advice Note references refer to Oxford's Local Plan 2036. When that Local Plan is replaced by subsequent documents, care should be taken to refer to those new policies on equivalent topics.

### Electronic Navigation

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## Chapter 1

# Foreword

Oxford Central (City & University) Conservation Area



## 1.1 Foreword

I am pleased to present this appraisal and management guidance for Oxford's Central Conservation Area.

Oxford is well known throughout the world for its significant contribution to architecture and education. Its special qualities have enabled a vibrant commercial core to interact with homes and institutions within a green landscape setting for centuries, evolving as needed without losing that vital combination of elements which makes it unique.

Vital to the continued economic success and vitality of the city centre are the historic buildings and spaces in which we trade, live, and educate. The growth of the universities, the pressure for housing, and the ever-changing retail market has made it imperative that we support the Local Plan with accurate assessments of our heritage assets. By understanding what qualities we already have, we can build on this to create more accessible public space, reduce the loss of embodied carbon, and identify places where new homes and jobs can be generated.

During the first consultation of the appraisal document we found that there were other areas worthy of inclusion. Part of the city's west end around St Thomas' Church, and the University Science Area have now been included, recognising their importance to the history of the city.

The first part of the appraisal sets out the important details which make Oxford definable, from the small architectural details to the relationships between the buildings of all different ages. It provides an evidence base for the policies and proposals that will impact on the historic core. As we aim to utilise our existing assets and expand the city centre, there are opportunities to maintain the historic environment as central to Oxford's continued achievements as a world-renowned city centre. Improved infrastructure and spaces in the west end will be a welcoming point for many visitors; the identification and recognition of the importance of this area can be a building block for this expansion.

The city centre is a whole entity, but there are recognisably different elements to it which bring balance and richness. At a detailed level, the character zone chapters break the city centre down into character areas, meaning it is easier to find and understand individual streets and places.

The management and design advice aims to help homeowners, occupiers, freeholders, institutions, companies, and developers living and working within the city, all of whom are charged with its maintenance and continued success. It highlights where some alterations could be made and gives a framework for new structures. This can help to save embodied energy through the retention of adaptable buildings, and finding appropriate spaces for new energy-saving structures.

The conservation area is not defined solely by its buildings and spaces, but also by its uses and users. It is against the backdrop of landscape and buildings that everyday life occurs. This reinforces the importance of having an up-to-date appraisal to ensure that its special qualities are recognised and made central to the continued development of the city. I feel sure that the document will prove to be an invaluable management tool to all those involved in the on-going preservation and enhancement of the city.

Councillor Louise Upton

Cabinet Member for Planning and Healthier Communities



## Chapter 2

# Character Statement

Oxford Central (City & University) Conservation Area





## 2.1 Character statement

Few places in the world can claim so much outstanding architecture and townscape in such a concentrated space as the historic centre of Oxford. One of the masterpieces of European architectural heritage, it is also a major regional commercial centre and one of the most celebrated and loved places in Britain. Its history, its architecture, its townscape and its setting within the landscapes combine harmoniously, and frequently spectacularly, to convey a strong sense of the specific nature of the city.

### 2.1.1 University and colleges

- The University and its colleges are the principal source of this international significance, and it is their **long-term ownership and functional continuity** that makes the conservation area's townscape so distinctive. Through research, teaching and the arts, they are associated with people and events that have shaped national and world history. This **historical association** is expressed in the distinctive **architectural traditions** that reflect the requirements of higher education since the middle ages. From the 13th century onwards colleges colonised the eastern half of the town with private inward-looking precincts planned around quadrangles of medieval and post-medieval buildings, both within and outside the walled town. These urban forms define much of the conservation area, and within these enclosures Oxford's **medieval archaeology** is preserved to an unusual degree.
- The University and colleges are wealthy and sophisticated and have always employed leading architects. Because of them the conservation area is characterised by **architecture of international importance** worthy of a capital city. An exceptionally and unusually high proportion is pre-Victorian, but the high standard applies to architecture of all periods up to the present day.
- The quality of Oxford's architecture is best illustrated by the magnificent group of University and college buildings and spaces situated between Broad Street and St Mary's Church, which form the visual heart of the conservation area. Pevsner described this as, 'unique in the world.' The evolution and growth of scholarly research, educational practice and architecture is represented by later developments such as the Science Area.



Radcliffe Camera, All Souls College and the Bodleian Library



The Clarendon Building on Broad Street

## 2.1.2 Historic county town

- Centuries before Oxford became a seat of learning it was a **regional centre of commerce, administration and justice**. This history, these functions and the architecture associated with them, shape the character and appearance of the conservation area as profoundly as the University.
- The largely regular **street layout** of the Saxon burh, founded over a thousand years ago, is well preserved. Together with the line of the 13th century **city walls** and the floodable river valleys this largely determined the plan of the historic centre as it is today. Fronting the streets are narrow Norman tenement plots, some amalgamated to form colleges or later shops, and characterised by buildings built hard up against the pavement.
- Most of the non-educational buildings on these streets were **built for housing or shopping**, and often both. In contrast to the colleges, these buildings historically have active frontages which contribute greatly to the character of these streets.
- **The Castle** creates a contrasting zone to the west, the character of which is derived from its military requirements and subsequently the development of public functions such as law courts, prison, police headquarters, and county and city government, housed in large and often monumental buildings set in back from the street.



County Hall (OCC)

## 2.1.3 Architectural tradition

- This history has created a distinctive architectural tradition, characterised by:
  - a **limited range of materials**, most famously oolitic limestone, but also timber framing with rendered walls, and brick. Historically these materials were locally sourced, and they express a specific sense of place
  - the highest quality **workmanship**, and careful often enjoyable **detailing**
  - **articulation** of elevations by detailing and deep reveals
  - picturesque and harmonious juxtaposition of buildings and elements
  - narrow building widths
  - an **outstanding roofscape**, perhaps the most famous and architecturally rich in the country, whose animation and delight is formed from a combination of both the deliberate contributions such as towers, turrets, spires, pinnacles, and the functional backdrop of chimneys, parapets and party walls.



Oxford's Roofscape from South Park



## 2.1.4 Landscape and setting

- The setting for this architecture and townscape is formed by water and landscape:
  - water takes the form of **the rivers and the Oxford Canal**. Oxford exists because of the Thames and Cherwell river crossings, and the convergence of the two rivers shaped the city centre and stimulated commerce
  - the different characters of the Thames, Cherwell and Canal give each of the east, south and west edges of the conservation area a distinctive identity. To the west, Castle Mill Stream and Canal, and later the railway, were the focus of **industry**, leaving a legacy of light industrial buildings and workers housing that illustrates the often-overlooked importance of industry to the development of the city
  - to the east and south, **flood plains of the Cherwell and the Thames** encircle the city centre, framing views of Oxford's architecture rising above trees and meadows that form one of the most famous images of any town or city in Britain. This has been a landscape of recreation for centuries: for walking, boating and sport. Because of it, the conservation area contains an exceptional amount of green space, but this is unevenly distributed. Elsewhere, the most significant elements are College lawns and gardens, glimpsed from streets but normally closed to the public. The particular ways in which **greenery and buildings combine** are fundamental to the conservation area's unique character
  - **beyond the conservation area, the surrounding hills contribute powerfully to its character and appearance by their contribution to its world-famous skyline, both as a backcloth to views out, and the origin for views in.** This skyline and its green setting are precious and treasured.



Christchurch Meadow



The Cherwell River



## Chapter 3

# Conservation Area Map

Oxford Central (City & University) Conservation Area



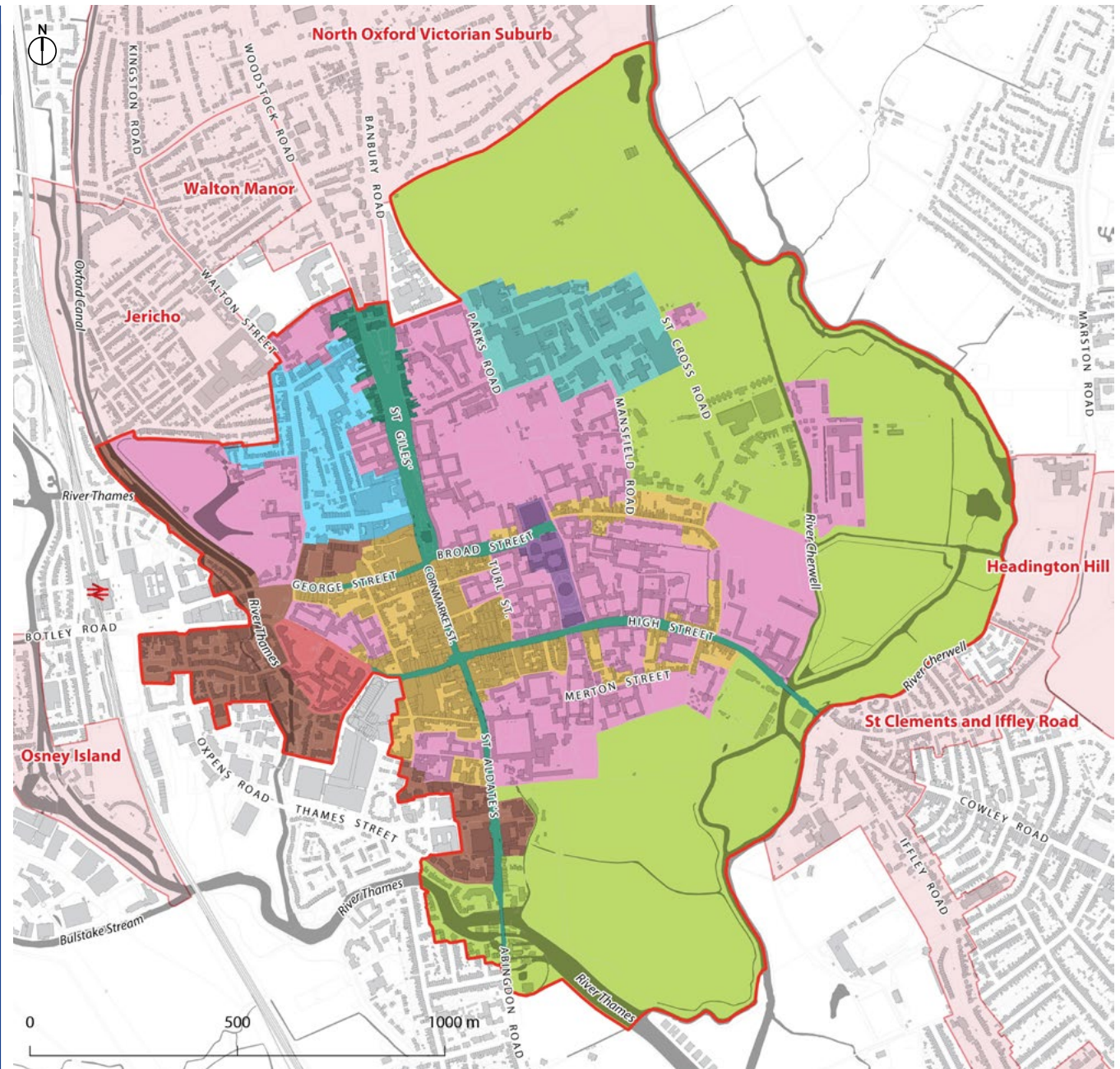


## Oxford Central (City & University) Conservation Area

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- Neighbouring conservation areas

### Character Zones:

- 1. Principal Streets**  
 Comprising the principal historic routes into the city, the main shopping streets and its most important public spaces. Because of their historical importance and their significance today for the movement of people and vehicles, the character and challenges of these streets are very different from elsewhere in the Conservation Area.
- 2. Medieval and Commercial Core**  
 A tight grid of Saxon and Medieval streets is shaped by the former line of the Norman city walls. This has hosted the commercial and retail core of the city since its foundation. Where it has not been colonised by colleges, characteristically long, narrow medieval plots survive, with larger retail redevelopment concentrated in the west.
- 3. Oxford Castle**  
 Once dominating the western edge of the medieval city, the Castle was the centre of administration and justice for over 800 years. Now opened up to the public and commercial uses, but its defensive plan and historic structures retain a character quite distinct from the rest of the Conservation Area.
- 4. College Architecture**  
 Educational precincts of many dates, but sharing the defining characteristics of formal planning around a quad, imposing architecture, spacious grounds and isolation from the surrounding city. Forms one of the most important collections of medieval architecture in Europe.
- 5. University Core**  
 An exceptional architectural and historical sequence – without parallel in the UK – that is the aesthetic heart of the Conservation Area and encapsulates the stature, evolution and global impact of the University of Oxford.
- 6. Western Fringe**  
 St Thomas was a medieval suburban extension, which can still be traced in the street pattern, that later expanded into a light industrial quarter because of the Castle Mill Stream, the Thames and later the Oxford Canal and railway. Large areas have been redeveloped since 1945.
- 7. Nineteenth-century Residential Quarter**  
 Suburb of terraced housing developed from the early nineteenth century, including Oxford's only uniform Georgian terraces and its sole residential square.
- 8. University Science Area**  
 Large, detached institutional buildings laid out on a grid in the 19th and 20th centuries, set back from the street edge. Strongly associated with Oxford's internationally-significant contribution to scientific advancement.
- 9. Flood Plain**  
 Riverside landscape of historic meadows, parks and sports fields and pockets of development, which still fulfils a vital function in the City's flood defences, provides a clearly defined edge for the city centre, a place for recreation and relaxation and a picturesque foreground for views from east and south.



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Chapter 4

# Approach

Oxford Central (City & University) Conservation Area





## 4.1 What is the document?

- This conservation area appraisal has been prepared by Oxford City Council to guide the future management of the Central (City & University) Conservation Area – one of the largest, most important and complex conservation areas in the country.

## 4.2 Why has it been prepared?

- The centre of Oxford is one of the most beautiful places in Europe. Residents, workers, students and visitors alike take great pleasure from its architecture, streets and green spaces. They add immeasurably to the quality of life and the economic and cultural vitality of the city.
- For this reason, in 1971 Oxford City Council designated the whole of the central core of the city as a conservation area. It has since been expanded on several occasions, most recently in May 2019.
- By law, the City Council is required to prepare proposals for the ‘preservation and enhancement’ for each of its conservation areas. To this end, this appraisal:
  - analyses the history and character of the conservation area
  - defines what makes it special (its ‘significance’)
  - outlines management responsibilities and recommendations for the City Council and other stakeholders
  - provides design guidance for householders and developers.
- This information will be used by the Council, planning applicants, and other interested parties to inform and assess proposals for new development and buildings in the conservation area. Planning applications and listed building consent applications must refer to the appraisal when explaining the design concept (see section 8.1).
- Above all, the City Council recognises the city centre is a living, evolving place, not a historic monument. The purpose of the appraisal is to manage change positively, not prevent it. We believe in this way that the appraisal will be a useful, constructive document for householders, businesses, universities and colleges, and everyone else who has an interest in the future of the city centre.

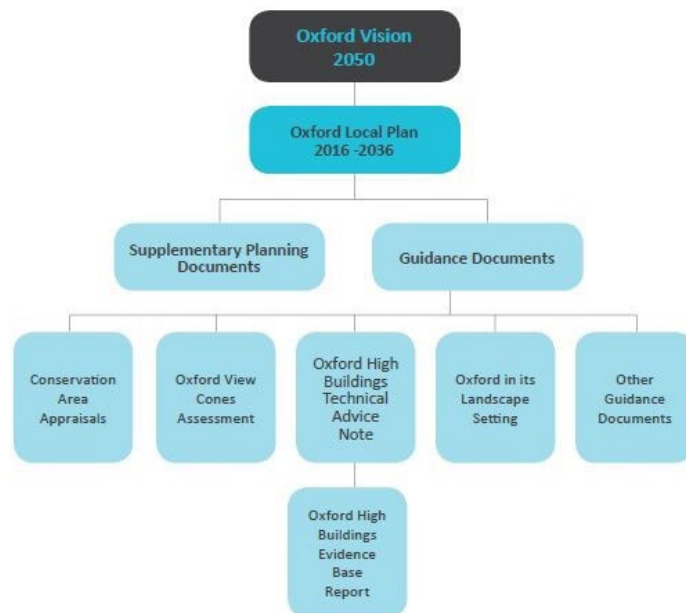
## 4.3 How does it relate to planning policy and other council documents?

### 4.3.1 Legislation and national planning policy

- The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act of 1990 defines conservation areas as ‘areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.’ This appraisal forms a ‘material consideration’ in all planning and listed building consent applications that could have an impact on the conservation area.
- The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that local planning authorities should recognise that heritage assets including conservation areas are an irreplaceable resource that should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. In determining planning applications, it directs local planning authorities to take account of:
  - the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation
  - the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
  - the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.
  - the opportunity for new development within conservation areas and within their setting to enhance or better reveal their significance
  - the fact that not all elements of a conservation area will necessarily contribute to its significance. Loss of a building (or other element) which makes a positive contribution to the significance of the conservation area should be treated either as substantial harm under paragraph 201 or less than substantial harm under paragraph 202 as appropriate, taking into account the relative significance of the element affected and its contribution to the significance of the conservation area as a whole.

### 4.3.2 Local planning policy

- Local planning policies on heritage assets including views are set out in the Oxford Local Plan.
- This appraisal forms part of the evidence base for the Local Plan.
- For decision making purposes, this appraisal articulates the special interest of the conservation area to inform the process of making rational and consistent planning decisions within it.
- Due to the complexity of Oxford's historic environment, the appraisal interfaces with a number of other guidance and supplementary planning documents. The relationship between the different components of local planning policy and guidance are shown here:
- If you are considering development in the conservation area, you will have to take into consideration these other documents too, for example, the High Buildings Technical Advice Note for taller schemes, the Archaeological Action Plan if it may affect archaeology.



Policy and guidance hierarchy  
Oxford Local Plan 2036

## 4.4 How was the appraisal prepared?

- Although Oxford's architecture and history has been studied extensively for many decades, this is the first assessment of the Central Conservation Area to be undertaken since it was designated in 1971.
- The task was not a straightforward one. A conservation area such as this is an inherently complex place whose special interest is the unique result of a subtle combination of many factors: historical development and change, land ownership and use, architectural styles and materials, topography and landscape, streets and space.
- The underlying methodology followed Historic England advice, adapted to the specific circumstances. Extensive fieldwork was undertaken in 2018 and again in 2023 using a bespoke version of the Oxford Character Assessment Toolkit, supplemented by a review of published material.
- The setting of the wider city and the landscape beyond has been studied to analyse the character and appearance of the conservation area and how this is defined by its relationship to its context (for example, views, skyline, green space).
- Mapping has been used extensively due to the complexity of the Area, created in GIS format so it can be integrated into council planning and other systems, and updated in the future.
- This project was undertaken by Oxford City Council working with Alan Baxter Ltd.

## 4.5 Who has been consulted?

- The appraisal must reflect the views of the local community and interested parties to accurately portray the special interest of the conservation area, and set out relevant management and design guidance.
- Three stages of public consultation have been undertaken – in 2018, 2019, and 2022 - and statutory and local stakeholders were invited to roundtable workshops at key stages.
- Full details of this programme, comments made by consultees and how the Council responded to them in finalising the appraisal can be found in the accompanying statement.

## 4.6 Glossary

- The appraisal must be accessible. To make it easier to understand, the following table includes a list of key terms used throughout the document.
- Many buildings in Oxford are built in the classical or gothic architectural styles. The following pages show key architectural terms associated with these styles in a graphic format to assist in their interpretation.

<b>Active frontage</b>	Ground frontages with openings and views into and out of buildings, in order to encourage human interaction. For example, windows, active doors, shops, restaurants and cafes.
<b>At risk</b>	A historic building, landscape, structure, or archaeology, that is threatened with damage or destruction by neglect, a lack of maintenance or the need for repair.
<b>Building line</b>	The position of buildings relative to the edge of a pavement or road. It might be hard against it, set back, regular or irregular, broken by gaps between buildings, or jump back and forth.
<b>Designation</b>	Legal protection for historic places and buildings, such as listing, conservation areas and scheduled ancient monuments.
<b>Enclosure</b>	The sense in which a street feels contained by buildings, or trees.
<b>Legibility</b>	The ability to navigate through or 'read' the urban environment. Can be increased through means such as good connections between places, signage, and landmarks.
<b>Massing</b>	The arrangement and shape of individual or combined built forms.
<b>Movement</b>	How people and goods move around the city: on foot, by bike, car, bus, train or lorry.
<b>Permeability</b>	The ease with which people can move through an area. Lots of connected streets make a place permeable; private grounds and no-through roads, for example, make it less so.
<b>Public realm</b>	The publicly-accessible space between buildings – streets, squares, paths, parks and gardens – and the elements that make them up, such as pavement, signage, seating and planting.
<b>Roofscape</b>	The 'landscape' of roofs, chimneys, towers, spires etc.
<b>Significance</b>	The special historical, architectural, cultural, archaeological or social interest of a building or place – forming the reasons why it is valued.
<b>Skyline</b>	The outline of built form and land defined against the sky. Sometimes referred to as silhouette or profile.



<b>Tenement plot</b>	The typical building plot of a medieval town, concentrated around the central streets and marketplace. Tenement plots are long and narrow, with a narrow street frontage.
<b>Townscape</b>	The landscape of the city – the interaction of buildings, streets, spaces and topography.
<b>Urban grain</b>	A way to describe the arrangement or pattern of the buildings and streets within the built form. It may be fine or coarse, formal or informal, linear, blocky, planned, structured or unstructured.
<b>Positive contributors</b>	A building, structure or feature which, whilst not listed by the Secretary of State for its national importance, is felt by the council to be of local importance due to its architectural, historical or environmental significance.



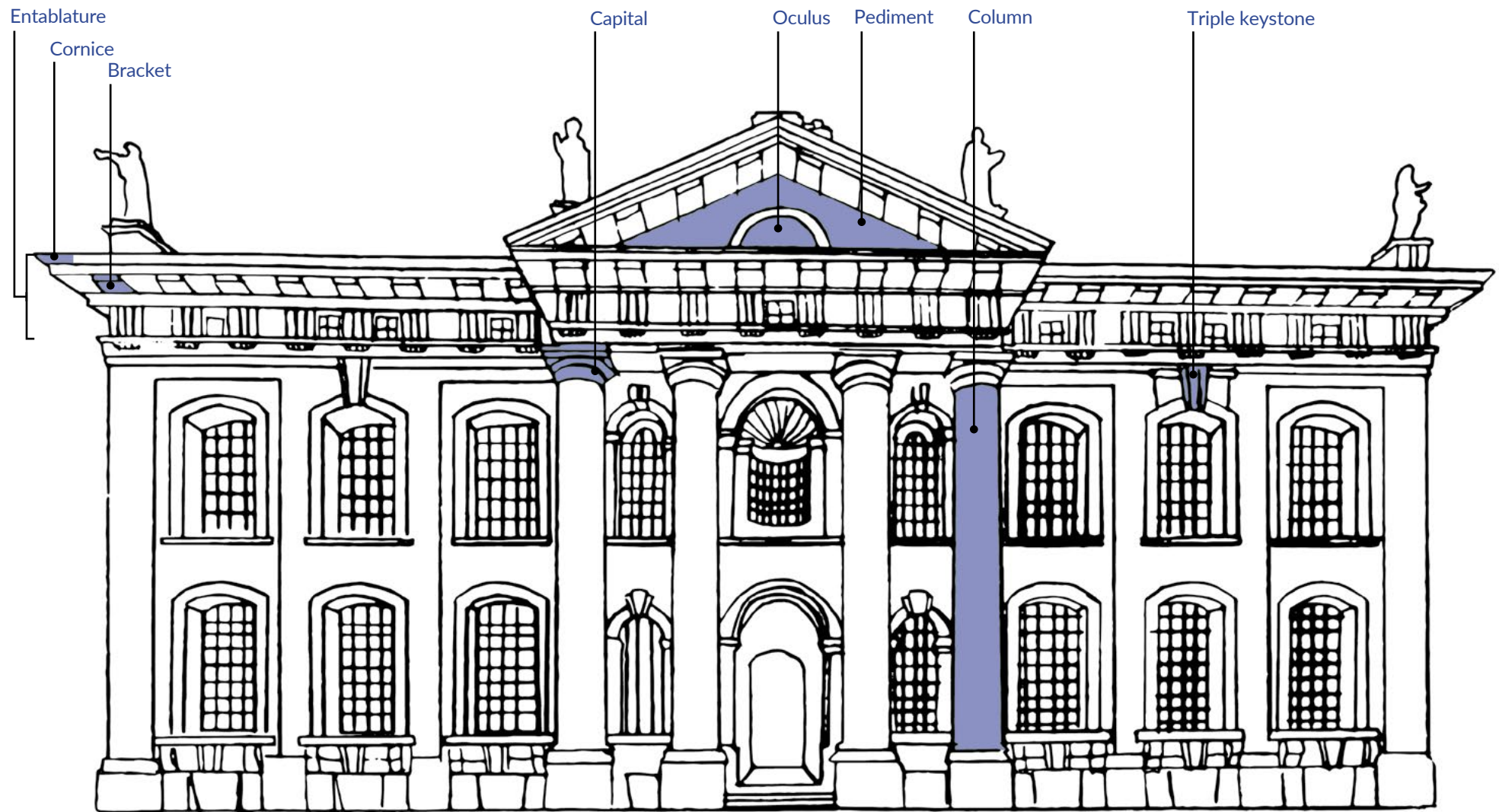
Roofscape - All Souls College (OCC)



Building line - Consistent building line on Beaumont Street (OCC)

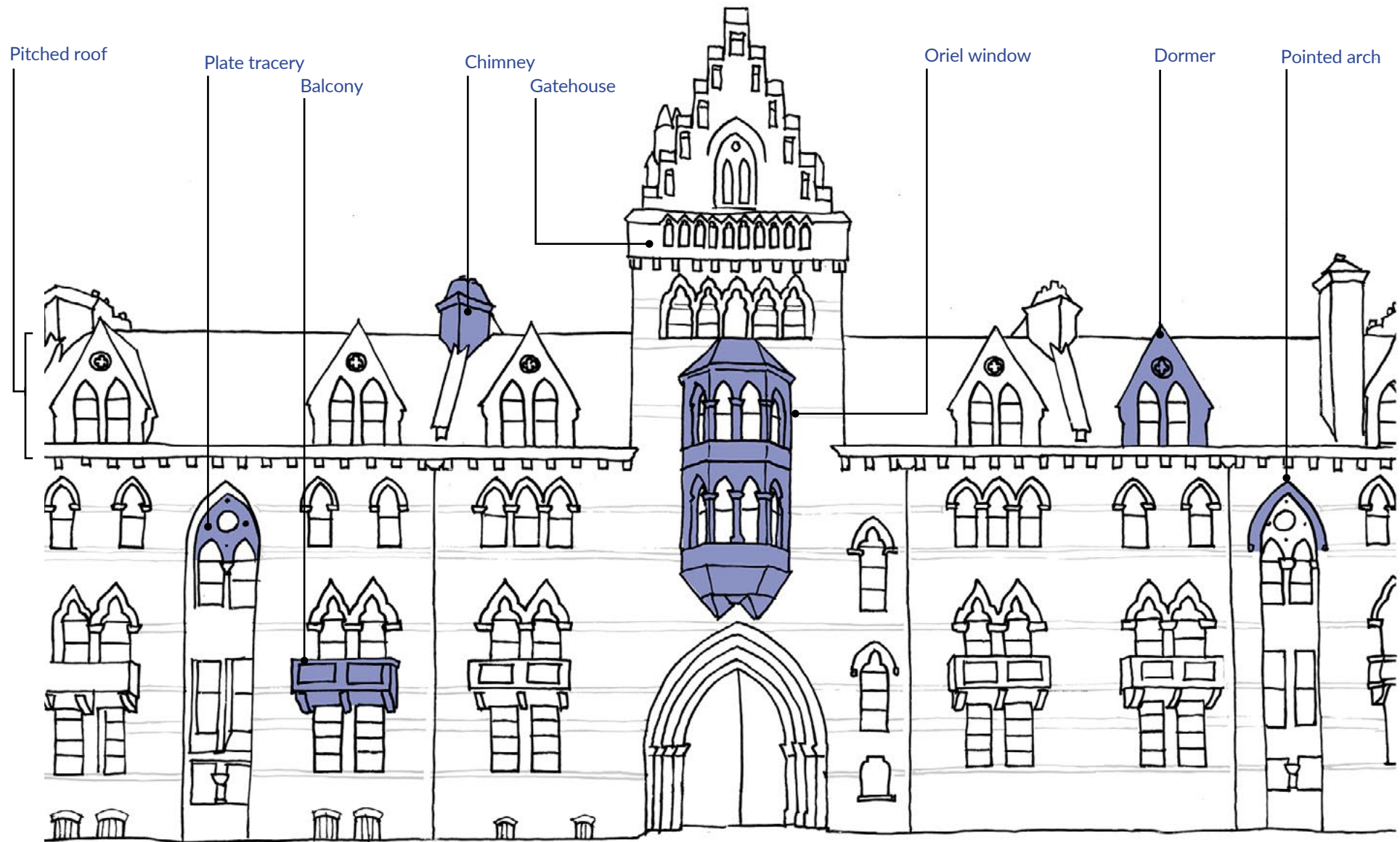


Permeability - Lamb and Flag Passage (OCC)



The Clarendon Building - University of Oxford





The Meadow Building - Christchurch College (OCC)



## 4.7 Further information



### Planning Advice

For information or questions relating to planning in the conservation area, contact Oxford City Council's Planning Department, visit the website at: <https://www.oxford.gov.uk/planning>

### National Planning Policy Framework

The Government's national policy governing planning, including heritage and conservation areas:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

### Oxford Archaeological Action Plan 2013-2018

An illustrated history of the urban growth of Oxford as well as archaeological advice to landowners and developers.

[https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/download/447/oxford\\_archaeological\\_action\\_plan\\_2018](https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/download/447/oxford_archaeological_action_plan_2018)

### Oxford Heritage Plan

The City Council's heritage plan

[https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20191/oxford\\_heritage\\_plan](https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20191/oxford_heritage_plan)

### Oxford View Cones Study 2015

Oxford View Cones Study provides an understanding of the ten protected view paths in Oxford, which are important heritage assets and fundamental to the city's distinctive character.

[https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/1610/oxford\\_view\\_cones\\_study\\_full\\_report](https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/1610/oxford_view_cones_study_full_report)

### Historic England Advice Note 1: Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management (2nd edition)

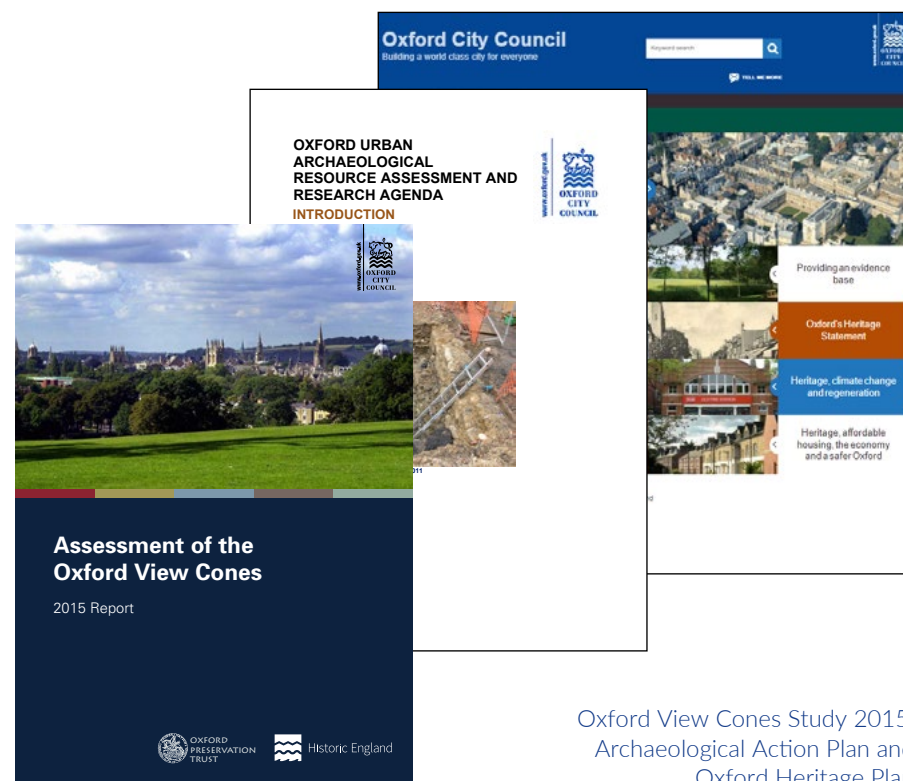
The principal source of advice and information for the designation and management of conservation areas.

<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/conservation-area-appraisal-designation-management-advice-note-1>

### Oxford High Buildings Technical Advice Note (TAN)

Informs decisions regarding the growth and intensification of Oxford in a positive and structured way. Includes the four visual tests.

[https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/7509/tan\\_7\\_high\\_buildings](https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/7509/tan_7_high_buildings)



Oxford View Cones Study 2015, Archaeological Action Plan and Oxford Heritage Plan

## Chapter 5

# Understanding

Oxford Central (City & University) Conservation Area



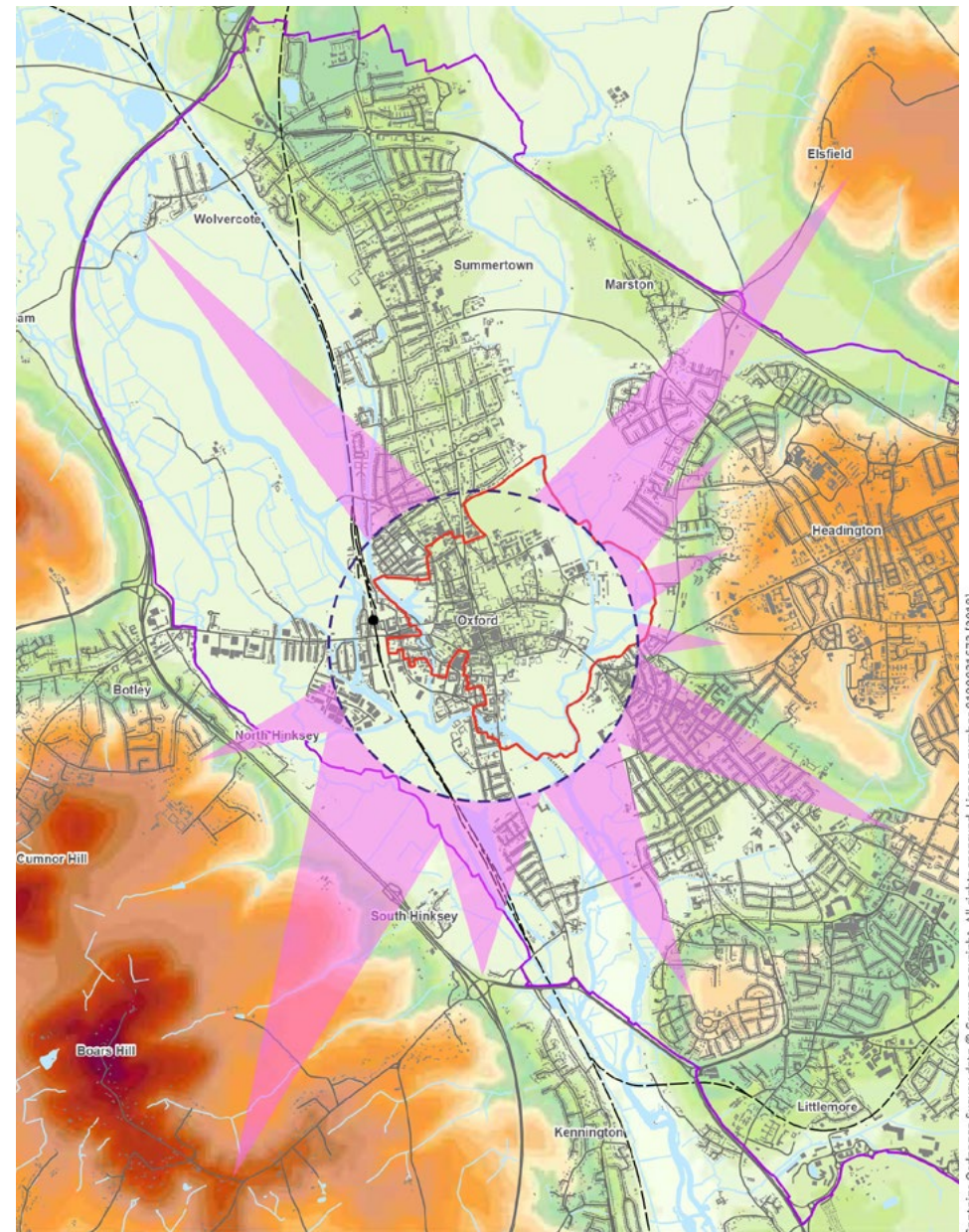


## 5.1 Overview

- There can be few cities more exhaustively studied or better documented than Oxford. There is no need therefore to retell the history of the city centre here in great detail. Instead, this chapter provides a brief introductory overview of the city's geographic and geological context and its historic development.
- At the end of this chapter there are some suggestions for further reading and other sources of information.

## 5.2 Geographic position

- Oxford is a city on the upper reaches of the River Thames, located in a broad valley between its source in the Cotswolds and the NE-SW line of hills formed by Cotswolds and North Wessex Downs. The city is located at the convergence of the Thames and its tributary the Cherwell, with higher ground rising to the east and west.
- The River Thames explains the origins of the city, and has sustained its life. The settlement was established here at a crossing point across the Thames floodplain, which is likely to have been used for thousands of years. The river has been the most significant means of communication for most of this time, providing direct transportation to London and settlements along the way. In the late 18th century this was joined by the Oxford Canal, which provided a vital trade link between the Midlands and London.
- Other than by its waterways, the city was isolated from the principal arterial routes of the country until the creation of the M40 in the 1960s. None of the major Roman roads passed through the city (though there are likely to have been more minor ones), and the route selected by Brunel for his Great Western Railway ignored the city in favour of the fastest line between Bristol and London.
- Today, improvements in road and rail communication and relatively easy access to Heathrow airport have all contributed to the growth and prosperity of the city.



The geographic position of Oxford and the Central Conservation Area (High Buildings TAN)



## 5.3 Geology and its effects

### 5.3.1 Location and shape

- The Saxon and Medieval city was laid out on a gravel terrace that forms a dry, south-facing promontory in the cleft above the converging floodplains of the Thames and Cherwell. Despite encroachment to the west, the edge of the terrace still predominantly defines the building line on the southern and eastern sides and gives the city centre its highly distinctive shape. The view below illustrates this, and shows how the line of the medieval walls traced the shape of the terrace.

### 5.3.2 Building materials

- Oxford's famous oolitic limestone was quarried locally at Headington. Although this source is now exhausted, the warm tones of this stone are a defining characteristic of the conservation area, and one that provides a direct link between the architecture of the city and its locality.



Oxford seen from Christchurch Meadow (OCC)

## 5.4 Historical overview

### 5.4.1 Saxon origins

- Oxford began as a Saxon settlement around 900AD at a crossing point on the River Thames, and grew quickly into a defended, walled burh, thriving on trade between the kingdoms of Mercia and Wessex.

### 5.4.2 Norman growth

- Following the Norman Conquest the settlement grew into one of the most economically successful towns in England and a major trade centre, overlooked by a Norman castle and ringed by major religious houses. The University of Oxford arose in the 12th century and gradually grew into a major force in the city's life. To the west, monasteries and friaries occupied large complexes, emphasising the importance of religion in the life and form of the city.
- The Saxons' rigid street layout and the fixed line of the 13th century defensive walls, together with the floodable river valleys, largely determined the plan of the historic centre as it is today. The gentle curve of the High Street, the great market place of St Giles and the older churches, together with the medieval and post-medieval timber-framed buildings, are powerful reminders of this.



The gentle curve of the High Street

## 5.5 Timeline of Oxford's development

Timeline adapted from the Oxford Archaeological Action Plan 2013-2018.

<b>Pre-historic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monumental earthworks influence later routeways.</li> <li>• Farmsteads and field systems are established.</li> </ul>
<b>Roman</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roman roads and pottery manufacturing compounds.</li> </ul>
<b>Saxon</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Religious and trading centre established by a crossing point over the Thames.</li> <li>• Oxford established as a planned defended settlement (or burh) with an orthogonal street grid centred on Carfax.</li> </ul>
<b>Norman</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1066 – the Norman invasion leads to the construction of a motte and bailey castle over the western part of the town.</li> <li>• The 1086 Domesday Survey records large areas of waste ground within the town.</li> <li>• Subsequent growth leads to the division of existing tenements, the creation of new streets and big infrastructure projects like the Grandpont causeway over the floodplain, new religious buildings and hospitals.</li> <li>• Oxford enjoys royal patronage with the construction of the Royal Beaumont Palace north of the town.</li> </ul>
<b>Medieval</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monastic houses and friaries are attracted to Oxford and establish precincts outside the walled town, some on land reclaimed from the floodplain.</li> <li>• The town wall is rebuilt in the 13th century with bastions and unusual double (concentric) line along the north-east part of the circuit.</li> <li>• Oxford's economy falters in the 14th century with increasing areas of the town recorded as waste.</li> <li>• The 13th and 14th centuries see the growth of academic halls and colleges associated with the University.</li> </ul>
<b>Post-medieval</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Dissolution of the Monasteries leads to the closure of the friaries and abbeys leaving the west and south-western suburbs of Oxford economically disadvantaged.</li> <li>• Oxford becomes a city with a Cathedral established first at the former Osney Abbey Church then at Christ Church.</li> <li>• During the Civil War Oxford is chosen by Charles I as his temporary capital and consequently defensive and siege earthworks are built around the town, clearing part of St Clement's.</li> <li>• In 1644 a major fire destroys many properties between George Street and Queen Street.</li> <li>• The 17th century sees the expansion and rebuilding of the town, with land inside the town wall and the in-filled town ditch newly developed.</li> <li>• The canal reaches Oxford in 1790.</li> <li>• A major clearance of obstructions was undertaken by the 1771 Paving Commission including the demolition of remaining gates. New drains were laid and an indoor market replaced the historic street market.</li> </ul>
<b>Modern</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The railway arrives in Oxford in 1844.</li> <li>• The 19th century sees the reform and expansion of the University and its colleges and the rapid expansion of the suburbs to cater for wealthy trades people, academics and those in domestic service.</li> <li>• In the early 20th century the development of the Morris Motors and Pressed Steel plants transformed East Oxford.</li> <li>• After the First World War the city authorities reluctantly engage in slum clearance and a programme of council house building which continued until the 1980s.</li> <li>• Between 1938-1966 the outer ring road is completed. Major plans for inner ring road and city redevelopment were subsequently abandoned.</li> <li>• Between 1957-1974 a major project was undertaken to replace decayed stonework on historic buildings.</li> <li>• In the 1960s and early 1970s the 19th century suburb in St Ebbe's was demolished and the original Westgate shopping Centre was constructed.</li> </ul>
<b>21st century</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The late 20th-early 21st century has seen the expansion and renewal of College and University facilities.</li> <li>• The restoration and redevelopment of the Oxford Castle site into leisure, residential and retail was completed in 2006.</li> <li>• The redevelopment of the Westgate Centre and the construction of the Clarendon Shopping Centre.</li> </ul>

### 5.5.1 University and colleges

- As the University expanded in the later Middle Ages it colonised the eastern half of the town with halls and later walled quadrangular colleges, occupying plots abandoned after the Black Death had reduced the town's population by perhaps a third.
- Colleges continued to expand in number, size, and status, as the Dissolution put an end to the religious houses. Generously supported by benefactors, they became wealthy landowners able to employ the finest masons, builders, and - later - architects.
- The growth of the University's central institutions is well illustrated by the magnificent group of buildings situated between Broad Street and St Mary's Church. This group grew out of the organisational focus provided by the University Schools and began with the addition of the 14th century Convocation House and Library on the north side of St Mary's Church, followed in the 15th century with the building of the Divinity School and Duke Humfrey's Library. This nucleus expanded in the 17th century with the construction of the Schools' Quadrangle, Convocation House and Sheldonian Theatre. With the later addition of the Old Clarendon Building and Radcliffe Camera, this formed the exceptional architectural and historic sequence that is the aesthetic heart of the conservation area.
- Subsequent University development reflected its growing importance as a focus of scientific research and discovery, together with its role in promoting the study of the humanities - resulting in buildings such as Holywell Music Room, The Ashmolean, The Taylorian Institute, Science Museum and the Natural History Museum. Other institutions trained civil servants to work across a growing empire, and yet further facilities related to its role in pioneering development in the medical sciences, such as the Radcliffe Infirmary.

### 5.5.2 Canal and railway

- Whilst the University was evolving and expanding, changes and growth to Oxford in the 19th and 20th were also stimulated, first by the arrival of the Oxford Canal, and then the railway. By substantially improving communications, these developments fuelled industrial and commercial expansion to the west of the centre, and the erection of terraced housing for their workforces.

- Slum clearances in the 1930s between the river and railway station resulted in housing and other buildings that complemented the growing motor industry in the area.

### 5.5.3 Contemporary Oxford

- Oxford was fortunate to survive the Second World War unscathed, and to escape the worst of post-war town planning that followed. Today it is an expanding and world-class educational and research centre, a vibrant and prosperous regional hub, and one of the most visited tourist destinations in the country.

## 5.6 Designations

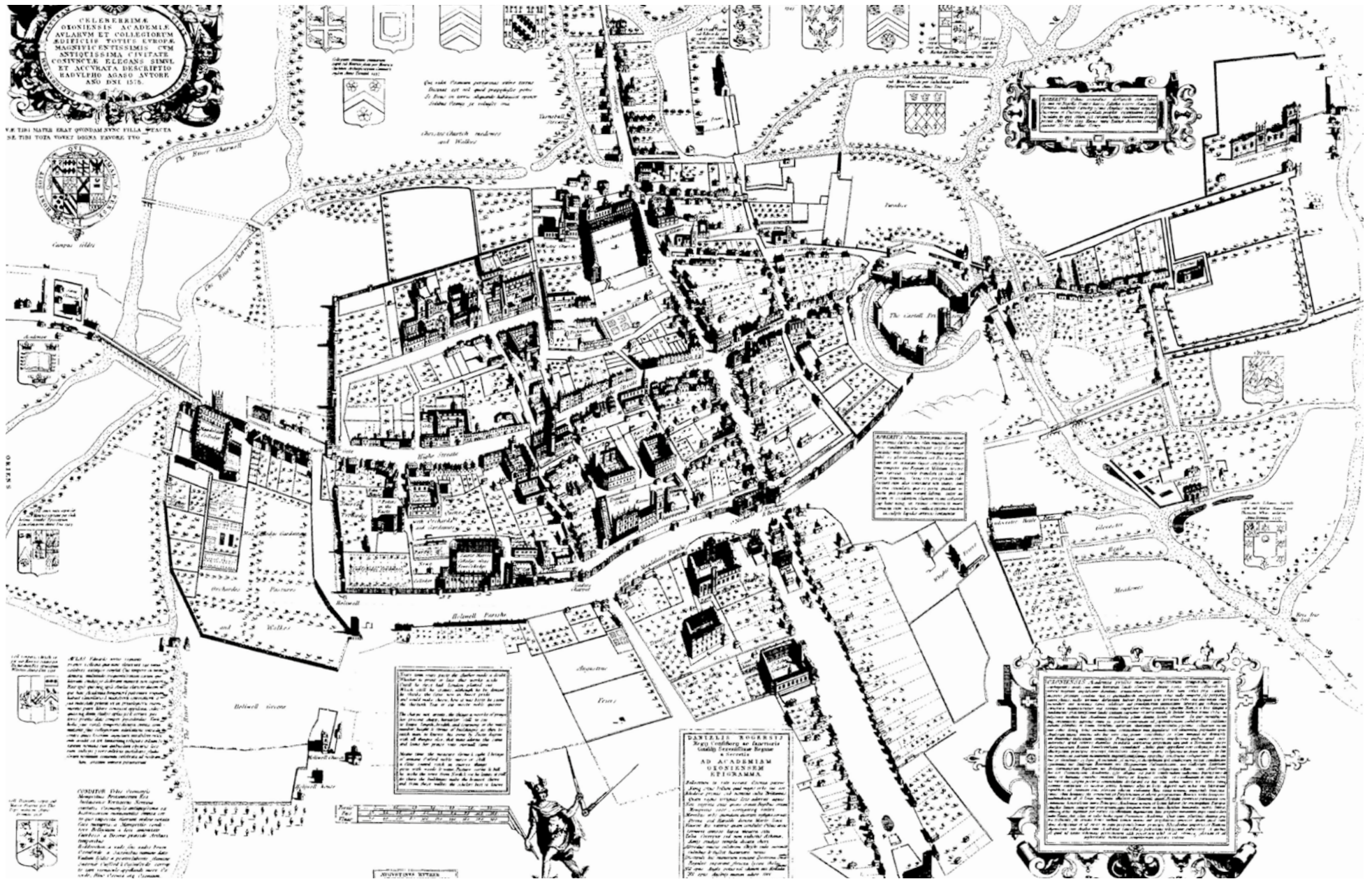
- The conservation area has a high concentration of designated heritage assets including those of the highest grading. The following sets out the percentage of each grading compared to the national average.

<b>Scheduled Monuments</b>	4	
<b>Listed Buildings of which:</b>	819	(entries on the list; some of these encompass multiple buildings)
- Grade I	190	(23% against a national average of 2.5%)
- Grade II*	64	(8% against a national average of 5.5%)
- Grade II	565	(69% against a national average of 92%)

## 5.8 A history of Oxford in maps

- Oxford is exceptionally rich in historic maps. Here are four of the best, showing what has changed, and what has stayed the same.
- These and other maps can be found at the Oxfordshire History Centre.





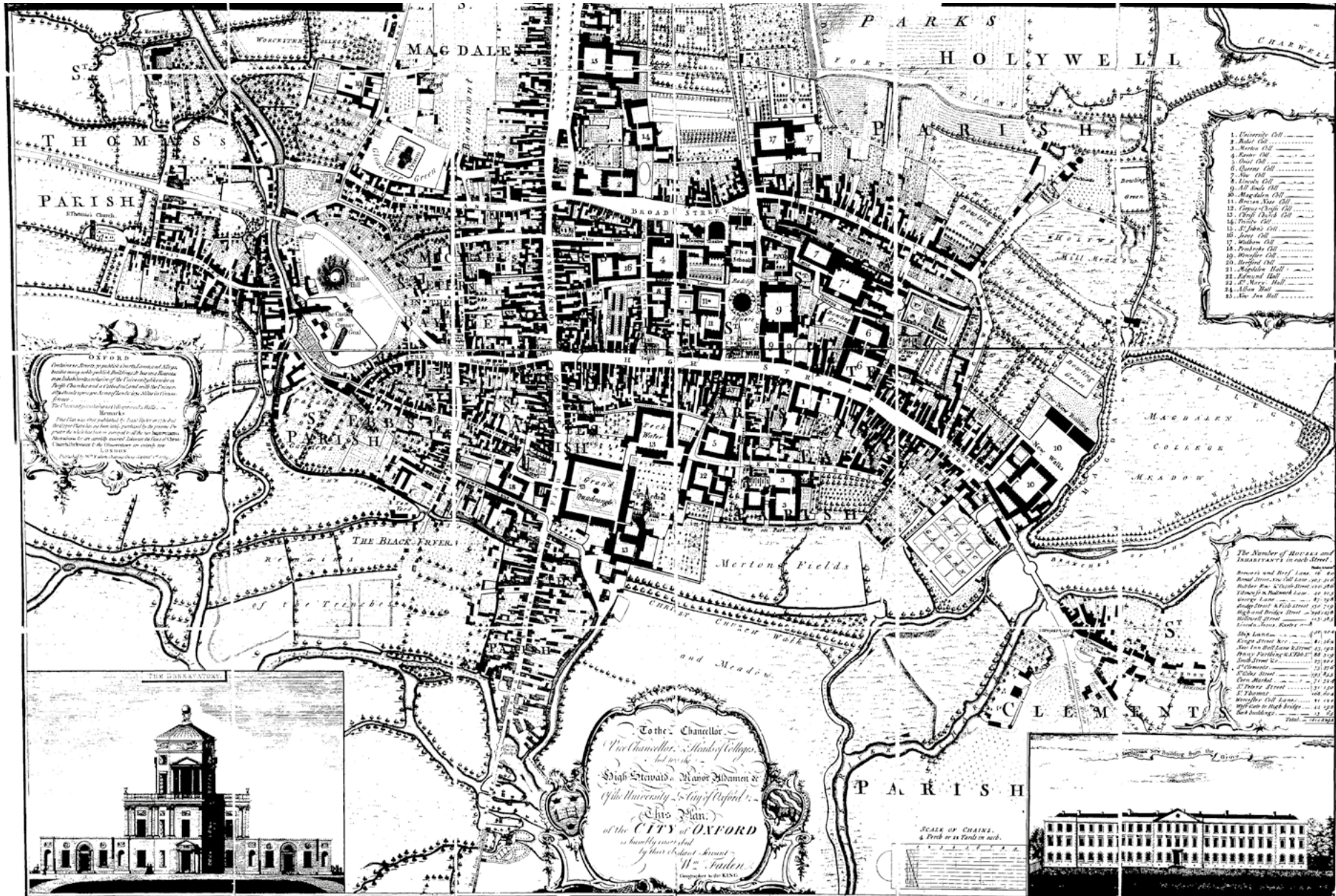
1578 Agas





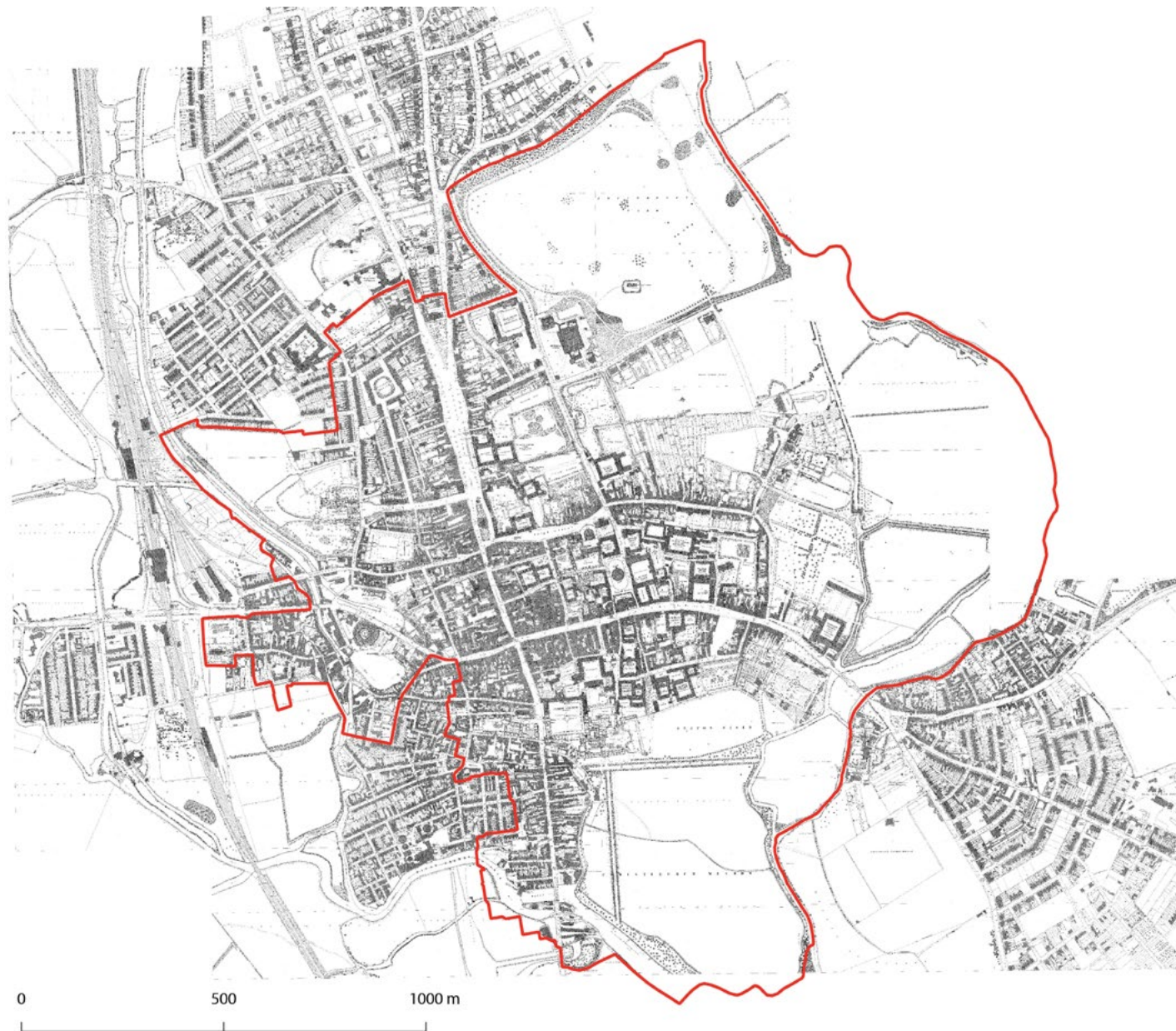
1675 Loggan





1789 Faden






1876 1st Edition OS



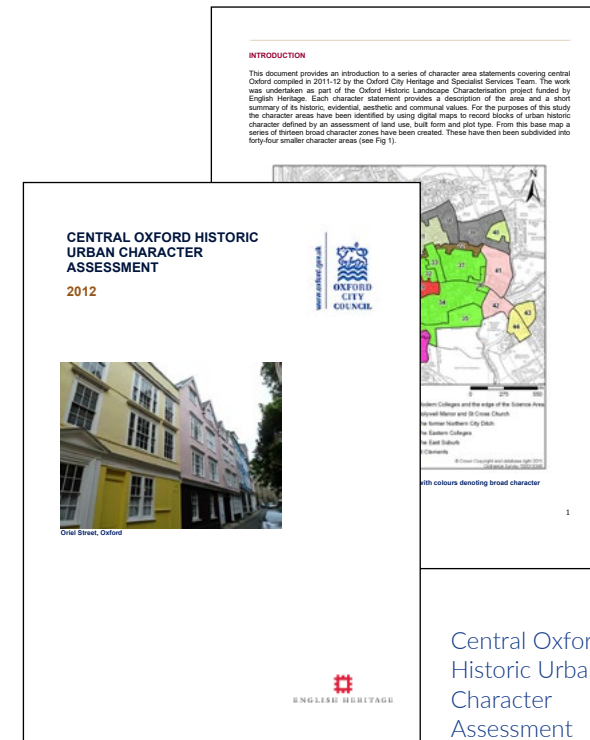
## 5.9 Further reading

 Oxford has long been the subject of academic study and historical research, there is a rich library of further reading to draw on. The most useful texts and websites are listed here. Many contain references to further sources:

- Buildings of England: Oxfordshire, Nikolaus Pevsner and Jennifer Sherwood, 1974.
- Oxford, an Architectural Guide, Geoffrey Tyack, 1998
- Oxford Heritage Walks, a series four of illustrated guides by Malcolm Graham, recently republished by the Oxford Preservation Trust. <https://www.oxfordpreservation.org.uk/>
- Central Oxford Historic Urban Characterization Assessment, Oxford City Council. [https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20200/archaeology/739/historic\\_urban\\_character\\_area\\_statements\\_for\\_oxfords\\_historic\\_core](https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20200/archaeology/739/historic_urban_character_area_statements_for_oxfords_historic_core)
- Oxford History website: <http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/>
- Oxford's Working Past – walking tours of Victorian and Edwardian industrial buildings, Liz Woolley, 2013.

These membership organisations promote interest in the history and future of Oxford and its heritage, and many organise events:

- Oxford Civic Society: <https://www.oxcivicsoc.org.uk/>
- Oxford Preservation Trust: <https://www.oxfordpreservation.org.uk/>
- Oxfordshire Architectural and Historical Society: <https://oahs.org.uk/>



## Chapter 6

# Significance

Oxford Central (City & University) Conservation Area





## 6.1 Assessment of significance

- The character statement set out in chapter 2.0 summarises those values and qualities that make the conservation area worthy of its designation. This chapter provides a more detailed examination of what makes the conservation area significant. It does so thematically, with the majority of those themes falling under three broad topics: uses and history; architecture and townscape; and landscape and setting.

### 6.1.1 Theme 1: Contrasts and complexity

- Oxford city centre is a place of harmonious contrast. So, whilst some historic urban places are significant because they are uniform and regular, the character and appearance of this conservation area is distinctive and exceptional because of the complementary combination of many things: commerce and education; monumental college architecture and modest houses; limestone ashlar and painted render; green swathes and dense streets; spires and rooftops; tranquil river banks and streets heaving with humanity; busy shopping areas and quiet back streets; administration and retail.
- Where these factors make a positive contribution to the conservation area they convey a strong sense of the specific nature of Oxford – its history, the landscape, time-honoured materials and the city's architectural traditions.

## 6.2 Use and history

- Oxford Central Conservation Area is of international historical and architectural significance because of the University of Oxford, but before it was home to a university, the town was a regionally important civic and commercial centre, and these functions have also profoundly shaped the character and appearance of the conservation area. The full name of the conservation area – Central (City and University) – makes clear the importance of both town and gown in the decision to designate it.



Commerce and education along Turl Street

### 6.2.1 Theme 2: University

- The University of Oxford and its colleges and permanent private halls make the centre of Oxford distinctively different from other regional towns and cities. By association with the University's long and distinguished history of education and research, scientific advancement, the arts and humanities, and the influence of the institutions on the development of the nation as a whole, the conservation area is a place of international historic importance. The buildings and spaces of the conservation area provide an opportunity to make a tangible connection with this history and these achievements.
- Furthermore, the longstanding traditions, the wealth of the institutions, and the specific needs of education and research have generated architecture of the highest historic importance, unique types of buildings and planning (see theme 13), preserved a significantly high number of medieval buildings and extent of archaeology (see theme 12), and created distinctive patterns of activity.



'The iconic Radcliffe Camera in Radcliffe Square, which forms part of the University's Bodleian Library

### 6.2.2 Theme 3: association with historic figures

- The city has been home to many notable figures who have made a significant impact on science, art and literature, religion, politics and many other walks of life. These associations are a major component of the historical interest of the conservation area and are frequently linked to specific buildings and sites.
- The wealth and ambition of Oxford University and its colleges has also meant that some of the country's most celebrated architects have been employed in the city, from William Wynford, Sir Christopher Wren and Nicholas Hawksmoor, to G. T. Andrews, and Powell and Moya.
- Individual works by these architects contribute greatly to the historic and architectural special interest of the conservation area, but it is also unusual and therefore significant to see the works of leading architects from so many historical periods in one location.



The Sir William Dunn School of Pathology where Penicillin was developed as a viable drug for the treatment of bacterial infection (OCC)



### 6.2.3 Theme 4: fame and celebration

- Oxford has been the subject of and setting for countless works of art and literature, and it is significant that the townscape, landscape, architecture, culture and sense of place celebrated in these works remains recognizable because of the unusual degree of preservation and continuity in the conservation area.
- The city's associations, exceptional architecture and landscapes draws up to 8 million visitors a year from across the globe. This is a source of economic prosperity, cultural richness, and vibrancy, but the sheer number of visitors on the central streets is also a threat to the quality of experience and sense of place and risks unbalancing the functional use of the centre.



Christchurch Blue Boar Quad by Powell and Moya (OCC)



The Martyrs Memorial on St. Giles (OCC)

## 6.2.4 Theme 5: religion

- Oxford is home to a wealth of religious institutions and buildings. What is not always understood today is that the University and its earlier colleges were established to prepare people for a life in the church; and in addition to the many college chapels situated in the conservation area there is a cathedral, non-conformist chapels, Catholic churches, a Quaker meeting house, and several Christian 'permanent private halls' of the University. This is a concentration of places of worship that is exceptional in post- Reformation Britain, and embodies a physical link to the significant contribution of Oxford priests and theologians to the history of faith in the UK.
- Many of the city's religious buildings are also prominent elements in the townscape of the conservation area, most famously in their contribution to the celebrated skyline of the city (see theme 21), but also as focal points of streets and spaces. Examples of the latter include the Wesley Memorial church on New Inn Hall Street, St Michael at the North Gate, the Church of Saint Mary Magdalen at the south end of St Giles', and the University Church of St Mary's.
- Oxford was also, like York, Norwich and London, one of the few towns in medieval England with multiple parish churches. This legacy is in itself significant, although some of these churches have been demolished (St Peter le Bailey, St Martin's, Carfax) and others converted to other uses (All Saints, St Peter in the East).
- Faith in the middle ages had one further significant impact on the development and townscape of the conservation area: wealthy abbeys and other such 'religious houses' once occupied an enormous area, mostly in a crescent west of the walled town. After they were closed in the Reformation, the footprint left by these complexes shaped subsequent development and street layouts, and left traces as grand as Christ Church Cathedral and as modest as isolated sections of wall. Where traces of these medieval institutions survive within the conservation area they make an important contribution to its significance.



The University Church of St. Mary The Virgin, a landmark building both at street level and as part of the city skyline. (OCC)



The Wesleyan Memorial Church forms a focal point along St. Michael's Street (OCC)



### 6.2.5 Theme 6: continuity of land ownership

- Long-term institutional ownership is a distinctive aspect of the conservation area that has helped to shape its appearance and its character in a number of ways:
- Continuity of ownership and function has preserved an exceptionally high proportion of pre-1800 buildings.
- Long-term commitment of colleges and the University has resulted in the employment of architects of national and international standing in many cases.
- College ownership is not limited to their own precincts: most of the city centre is owned by a small number of colleges and trusts, resulting in a high degree of continuity and a long-term interest in the appearance and function of commercial and residential areas.

### 6.2.6 Theme 7: a service economy

- In the 1851 census more than a quarter of the city's employed population were recorded as being engaged in domestic service and allied occupations, such as inn servants or washerwomen, compared with an average for England and Wales of 13 per cent. This disparity can be explained by the presence of the University and colleges who were major employers in the city and whose staff and students also provided custom for independent businesses.
- The architectural expression of this service culture includes the large number of inns and pubs in the city, particularly those without coaching facilities, and the fragmentary survival of simple brick workers' housing from the later 19th and early 20th century. These capture the flavour of Victorian Oxford but are vulnerable to change. The closure of a number of historic pubs in recent years also threatens the legibility of this important aspect of the city's history.



19th century worker housing on Worcester Place (OCC)



The Royal Blenheim Public House on St. Ebbe's Street (OCC)

## 6.2.7 Theme 8: commerce and retail

- Oxford was established at a Thames crossing point on the boundary between two Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and likely developed an early role as a trading centre. Retail and commerce have influenced the character and architecture of the central streets ever since. Developments in shopping and commercial life are reflected in the evolution of shop design, from narrow frontages of small family businesses to large Victorian premises with expansive glass frontages, department stores, and modern shopping centres created by combining several historic plots. Where historic shopfronts survive within the conservation area these make an important positive contribution to its character and appearance, particularly where they form part of a group. Conversely, the amalgamation of historic plots to create larger units threatens the survival of the city's historically significant medieval tenement plots (theme 20).
- Until the late-18th century the city's markets retained their medieval patterns, with certain trades based in certain streets such as in Fish Street (St Aldates) and Butcher Row (Queen Street and formerly High Street). However, following the 1771 Oxford Mileways Act – passed to de-clutter the main city roads and improve them for traffic movements – many moved into the newly built Covered Market, located between High Street and Jesus College Lane (now Market Street). Designated in its own right as a Grade II listed building, the Covered Market is significant as one of the oldest continually operating markets in the country. It is a distinctive architectural element of the conservation area, and connects and has influenced buildings on the streets to both the north and south.



Oxfam on Turl Street, where corporate branding has been adapted to successfully compliment the historic shopfront (OCC)



Commerce and retail - Packing Room at Frank Cooper's Marmalade Factory c. 1905 (Oxford's Working Past p.11)



- Industry is not often associated with the centre of the city, but it has been an element of the city's economy since its foundation. Castle Mill Stream and the Thames were traditionally the focus of this activity (as a source of power, a raw material, and a means of transportation), with the completion of the Oxford Canal in 1790 and the arrival of the Great Western Railway's midlands line in the mid-19th century accelerating the development of industries to the west of the city. Large parts of this area have since been redeveloped, with further change imminent (see the West End and Osney Mead SPD (2022)) However, where they have survived, buildings, infrastructure and fragments of this industrial past – such as the Lion Brewery, Cooper's Marmalade Factory, and the Former Cantay Depository, are historically important and contribute strongly to the specific character of the western edge of the conservation area.



Cooper's Marmalade Factory (1902-3) by Herbert Quinton on Park End Street (OCC)



The Old Lion Brewery gates on St. Thomas' Street

## 6.2.8 Theme 9: civic administration

- Oxford has been a regional centre of administration and justice for over a thousand years and the facilities that have been built to discharge these functions - the Castle, and subsequently law courts, police headquarters, county and city government offices - help to make the character and appearance of the south and west of the conservation area distinct from other parts.
- Like educational facilities, these are large buildings occupying large plots. They are in a range of architectural styles though a significant number, reflecting the expansion and reforming ethos of public services since the War, are Modernist post-war structures. What differentiates them from the colleges is their relationship to the street: the main elevations face the public (with the exception of the Castle), and they are sometimes set back from it.



County Hall (1841), by John Plowman, inspired by the adjacent Norman castle (OCC)



The Register Office at the junction between Tidmarsh Lane and New Road



Oxford Police Station (1936) by H.F. Hurcombe, the City Estates surveyor, faces onto St. Aldates.



### 6.2.9 Theme 10: defence

- Like many settlements of the Saxon and Norman periods, Oxford was built as a fortified city. This is significant both historically and because the outline of the medieval fortification still does much to define the centre of the city. There is a high level of survival of the city's medieval wall, and the outline of this fortification can be traced in streets such as Bulwark Lane, Broad Street and Holywell Street.
- Oxford had one of the most extensive and complete systems of Civil War fortifications. Although only traces of this are still visible (for example at Rhodes House), the buried archaeology of earthworks and structures and their operation and inhabitation are of national importance. See map opposite.



Defence - The City Wall at the history faculty (OCC)

### 6.2.10 Theme 11: living

- The city centre has been an inhabited place since its foundation. That people live in the conservation area is therefore fundamental to its character, but the balance of this has changed. Today, the remaining residents are concentrated overwhelmingly in its western areas; they are easily outnumbered by the students of the University, living across the conservation area but not for long and only for part of the year.
- As the student population has grown, and continues to grow, accommodation for them has expanded into historically residential streets, causing a change of character in places such as Pembroke Street and Beaumont Street. For example, access for students is normally to the rear, meaning historic front doors are locked unused, and the amount of activity in the street reduced.
- Residents and students are two of the distinct communities that coexist but there can be limited interaction between them along with workers, shoppers and tourists in the centre of Oxford, partly due to the collegiate nature of the University with each college having its own accommodation and on site social facilities.



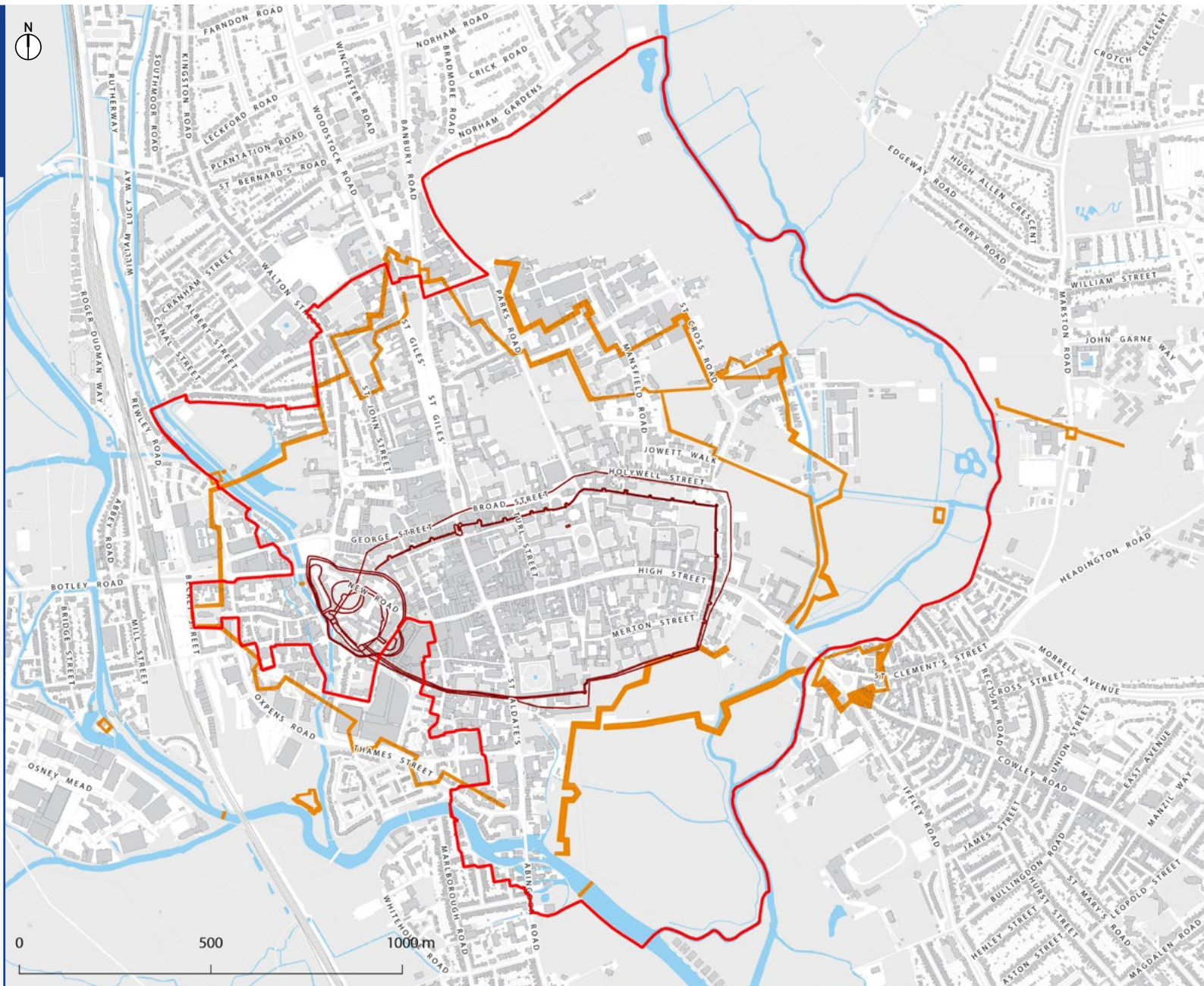
Living - Townhouses in office and student use (OCC)



# FORTIFICATIONS OXFORD (CITY AND UNIVERSITY) CONSERVATION AREA

### Key

-  Oxford Central Conservation Area
-  Medieval defences
-  Civil War defences



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### 6.2.11 Theme 12: archaeology

- Much of the history and evidence for past uses of the city centre, and the lives of those who lived there, exists in archaeology both below and above ground. This includes evidence for all phases of human activity since the last Ice Age. Because of its quality and extent, this is of national importance (see the Oxford Archaeological Action Plan 2013-2018 for more detail). The potential of this archaeology is all the greater for the quality of medieval documentary archives.
- In particular, the continuity of the colleges ensures an exceptional survival of evidence of the Saxon and medieval towns beneath the quadrangles and gardens, much greater than is normal in town and city centres.
- Above ground, details and fragments in places and buildings - materials, fittings, street surfaces, place names and historical associations - form evidence of past lives and events that contributes to the conservation area's unique sense of place. However, often unnoticed or unacknowledged, they are also vulnerable to damage or replacement, perhaps without an understanding of their significance.



Quadrangles, such as this one at Brasenose College, are one of the most distinctive aspects of the conservation area's townscape.



The walls of Pembroke College along Brewer Street - an example of where high boundary walls abut narrow medieval streets, creating a strong sense of enclosure.

## 6.3 Architecture and townscape

- The distinctive limestone buildings of the University and its colleges, and the medieval street layout are perhaps the most visually recognisable parts of Oxford's townscape. However, the architectural and townscape significance of the conservation area can only be understood in combination with all the other buildings and streets that make up the centre of the city.

### 6.3.1 Theme 13: colleges and quadrangles

- The University's colleges contribute more to the exceptional architecture and world famous townscape of central Oxford than any other single factor. In no small part, this is due to their sheer extent, with 34 of the colleges located within the conservation area, occupying approximately half of its developed area. However, it is also the result of the long-term commitment they have to their estates, and the unusual degree of continuity in the way they function, which has resulted in a highly distinctive urban form and- for the most part - architecture of outstanding quality.
- The University's colleges began as academic communities that provided space and quiet for students to prepare for entry into the church profession. Whilst the users and subjects they study have changed over time, the use of the college as private accommodation and study space has remained. The result of this is that the college's buildings remain in their original use to an unusual degree, and an exceptionally high proportion of pre-1800 buildings have been preserved.
- The traditional college design is a series of private precincts planned around quadrangles and enclosed within a defensive perimeter. The principal components were a chapel, communal dining hall, library, and study/sleeping rooms, with a gatehouse to ensure that the outside world did not disturb the peace that the academic community enjoyed. The different ways in which these elements are laid out around one or more quadrangles is what gives the colleges their individual character; however, this distinctive urban form, which was influenced by monastic architecture and first emerged fully formed in at New College in the late-14th century, has continued to serve as a model for collegiate architecture down to recent times, and characterises large parts of the conservation area.



All Souls College seen from Catte Street (OCC)



Keble College seen from Parks Road (OCC)



- The defensive perimeter creates a very distinctive streetscape in parts of the conservation area, characterised by few doors and high walls, but enlivened by intricate use of architectural detail and glimpses of college gardens. Functional, yet sometimes inactive, streetscape is emblematic of the city.
- The accumulated wealth and long-term commitment of the colleges has frequently enabled them to employ the best architects and craftsmen to create imposing and sometimes ostentatious buildings of the highest architectural quality. This has continued as the colleges have expanded, with the new structures often reflecting their time of construction. The sheer quantity of exceptional buildings spread across the conservation area's 34 colleges is a key contributor to its architectural and townscape significance.
- The influence of the colleges on the character and appearance of the city has not been wholly positive however. In recent decades, the rapid expansion of student numbers has been accommodated in a wider range of ways, such as new buildings within existing precincts, colonisation of houses and shops adjoining precincts, and pavilion blocks around the perimeter of playing fields. In some instances this has had an adverse effect on the character of these places, for example where precious green space has been built over, or where, buildings that historically addressed the street have been altered so that the primary entrance is to the rear, thereby significantly reducing the sense of activity to and from. In some cases, the original layout of the building is altered so that original windows and doors become blocked or no longer serve habitable rooms.



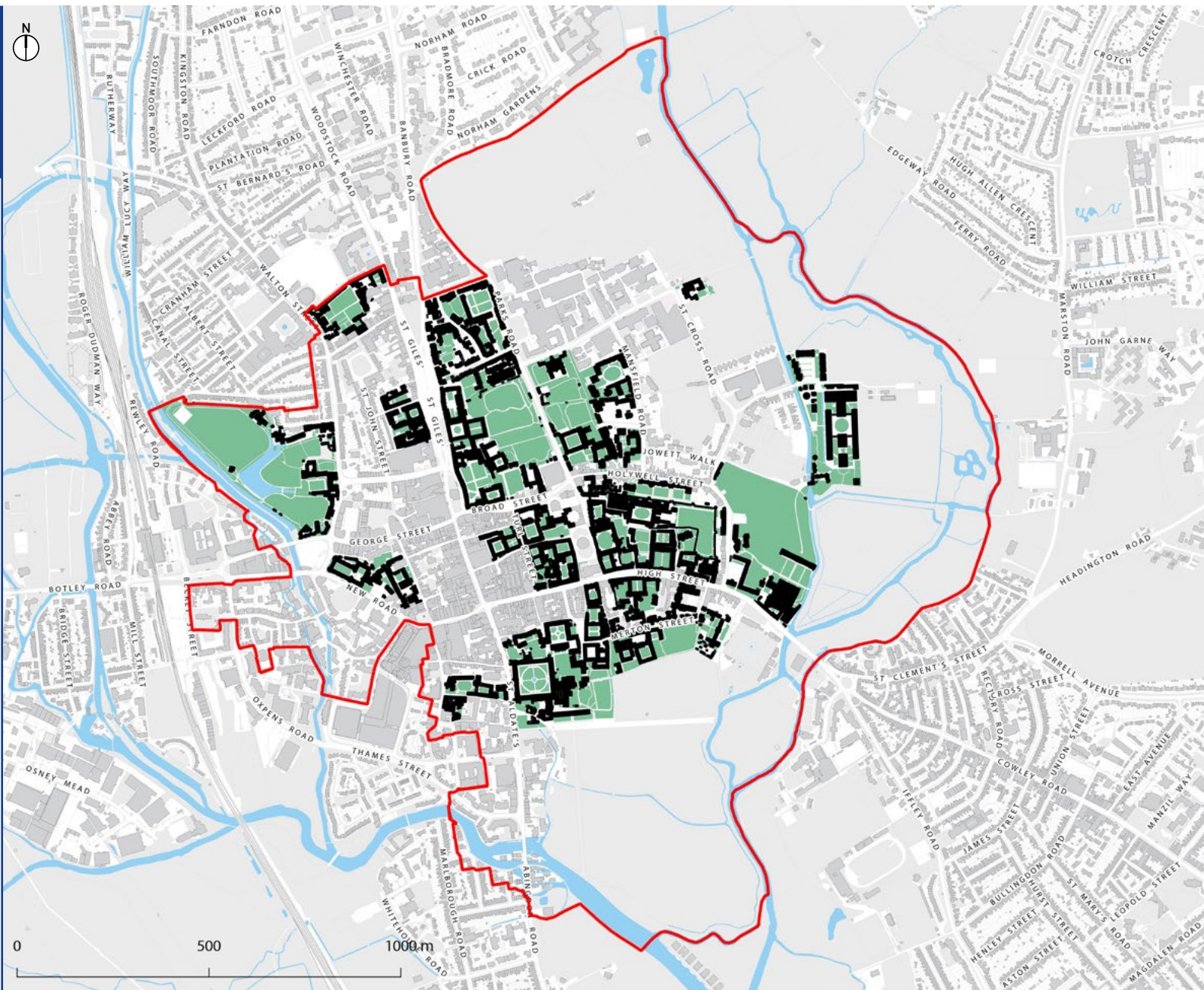
Original windows no longer serve habitable rooms (OCC)

# COLLEGE CHARACTER

## OXFORD (CITY AND UNIVERSITY) CONSERVATION AREA

### Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area
- College open space
- College buildings



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### 6.3.2 Theme 14: materials

- The overall quality and detailing of materials and the workmanship with which they have been employed is exceptional and contributes strongly to the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- A number of materials are strongly associated with the historic core of the city and do much to define its appearance:
  - limestone: Wheatley and Headington Limestone were the locally quarried stones used to face many of the college, University and public buildings in the middle ages and following centuries. Since the eighteenth century other limestones have largely replaced Headington because of the rate at which it wears and because the quarries were exhausted. Because they are of a similar appearance they integrate successfully into the townscape of the conservation area.
  - timber frames and painted render: Before the eighteenth century, modest buildings such as lodgings, houses and shops were normally built of oak frames. Large numbers survive and all such survivors are significant by virtue of their national rarity. Today, they are frequently rendered and colourfully painted, helping to create highly picturesque streetscapes such as Holywell Street. Although the use of many colours is a relatively modern development, it is generally agreed that it has successfully become part of the widely recognised and enjoyed image of the city.
  - brick: From the eighteenth century, red brick was commonly used for domestic and commercial buildings. For this reason, its appearance is concentrated in the western fringe and those commercial streets such as George Street that were redeveloped. When it was used by a college, for the construction of William Butterfield's Keble College, it was a considered a shocking introduction, though it is now considered a triumph of the Gothic Revival. Nevertheless, the use of brick remains unusual in historic college precincts.
  - at first, bricks were locally fired with a warm red hue; from the nineteenth century it was machine made and joined by pale biscuit and yellow bricks that could be economically imported by rail and canal. In the later twentieth century a hard brown brick emerged across the country as a favoured material. Its tone and machined texture have not proved a success in the Oxford townscape.



Materials - Limestone of Corpus Christi College and Merton College



Materials - Stone and painted render in Holywell Street

### 6.3.3 Theme 15: architectural details

- The abundance and quality of architectural detail is one of the defining characteristics of the conservation area and animates many buildings and streets. These details are not random and rarely solely decorative. They form part of a 'language' or pattern of building elements that reflect function and the evolution of architectural style. For example fine stone carving, stained glass windows, parquetry and decorative ironwork. This is well documented in Geoffrey Tyack's Oxford, an architectural guide.
- Recurring details add to the town's richness. Details vary from one character zone to another, depending on prevailing building type and age, and they are therefore important to reinforcing the unique characteristics of different parts of the conservation area. The character zones describe these local variations.

### 6.3.4 Theme 16: architectural style

- The 'Oxford tradition' is frequently used to describe the gothic style that many associate with the city's buildings and consider to be the 'correct' style for the city. Certainly the gothic style predominates in the city centre, particularly for college, University, and nineteenth century civic buildings, and does much to define its character.
- However, whilst Oxford has many buildings in the Gothic style, it is also home to many outstanding examples of Classical buildings, such as the work of Nicholas Hawksmoor and James Gibbs, and more recently to much Modernist architecture (see theme 17). When it comes to the international significance of the conservation area, it is the abundance of high-calibre architecture, and factors such as function, planning, materials, detailing, roofscape, and the relationship of buildings to the street, all of which are the subject of their own significance themes, that matter more than style.



Architectural details - Carving on the dormer of Magdalen College



Architectural details - Polychromatic brick of Keble College



### 6.3.5 Theme 17: post-war architecture

- Very few modern buildings were constructed in the city during the first half of the twentieth century, and as a result there is little evidence of the style directly influenced by French and German High Modernism.
- However, Oxford city centre is rich in post-war architecture, containing an exceptionally high concentration of listed post-war buildings. These designations are heavily weighted towards the colleges, reflecting the marked difference in quality between buildings commissioned by the colleges and those built by public bodies and for commercial and retail use.
- Many aspects of Modern Architecture and planning are at odds with the historic characteristics of Oxford's urban form and its architectural traditions. The best examples of post-war architecture respond positively to this context, rather than ignoring it. For example, Arne Jacobsen's St Catherine's College, was built with a low height that ensured it does not intrude into the views of the city centre from the Eastern Hills. The RIBA award winning music room at Corpus Christi College, built into a bastion of the medieval town wall, is another interesting example. Here, a high-quality architectural intervention has enabled an important heritage asset to be reused, which will contribute to its future conservation and enjoyment.



Architectural style - The Clore Music Room at Corpus Christi (OCC)



Architectural style - The Meadow Building, an example of the Oxford tradition (OCC)



Architectural style - The Sultan Nazrin Shah Centre, a successful modern building



### 6.3.6 Theme 18: street layout: Saxon burh, medieval changes and later town planning

- The largely regular street layout of the Saxon burh, founded over a thousand years ago, survives to a remarkable degree as the core of the conservation area (see Saxon and Medieval Street map). This historical continuity and resonance is of fundamental historical interest.
- Subsequent centuries have also made their mark, leaving important examples of later forms of urban growth and re-development that illustrate the evolution of the core and the expansion of the city over time. This includes medieval streets such as Longwall Street, Holywell Street, and Broad Street; as well as eighteenth and nineteenth century examples of development inspired by formal Renaissance concepts of town planning, such as Radcliffe Square and St John's Street.



Street Layout - Historic granite setts along the Norman route of Bulwarks Lane



Street Layout - Radcliffe Square



Street Layout - St. John's Street (OCC)

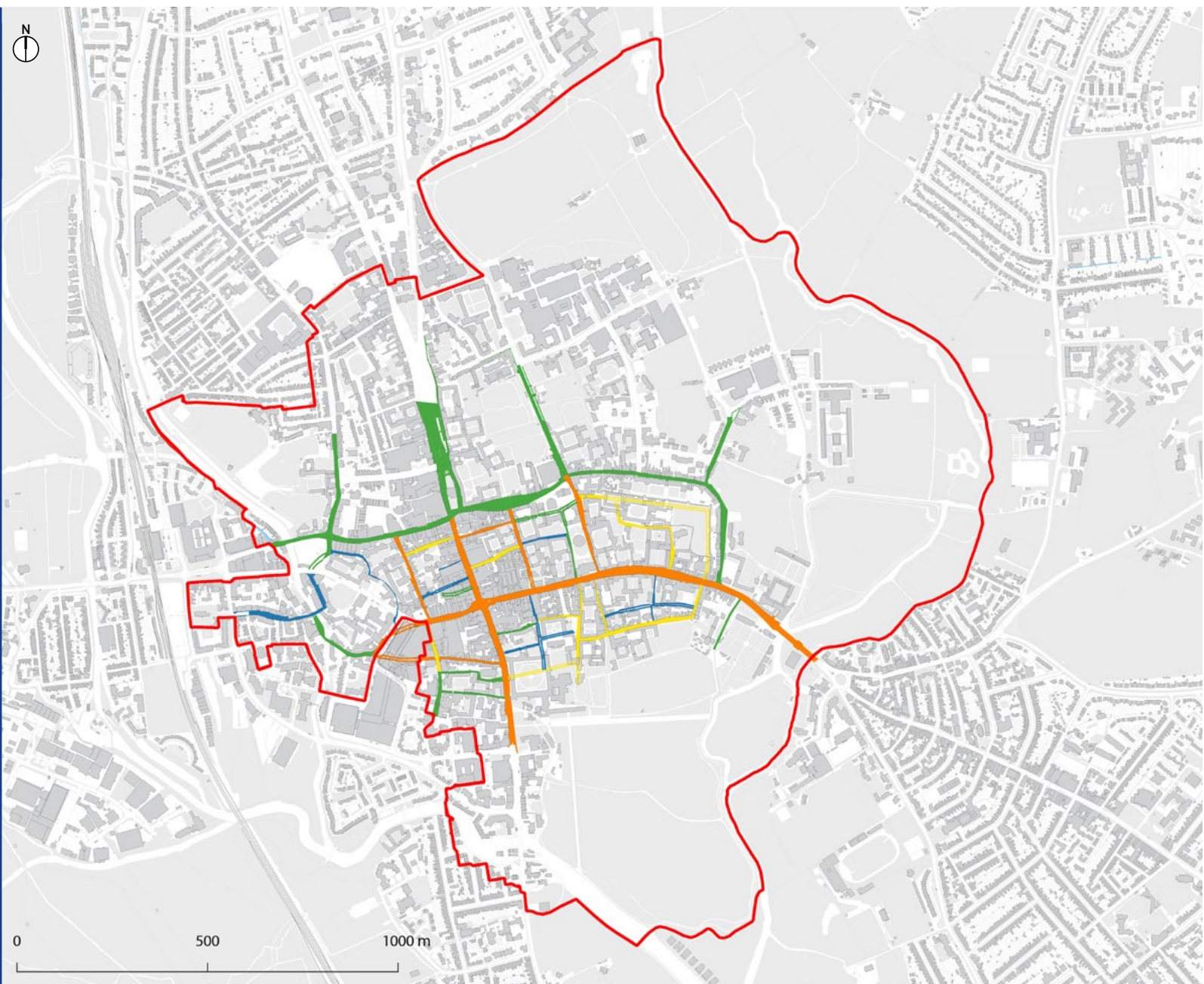


# SAXON AND MEDIEVAL STREETS

## OXFORD (CITY AND UNIVERSITY) CONSERVATION AREA

Key

- ▭ Oxford Central Conservation Area
- ▭ Medieval evidence
- ▭ Norman evidence
- ▭ Saxon evidence
- ▭ Saxon-medieval



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### 6.3.7 Theme 19: public space

- A legacy of the Saxon burh layout is the shortage of planned public spaces within what was the walled city. Those places that have been created and those streets that have taken on the function of public spaces are therefore of great importance to the history and life of the city:
  - Radcliffe Square: created within the Saxon burh in the eighteenth century to make a site for the Radcliffe Camera. The square is internationally significant and famous because of the quality and planning of the architecture. It has no comparison in Britain
  - Broad Street: its shape derived from the town ditch from which it was created. It has many of the characteristics of a major public space: its origins as a medieval market place, its broad dimensions, the public architecture and the tradition of public assembly and demonstration. Temporary projects such as the City Council's, 'Broad Meadow,' and the County Council's, 'Broad Street Project,' have introduced pedestrianisation, seating and planting to areas of Broad Street to improve the public realm and encourage use
  - St Giles': whose distinctive funnelling form and impressive scale reflect its origins as a medieval suburb outside the town walls, which has been the site for St Giles' Fair and before that markets since the middle ages
  - Gloucester Green, Oxford Castle, and Bonn Square: recent public spaces, all purposefully created by opening up previously closed places
  - Cornmarket Street and Queens' Street: focal points of activity effectively made into public space by restricting vehicles.
- Increased traffic over the last century has harmed the character of Broad Street and St Giles', by its appearance, the space it occupies, the noise it generates, and the impact of pollution and vibration on historic buildings. By contrast, the more recent restriction of vehicles into streets such as Cornmarket Street has done much to enhance their character and make it easier to appreciate their architecture.



Public Space - Broad Street looking towards the Sheldonian Theatre



Public Space - St Giles Fair looking North (Oxford Today)



### 6.3.8 Theme 20: medieval plots

- Narrow Norman tenement plots survive in many streets in the historic core, where they have not been amalgamated to form colleges and large retail buildings.
- This survival is of national historical importance as evidence of the planning and life of a medieval town. It has a profound impact on the character and appearance of the centre of the conservation area: the building line hard up against the pavement, narrow frontages and roofs that form animated streetscapes, 'backlands' of yards, gardens extensions and outhouses. Taken together, these form highly aesthetic and historically resonant counterpoint to monumental college precincts (see Oxford Archaeological Action Plan 2013-2018, p.14, for more details).
- The survival of these tenement plots is fragile if there is pressure to merge plots and demolish boundary walls.



Medieval Plots - The High Street



Medieval Plots - Holywell Street








Medieval Plots - St. Giles west side

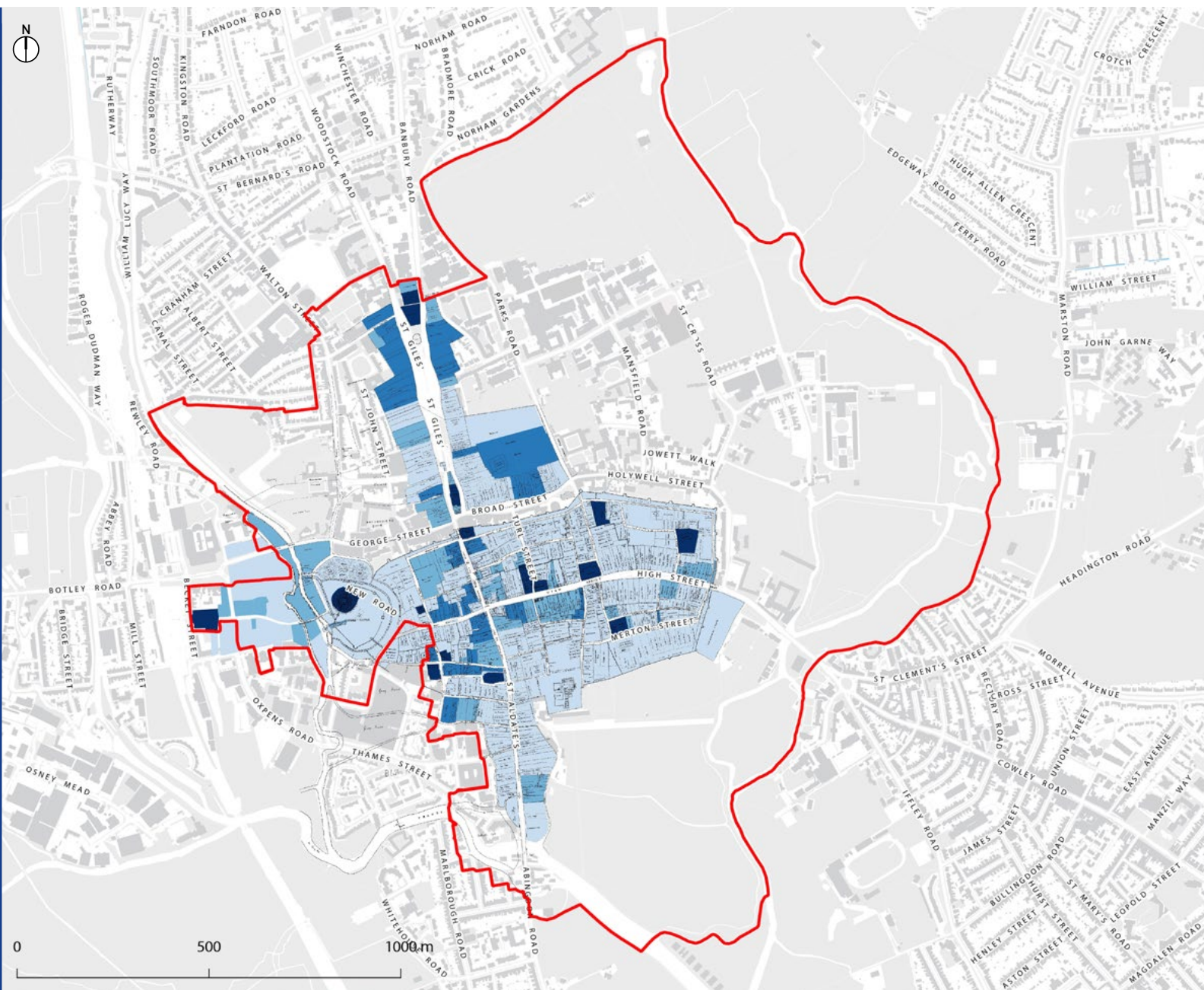


# MEDIEVAL PLOT BOUNDARIES

## OXFORD (CITY AND UNIVERSITY) CONSERVATION AREA

### Key

-  Oxford Central Conservation Area
-  High
-  Medium
-  Low
-  Nil




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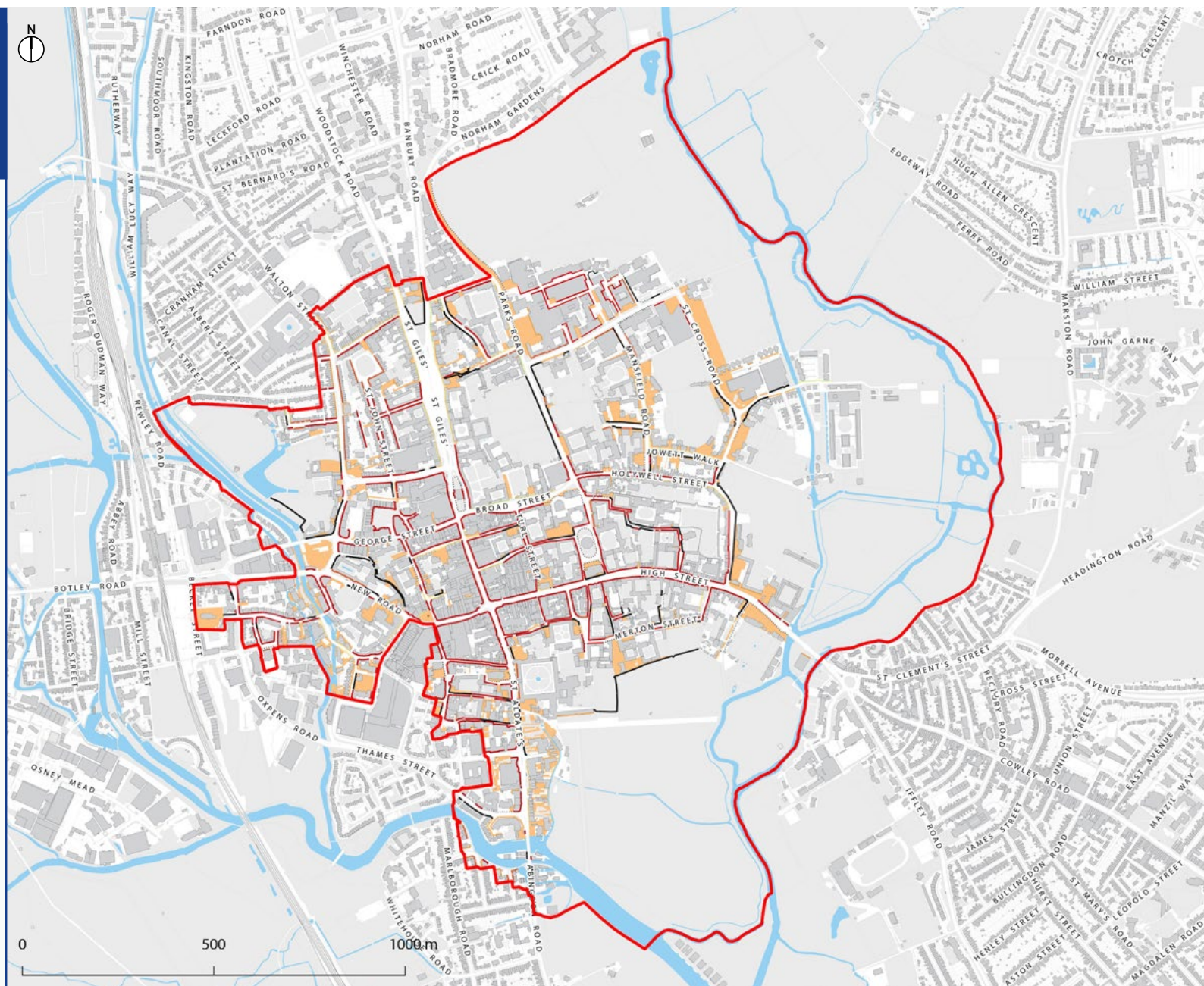


## BUILDING LINES AND GAPS

### OXFORD (CITY AND UNIVERSITY) CONSERVATION AREA

#### Key

-  Oxford Central Conservation Area
-  Back of the pavement
-  Set back (up to 3m)
-  Set back (3m +)
-  Mixed
-  Broken
-  Railings
-  Wall



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### 6.3.9 Theme 21: roofscape, skyline and landmarks

- The roofscape and skyline of the conservation area is perhaps the most animated, joyful and architecturally rich roofscape in the country. It is unquestionably the most famous. It is also fragile, and easily eroded by inappropriate or ill-considered development both inside and outside the conservation area. In recognition of this, as early as 1962 the City Council adopted View Cones and a High Buildings Area to manage and protect it.
- What makes the roofscape and skyline of the conservation area special is a harmonious combination of the vertical accents created by the famous landmarks, many designed to have a brilliant architectural effect on the skyline, and the rich backcloth of historic roofs, whose pitches, parapets, pinnacles, turrets and chimney stacks create a vibrant and picturesque texture. In longer views, the green spaces and higher ground form an attractive foreground or background (see theme 22).
- In this, the following factors are of special importance:
  - the complementary palette of materials
  - the narrow roofs whether houses or colleges (because pre-Victorian builders were limited by the use of timber)
  - the gentle range of building heights (mostly two – four storeys)
  - the combination of horizontal elements (e.g. parapets and ridge lines) and vertical elements (especially chimney stacks and pinnacles). The effect and rhythm of the vertical elements is particularly important
  - subtle variations in the building heights of different streets, which are important in distinguishing the different historical and townscape character of different parts of the conservation area. For example, residential streets are two-three storeys, whereas the primary commercial streets are four and sometimes five storeys.
- These factors cause harm to the significance of the roofscape:
  - post-war development where roofs consist of large flat planes, modulated on a large scale or not all, and are without vertical accent or detail
  - roof plant, extract flues, etc., associated with modern heating and ventilation systems, roof terrace paraphernalia such as parasols because of their non-historical form, their location, prominence, number and colour.



Roofscape - Radcliffe Camera, Bodleian Library, All Souls



Roofscape - View from Christchurch Meadow




# ROOFSCAPE OXFORD (CITY AND UNIVERSITY) CONSERVATION AREA


### Key


 Oxford Central Conservation Area

### Building heights:

-  0m
-  5m
-  10m
-  15m
-  20m

 Flat roofs

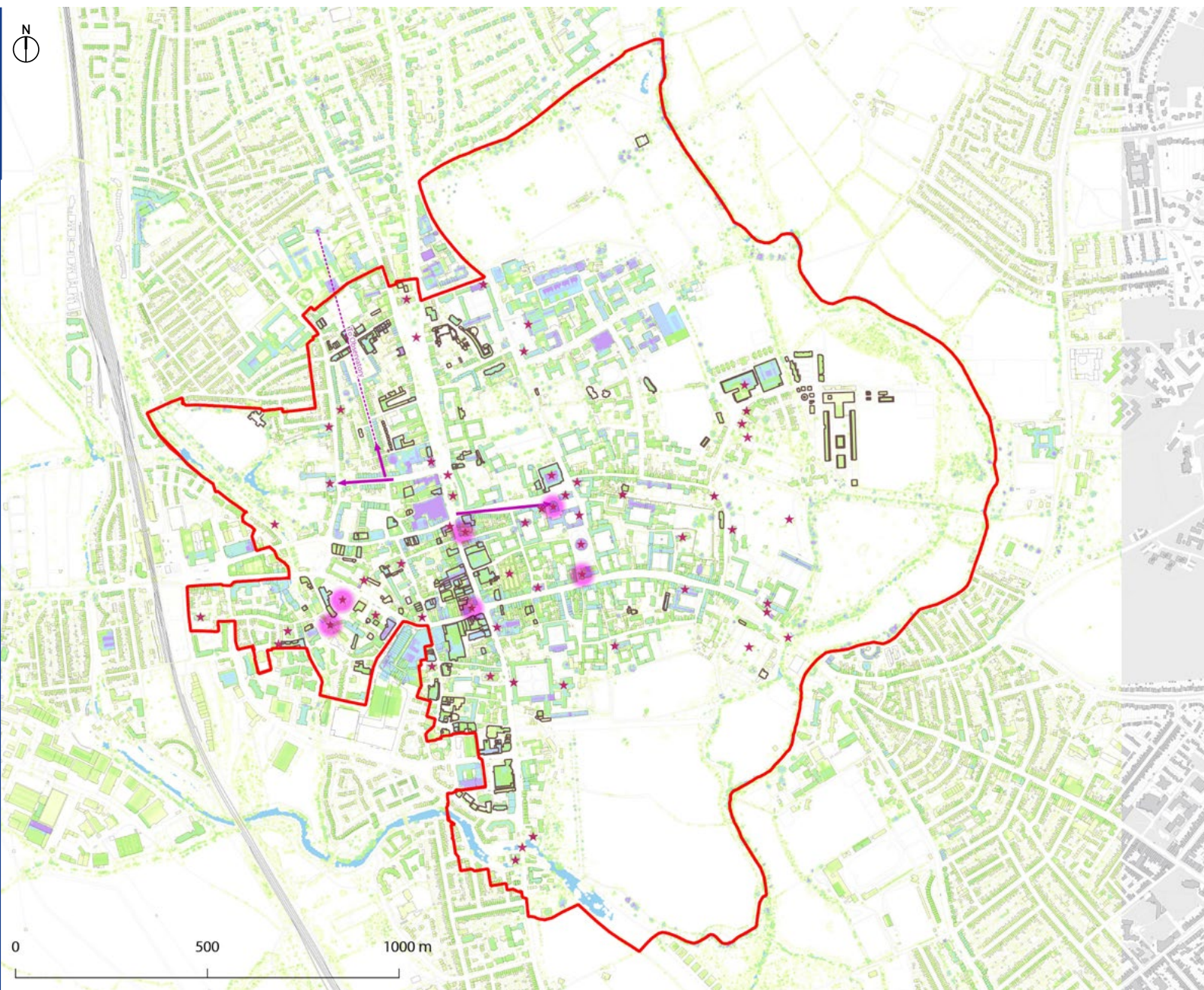
 Elevated panorama

 View end point

 Visible from

 Landmarks

NB. The Beecroft, Biochemistry and LAMB buildings have been updated from available planning information.



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### 6.3.10 Theme 22: views

- Significant and enjoyable views are exceptionally widespread in the conservation area, so much so that it is not possible here to identify all of the views that contribute to the experience and enjoyment of the city centre.
- It is useful, however, to identify types of views and the characteristics of them that contribute to their significance:
  - **unfolding views:** most famously, the curving topography of High Street creates a continuous sequence of unfolding views of streetscape and landmarks such as All Saints Church and the University Church. This is one of the finest and most thrilling townscape experiences in Europe
  - **glimpsed views:** of landmarks, for example, from Broad Street southwards down Turl Street to the spire of All Saints Church, or the Radcliffe Camera from the High Street; charming glimpses down alleys and side streets and into colleges, especially along the High Street
  - **vistas to focal points:** for example, Tom Tower is the focal point of the north-south axis of Oxford, clearly visible for the length of Cornmarket Street and St Aldates.



Views - The Radcliffe Observatory from Walton Street



Views - Cornmarket looking towards Tom Tower from St. Michael's Tower





- **designed views:** there are few designed views in public areas, but they include the Observatory views along Beaumont and Walton Streets, views of The Clarendon Building and the Sheldonian Theatre created by demolishing houses in the middle of Broad Street, and the panorama from the motte of the Castle (for surveillance and defence). There are many designed views within the formal gardens of the colleges. Though these are not always accessible to the public, they do form part of the contribution that the colleges make to the significance of the conservation area and they are experienced and often appreciated by the college members and visitors
- **public viewing panoramas:** from which the viewer can experience and appreciate the historical form and architectural character of central Oxford, and its relationship to its landscape setting. Seven have been identified: Carfax Tower (Church of St Martin), the Saxon tower of St Michael at the North Gate, St George's Tower, the Castle Motte, the University Church (of St Mary the Virgin), the cupola of the Sheldonian Theatre, and (just outside the conservation area but with views over it) the rooftop café terrace of the Westgate Centre. Of these, only the Sheldonian and Westgate Centre were views designed for enjoyment and pleasure
- **views across the flood plain:** to the city centre are amongst the most famous in the city, in particular, the view across Christ Church Meadows. These views illustrate the original siting of the city on dry ground adjacent to a river crossing. Because the historic core is otherwise so dense, these views are the only ground level panoramas in the conservation area
- **views from and along the rivers:** both from river crossings and from boats and punts are highly significant because of the historical importance of the rivers to the foundation of the city and for movement and trade, and because of the way topography and landscape can be understood, experienced, and above all enjoyed
- **views out of the conservation area:** on the eastern edge are screened by a band of mature trees along the Cherwell. This screening provides a strong sense of seclusion: from a distance, east Oxford is entirely hidden by trees and vegetation, so that water meadows feel remarkably rural despite being surrounded by the city.

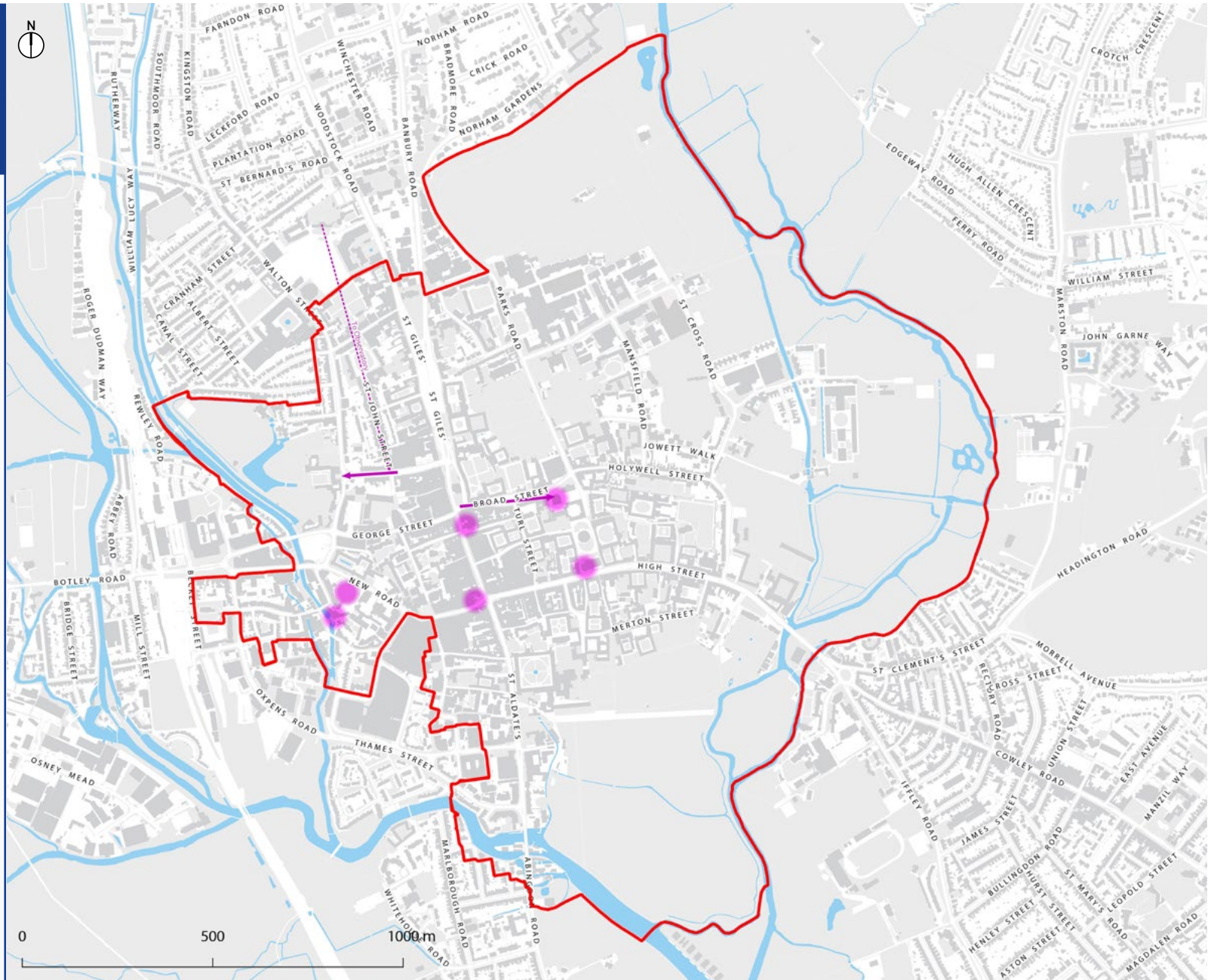


Views - Nuffield College from Bulwarks Lane

# VIEWS

## OXFORD (CITY AND UNIVERSITY) CONSERVATION AREA

- Key**
-  Oxford Central Conservation Area
  -  Elevated panorama
  -  View end point
  -  Visible from



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## 6.4 Landscape and setting

- Landscape – in the form of geography, topography, waterways and parks and gardens – makes a contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area which is as significant as the buildings and streets:

### 6.4.1 Theme 23: topography and geology

- The location and shape of the historic core is defined by the topography and geology of the Thames Valley.
- The Saxon burh was set out on the gravel terraces above the water meadows, in the peninsular between the River Thames and the River Cherwell.
- Today, the extent of development is still strongly defined by these terraces. Overlaying geology and street plans show that very few buildings have been built on the flood plain (with the notable exceptions of St Catherine's College and the former industrial zone along the Castle Mill Stream).
- The famed setting of the city centre, and views of it, is formed by the low hills rising up on either side of the river valley, which creates a gentle bowl (see theme 27).



Topology and geology - The green setting of Oxford - seen from the Church of St. Michael (OCC)




Views - Gently rising hills frame Oxford - seen from Carfax Tower



## GEOLOGY

### OXFORD (CITY AND UNIVERSITY) CONSERVATION AREA

#### Key


 Oxford Central Conservation Area


#### River gravels

 Alluvium


 1st (Flood Plain) terrace deposits


 2nd (Summertown-Radley) terrace deposits

 3rd (Wolvercote) terrace deposits

 4th (Hanborough) terrace deposits


#### Other ground types

 Silt (0 to 15m)

 Clay 90 to 22m)


 Oxford Clay (90 to 100m)


#### Geological symbols


 Inclined strata, dip in degrees


 Geological boundary, drift


 Geological boundary, solid


 Fault at surface crossmark indicated downthrow side. Broken lines denote uncertainty

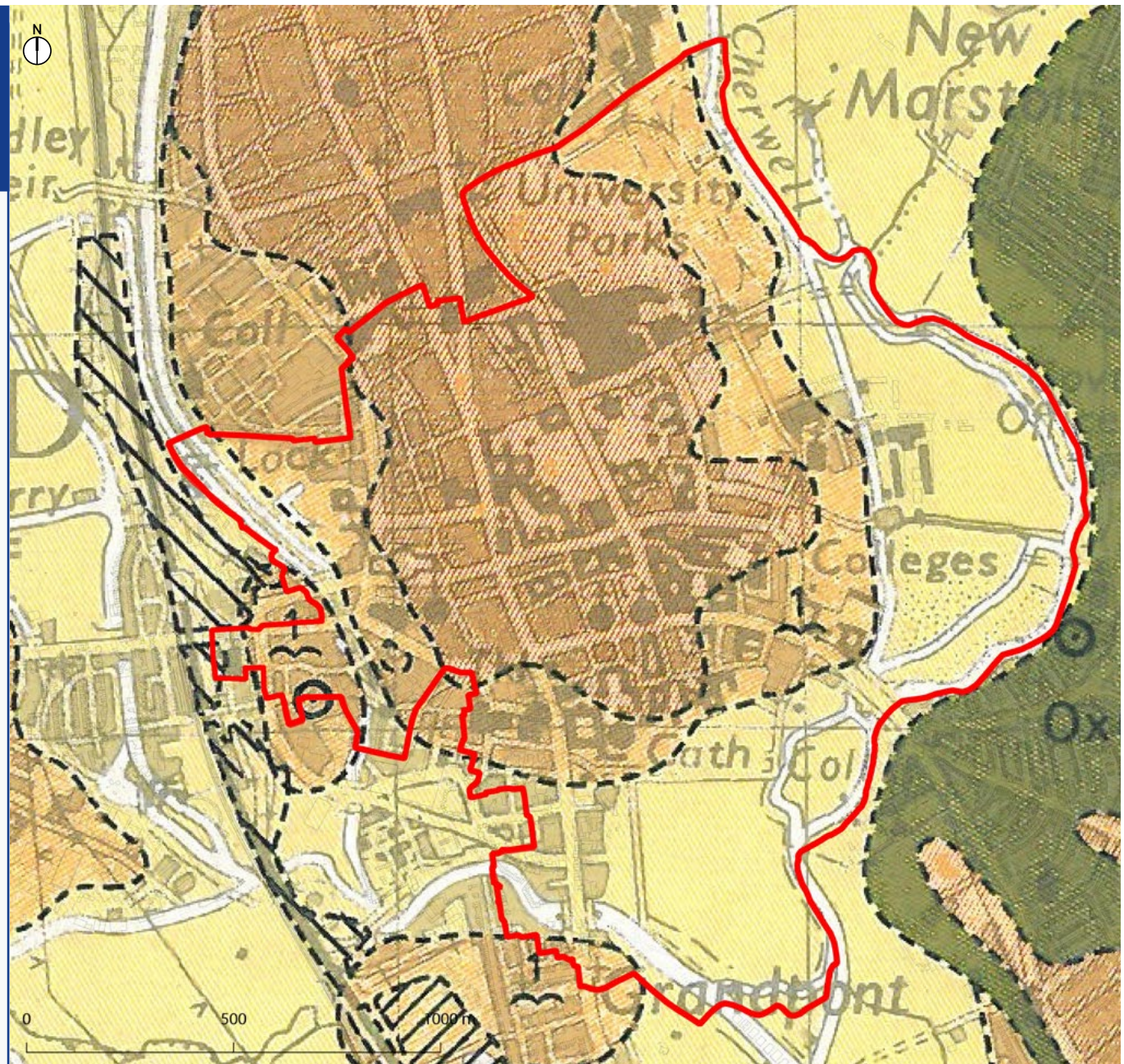
 Selected boreholes

 Pit or mine shaft, abandoned

 Adit or mine mouth, abandoned, showing direction of entry

 Area within which mineral has been worked. The colour is indicative of the deposit extracted

 Made ground. The colour is indicative of the underlying deposit



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# TOPOGRAPHY

## OXFORD (CITY AND UNIVERSITY) CONSERVATION AREA

### Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area
- 50 m AOD
- 55 m AOD
- 60 m AOD
- 65 m AOD
- 70 m AOD



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## 6.4.2 Theme 24: waterways

- Oxford exists because of the River Thames and the River Cherwell: it was founded as a crossing point across the Thames, at the confluence of the two rivers. These rivers have sustained Oxford's economy and been its playground. Together with the Oxford Canal they stimulated the industrial and commercial life of the city as a means of communication and source of power.
- The different characters of the Thames, the Cherwell and the Castle Mill Stream and Canal give each of the east, south and west edges of the conservation area a distinctive identity (see the Character Zone Assessments for further detail).
- The history of boating is a particularly distinctive feature of the rivers that is indelibly linked to the world-wide image of the city and the conservation area. Before their use as pleasure craft, punts were working boats for fishing and transporting goods, closely associated with the boat people of Fisher Row in the western fringe of the Area. Nevertheless, they have been used as pleasure crafts since at least the 1880s and there is a special importance to experiencing the conservation area from the quiet rivers of the Cherwell and Thames as they pass through the tranquil green spaces of the flood plain.
- Although the boathouses lie just outside the conservation area, they form an important part of its setting, as competitive rowing provides another focus of activity intimately linked with the image of the University and city, that extends to the riverside within it.
- River bathing also has a long history in Oxford with specialised locations such as Parsons' Pleasure used since the 16th century. Much of the infrastructure that was built at these locations during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has since been lost; nonetheless these places retain a great deal of historic interest and often considerable communal value too.



Waterways - The Isis by Folly Bridge



Waterways - Punting on the River Thames by the Botanic Gardens



### 6.4.3 Theme 25: green space

- At first glance the centre of Oxford may appear to have a relatively small amount of green space, due to its unequal geographic distribution, and a lack of public access. However, more than 40% of the conservation area is designated as Green Belt (mostly to the south and eastern edges), and there are numerous sports field, churchyards, and the lawns and gardens of the college precincts spread throughout the city. This green space is important, as the combination of greenery and buildings – both designed and accidental – is fundamental to the unique character and townscape of the conservation area.
- The flood plains of the Cherwell and the Thames encircle the city centre, serving as a rustic counterpoint to its architectural splendours and a cherished public resource of great historical and artistic interest.
- The lawns and gardens of the conservation area's 34 colleges are often spaces of exceptional quality, providing an attractive setting for the college's buildings, and often of historical and design significance in and of themselves. Of the 15 Registered Parks and Gardens within, or partly within, the conservation area, 13 of these comprise college grounds, five of which are registered in the highest Grade II\* and I categories. This significance is not diminished by the fact that the gardens are private and access is limited, although it does mean that public appreciation is restricted.
- What can be readily appreciated by the public, however, are the frequent glimpses of the college's gardens in the city streets, as overhanging trees and planting, and in views through gates and over walls. These contributes are of great importance to the streetscape, which is otherwise largely devoid of greenery.
- A high portion of the green space in the conservation area is used for recreation, either as public parks, or college and University sports fields. The largest of all, The University Parks combines both of these in a purpose designed Victorian landscape of national significance. The design and use of green space for organised sport is historically significant both because of its contribution to the culture of the University and because of the influence in popularising and codifying games across the world.
- Much smaller in size and number are churchyards, but these too are significant as relics of the medieval city, for their memorials, and as the setting of historic buildings to which the public have access.

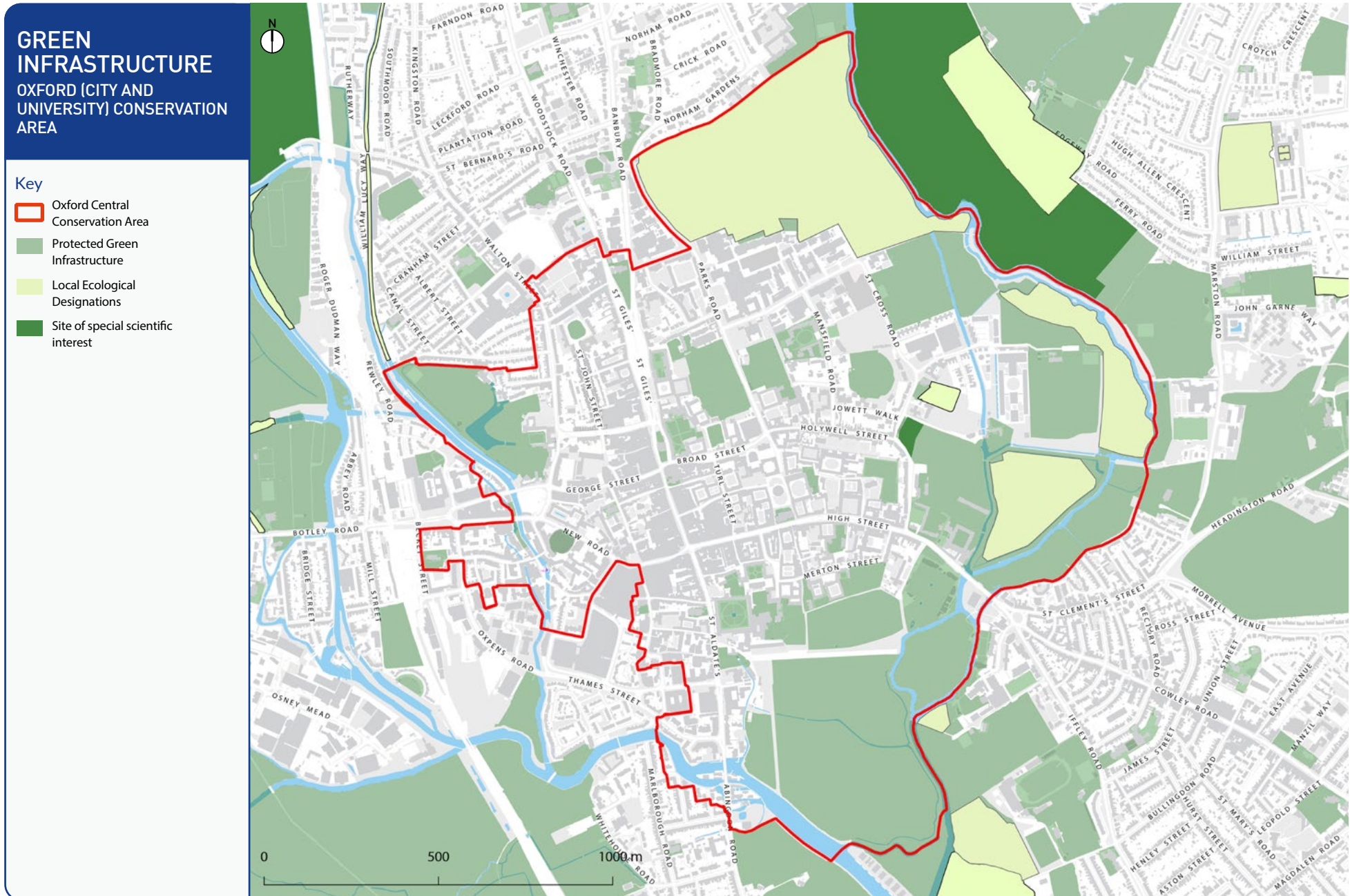


Green space - Oxford canal



Green space - St. Giles' churchyard





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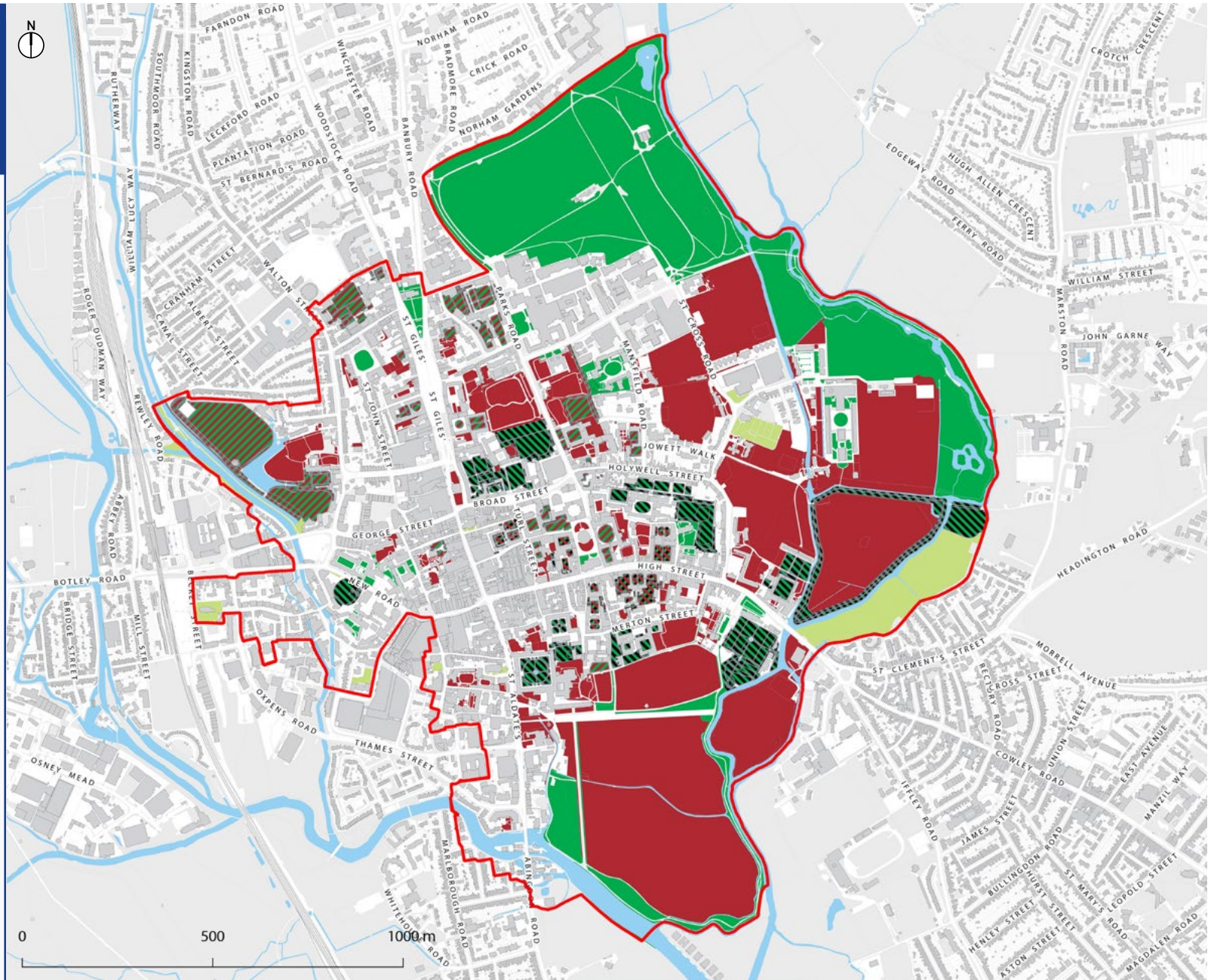
# PUBLIC ACCESS TO GREEN SPACES

## OXFORD (CITY AND UNIVERSITY) CONSERVATION AREA

### Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area
- Public with access
- Private with access
- Limited access
- Paid access
- Limited paid access
- No access
- Not inspected

Data correct in 2018



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- Green space carries the most significant ecological value in the conservation area. Through the range of flora and fauna this contributes directly to both the Area's character and appearance. The concentration of Snakes Head Fritillary in the Magdalen Meadows is, for example, the legacy of an historic land management regime that has allowed these plants to survive and flourish where they have otherwise been lost elsewhere in the Thames Valley. As a result of this historical management, they contribute to the meadows' draw for tourism.

#### 6.4.4 Theme 26: tranquillity and sound

- For a city centre, the proportion of the conservation area that is quiet and shielded from traffic is striking.
- Tranquillity and sanctuary are intrinsic aspects of the character of much of the publicly accessible green space, the river and canalside walks, and the colleges. In the case of the colleges, silence is an intentional part of their design and function, in order to foster learning and research. Against this backdrop, the colleges create a distinctive and beautiful soundscape of bells, clock chimes and the muffled music of organs and choirs which can be enjoyed in the streets beyond.
- A total or substantial absence of traffic also contributes strongly to the character and appearance of many significant and historic streets, such as Holywell Street, St Thomas Street and New College Lane.
- This tranquillity is cherished by the people who live, work, study and visit in the city, but it is vulnerable to developments both within and outside the conservation area.



Tranquillity and sound - Grove walk by Corpus Christi College



Tranquillity and sound - Lower Fisher Row by the Castle Mill Stream



### 6.4.5 Theme 27: setting of the conservation area

- From surrounding hills, the views of Oxford's dreaming spires rising above the trees and meadows form one of the most famous images of any town or city in Britain. The aesthetic, historic, and communal value of these views is exceptionally important and forms part of the core interest of the conservation area. This is analysed in depth in the Oxford View Cones Study and also in the Oxford High Buildings Technical Advice Note.
- The setting of the conservation area is important for preserving its skyline and roofscape, and for preserving high-level views out from the centre of the city to the surrounding hills that are fundamental to understanding the key role geology and topography have played in the development of the city (theme 23). It has different characteristics on different sides, reflecting the underlying landscape and the impact that this, and roads, railways and canals, have had on the development of the city's suburbs:
- **To the north:** the contrasting late-Georgian and Victorian suburbs of Jericho and Walton Manor (dense streets of terraced workers cottages) and North Oxford (affluent detached villas) are all conservation areas that were built to house people working in the city centre, and still do. Through them pass the arterial streets – Banbury Road and Woodstock Road – whose names indicate they are some of the most ancient routes to connect the city with the county of which it was the administrative centre. The experience of the approach along these broad, tree-lined routes culminates in the great arrival moment at St Giles, heralded by the substantial buildings of the former Radcliffe Infirmary and the University laboratories.
- **To the east:** largely hidden by the tree line of the Cherwell valley is St Clements' suburb, also a designated conservation area, first developed as a commercial area beyond the bridge over the Cherwell on the historic main road from Oxford to London, and formerly including inns that would have served the stagecoach trade. The area was rebuilt after its demolition during the Civil Wars. The 'Plain' provides an important gateway to the city centre with views to Magdalen Tower over Magdalen Bridge.
- Beyond, lie the compact mostly Victorian terraced streets branching off the Iffley and Cowley Roads, rising up gently towards Cowley. Further round to the north is Headington, rising up towards South Park and Headington Hill. These are the eastern heights that form the largely green back drop to views out from the conservation area.



setting of the conservation area - View west from Magdalen bridge, a historic approach

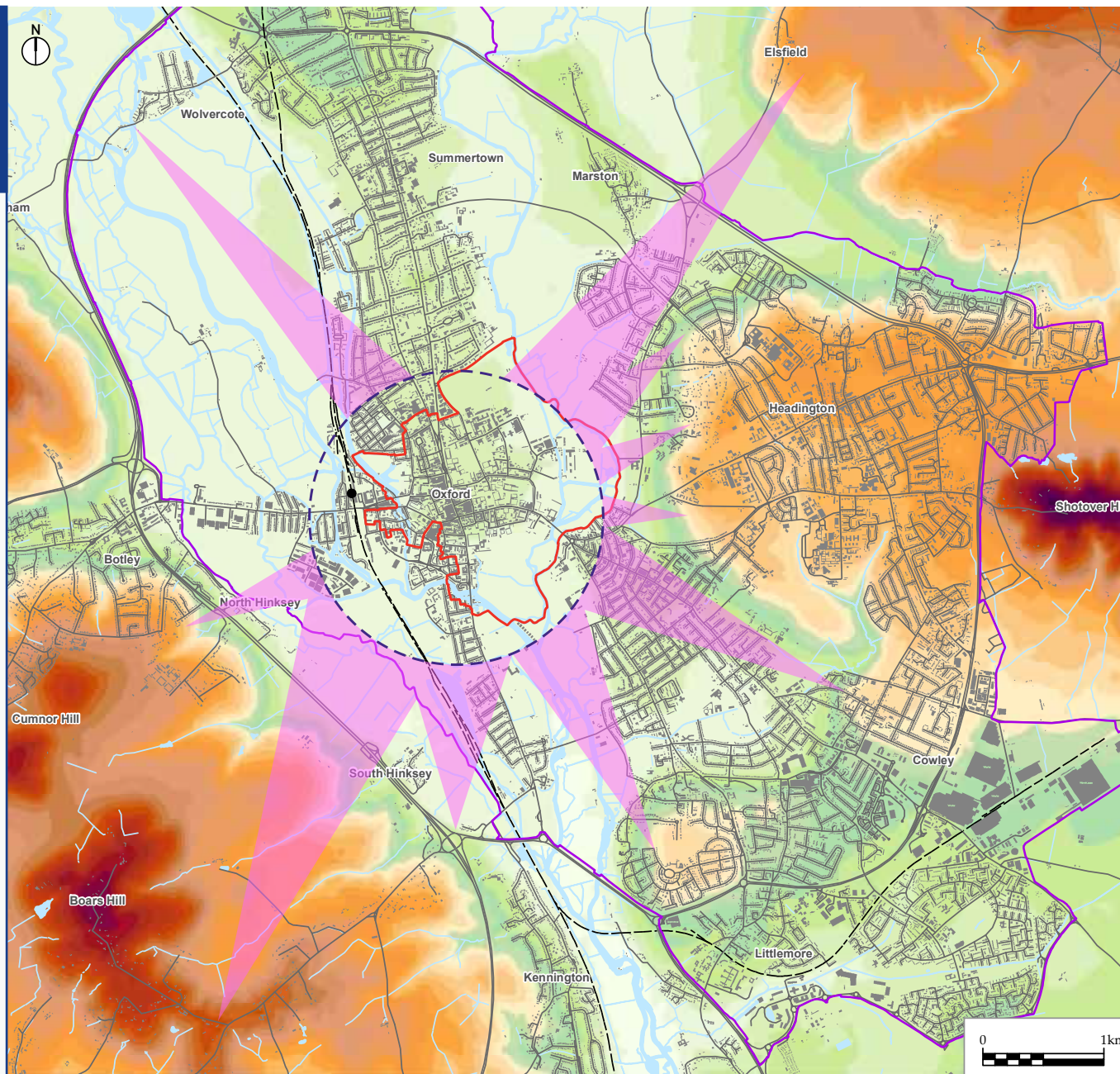


# GEOGRAPHY

## OXFORD (CITY AND UNIVERSITY) CONSERVATION AREA

### Key

- Oxford city boundary
- Conservation area boundary
- >170 m AOD
- 165-170 m AOD
- 160-165 m AOD
- 155-160 m AOD
- 150-155 m AOD
- 145-150 m AOD
- 140-145 m AOD
- 135-140 m AOD
- 130-135 m AOD
- 125-130 m AOD
- 120-125 m AOD
- 115-120 m AOD
- 110-115 m AOD
- 105-110 m AOD
- 95-100 m AOD
- 90-95 m AOD
- 85-90 m AOD
- 80-85 m AOD
- 75-80 m AOD
- 70-75 m AOD
- 65-70 m AOD
- 60-65 m AOD
- 55-60 m AOD
- <55 m AOD



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- **To the south:** a sliver of Victorian and Edwardian development in Hinksey, in the flat floodplain beside the Thames and along the railway line to Didcot.
- **To the south-east:** The dense Victorian and Edwardian suburbs of East Oxford sprawl out to encapsulate medieval villages, and are then further surrounded by post-war housing and the city's car manufacturing industry. Beyond this, the southern hills and Chiltern Hills beyond contain the city. The story of Oxford's history and it's, 'base and brickish skirt,' is illustrated in this view.
- **To the west and south west:** Osney Island, industrial, commercial and residential development spurred by the arrival of the railway in the 1840s, on land owned in the middle ages by Osney Abbey. The opening of the canal and later development of railway stations on land around Frideswide Square made the western area an important point of arrival on the edge of the city. The route into the city centre became a significant approach in ways it had not previously been, though the buildings reflect more of the industrial and commercial life connected to rail, river and canal.
- Beyond the railway and the flood plain of the Thames, including the archaeologically and ecologically significant Port Meadow, the landscape rises to Botley and Boars Hill, with the famed view over the city that inspired the poet Matthew Arnold to first write of Oxford's 'dreaming spires'.

## Chapter 7

# Management Guidance

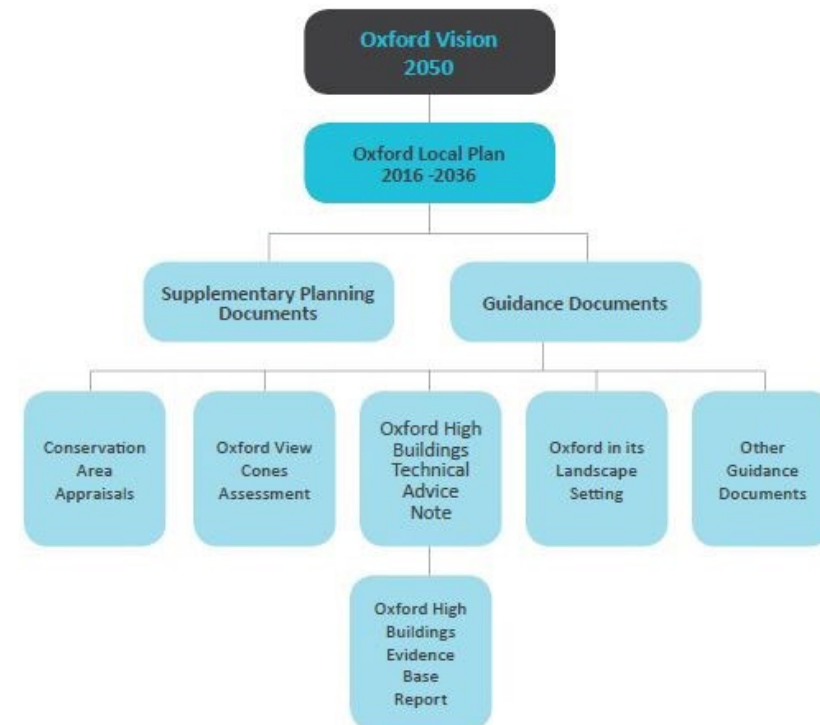
Oxford Central (City & University) Conservation Area





## 7.1 Management guidance

- Conservation area appraisals are required to include a management plan or guidance to aid the process of managed change for residents, institutions, developers, and other stakeholders. The management plan is based on an understanding of the issues and opportunities that exist within the conservation area and how to address them and take action. These issues and opportunities have been identified through street-level analysis, public consultation, and the Character Zone Assessments contained in Chapters 9 of this conservation area appraisal.
- The guidance is presented under a series of headings where the principal issues are identified with recommendations to address them. Whilst many of these recommendations are actionable by Oxford City Council, including through the development management process, the City Council is only one of several key stakeholders who have a responsibility to preserve the special character and appearance of the conservation area, and therefore other recommended actions will rely on the collaboration of other parties. It is nonetheless important to set out the City Council's aspirations as, once adopted, this will serve as a key tool for communicating what are considered to be steps required to address the issues identified to fellow stakeholders.
- The small number of landowners with long-term commitment and an interest in the vitality and quality of the city centre means the city centre is unusually well-placed to respond to these challenges and opportunities.
- The Management Guidance and Design Advice forms part of the main Central (City & University) Conservation Area Appraisal and this document sits underneath the Local Plan, as shown opposite. These documents are a material consideration in determining planning applications. It is expected that any proposals for development within the conservation area will have taken the Management Guidance and Design Advice into account and shaped the proposal around their requirements.
- The principles within the Management Guidance and Design Advice should be considered in relation to the specific needs and special interests of the different character areas.



Policy and guidance hierarchy  
Oxford Local Plan 2036

## 7.2 Effects of designation

- In order to protect the special environment, stricter controls exist within conservation areas, restricting the kinds of alterations that may be carried out without specific planning permission. These are not intended as a hindrance to change, but as positive management to safeguard the character of the area as a whole. There are greater restrictions relating to extensions and alterations, new buildings, cladding, satellite dishes and flues. There is also greater control over demolition and works to trees and adverts.
- Up to date information about what works require planning permission in a conservation area can be found online at: [www.planningportal.co.uk](http://www.planningportal.co.uk).

## 7.3 Streets, public spaces and green and blue space

- The particular character and strength of the conservation area is the inheritance of the Saxon and medieval street form and layout. The streets of the commercial part of the central area can now be heavily congested with large numbers of people and vehicles reflecting the popularity of the city and the policy and practice in public realm design.
- The conservation area has a number of contributory green spaces, the majority of which are owned and managed privately with limited public access. Blue spaces (The Rivers Thames and Cherwell and the canal), often less visually and physically accessible, have played and continue to play an important role in the history and development of the City.



Cornmarket - busy with pedestrians and buses at the crossroads (OCC)



Blue Boar Street - narrow medieval street (OCC)



### Key issues

- Shortage of public space putting pressure on the main streets: summer tourists increase this pressure, reaching pedestrian saturation.
- Accessibility constraints for pedestrians because of the narrow and congested pavements and busy streets with vehicles.
- Large amounts of street furniture and clutter: advertising boards, undocked bikes and scooters, bins, traffic signs and signals.
- Climate change response measures such as EV charging points – the number, design and location are all important considerations within the conservation area.
- The wide number of stakeholders/actors that have responsibility for the public realm.
- Damage to historic surfaces which can be disturbed during infrastructure works, such as access to underground services and the replacement with inferior materials such as tarmac.
- Shortage of public resting areas.
- Shortage of publicly accessible green space and limited physical and visual access to blue space.
- Inconsistent design, materials, quality and maintenance of street materials and furniture.
- Low numbers of street trees in some areas.

### Recommendations

- Prioritise a series of renewals to enhance the appearance of streets, including systematic de-cluttering and introduction of appropriate high-quality, robust surfacing materials.
- Work with the County Council to produce a schedule of materials and detailing handbook for works that disturb existing surfaces.
- Greater emphasis on the coordination and management of the public realm and streetscene.
- Increase pedestrianised public space through key stakeholder collaboration by converting, better utilising and re-imagining key areas such as Broad Street and St Giles.
- Support the increased pedestrianisation of streets where these are recommended by transport and place making strategies.



Magdalen Street - summer tourists increase the pressure on public space



Merton Street - inconsistent materials used for repair of historic streets (OCC)



- Work with landowners and other stakeholders to assess the amount and health of the conservation areas's tree cover and future plans for tree replacement.
- Identify opportunities to plant new trees that are appropriate to and enhance the specific character and appearance of individual streets and spaces.
- Support strategies for shared space with pedestrians and then cyclists having priority over motor vehicles.
- Identify opportunities to increase public access to existing private green space with coordinated and publicised opening hours.
- Identify and make the most of opportunities to link up networks of public spaces, particularly green spaces and green corridors and secondary streets.
- Increase the visibility and understanding of the waterways through interpretation of the historic environment.
- Take opportunities for major new development to improve pedestrian and cycle connectivity and incorporate public open space, street trees, and soft landscaping.
- Publish guidance on the design of streets and public spaces using coordinated approaches to lighting, high-quality materials, furniture and designs having regard to the characteristics of the relevant character areas.
- Keep up to date an advertising and shopfront guide, including a targeted enforcement strategy and the reduction of street clutter.
- Encourage management plans for Registered Parks and Gardens within the CCCA that prioritise the maintenance of green space, encourage public access and enjoyment, are sensitive to preservation of the settings of adjacent historic buildings and significant views from within and without and preserve historically significant layouts and planting regimes, ensuring planting and management that sustains the significance of below ground archaeological assets.
- Ensure existing historic surfaces that are of both architectural interest and historical significance are retained in situ or relaid should infrastructure works cause disturbance to them.
- Identify all historic surfaces within the conservation area and record these on a map to be shared with all stakeholders who undertake works within the highway.
- Support applications that would provide greater public accessibility to private green spaces.



Broad Meadow - open space, street trees and soft landscaping (OCC)



University Parks - Registered Park with Keble College in the background (OCC)



## 7.4 Transport

- The negative impact of traffic, particularly buses and coaches, is widely acknowledged as one of the most significant threats to the character and appearance of the conservation area. Its appearance and noise affects the ability to enjoy the space and its pollution and vibration is accelerating the physical deterioration of historic buildings and landscapes. The impact of traffic is not uniform, and is greatest on the main streets where vehicles and pedestrians are using the same space, such as Carfax, Beaumont Street, St Aldates and the top of the High Street. Parking and the lack of appropriate cycle storage can exacerbate the impacts.

### Key Issues

- Volume of traffic within the centre has visual, noise, and vibration impacts on historic buildings and settings.
- The size and frequency of buses and large coaches have a significant negative impact by adding to congestion, visually intruding through inappropriate parking, such as on St Giles and depositing increased levels of pollution on the city's historic buildings.
- Parking can conflict with the use and experience of public spaces in the city centre such as Broad Street and St. Giles.
- Lack of coordinated cycle storage.
- The increase in number and movement of delivery vehicles generated by the virtual economy.
- Future requirement for electric vehicle charging points.

### Recommendations

- Reduce the volume of traffic within the historic core by supporting the Zero Emission Zone and other strategies.
- Encourage the sustainable development of sites currently overly occupied by parking to create or include areas of public realm.
- Identify appropriate locations for tourist coach drop-off points, and parking locations outside the historic core.
- Implement a coordinated approach to cable-laying and charge point design for electric vehicle charging that takes into account buried archaeology and visual appearance.
- Adopt a coordinated approach to bicycle parking provision and design.
- Support the exploration of other solutions for the final mile of deliveries within the historic core to reduce congestion and emissions within the conservation area.



Traffic on St. Aldates

## 7.5 Uses

- The distinctive mix of uses in central Oxford, particularly the University and colleges, is fundamental to its unique appearance and sense of place. However, the continued growth of these institutions, together with changes in retail behaviour and central planning regulations threaten to unbalance this distinctive and historic mix of uses, and careful management will be required to ensure the continued vitality and quality of the city centre.
- Retail patterns and behaviours have been changing in recent years with a growth in online shopping creating a challenging environment for high street retailers that has been exacerbated by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. One result of this has been an increase in short-term, low-quality tenants occupying retail units, particularly on Cornmarket Street. The majority of these retailers cater solely to mass tourism, rather than meeting local and regional needs, and often seek to introduce unsympathetic signage and shopfronts.
- The challenging retail environment, together with recent changes to the Use Class Order (the introduction of Class E) and permitted development rights, has also led to an increase in retail premises being converted to alternative uses, particularly by Colleges. This has resulted in pressure to alter historic retail frontages, and the loss of active frontages in the historic commercial core, which is of detriment to the character, appearance and significance of the conservation area. This is a particular issue where Colleges seek to introduce rear entrances to the buildings to connect them directly to their precincts, replacing the street-facing entrances as the primary points of access/egress.
- The expansion of student accommodation into historically private residential streets, such as has occurred on Pembroke Street and Beaumont Street, is also recognised as having an adverse effect on the character of these places.

### Key issues:

- Decrease in private residential accommodation and non-educational accommodation.
- The reduction of the amount of retail in historically retail-based streets such as the High Street and Cornmarket Street, which has led to pressure to alter historic retail frontages, and often results in the loss of active frontages, which threatens the vibrancy of the city's historic commercial core.
- Unbalanced retail provision within the city centre, with increasing provision for mass tourism but fewer retailers catering for local and regional needs.
- Unsympathetic and unauthorised shopfronts and signage, which detract from the character and appearance of some of the city's oldest and most historically and architecturally significant streets.

### Recommendations

- Adopt a retail strategy that seeks to retain retail within historic retail buildings and streets.
- Adopt a Covered Market masterplan as part of the revitalisation of historic retail areas.
- Adopt a Shopfront and Advertising Guide as part of the City Centre Strategy to improve the quality and appearance of retail areas, including consideration of an Area of Special Control of Advertisements.
- Increased provision for enforcement action against authorised alterations to shopfronts and signage.
- Work with stakeholders to sustain and reinstate ground floor activity where this historically existed to reduce inactive frontages, and explore opportunities to reuse upper floors to maximise retail, office, and residential uses.
- Support continued residential uses in historically residential streets.



## 7.6 Setting and views

- More so than most conservation areas, the setting of Oxford's Central (City and University) Conservation Area contributes to its character, appearance and significance. The internationally renowned skyline is a centuries-old product of the relationship between the architecture of the city centre and its strong relationship to the landscape surroundings which form part of its setting. This setting is commonly thought of in terms of the green hills rising up around the city and the suburbs that lead out to the hills. Equally, there are distinct variations in the character of the conservation area's setting from one side to another.
- The importance and vulnerability of the setting of the city centre has long been recognised, culminating in the adoption of strategic View Cones and the 'Carfax Rule' in 1962. More recently, the City Council published the Oxford High Buildings Technical Advice Note to enable it to shape and assess development outside and inside the city centre in ways that would not harm the significance of the historic environment, including the Central Conservation Area.
- The Technical Advice Note contains a robust methodology, clear design guidance and detailed recommendations on acceptable building heights in the different parts of the city where development could be accommodated without harming the significance of the skyline. The effective implementation of the Technical Advice Note will be one of the most important tools for the management of the conservation area.
- The setting of the conservation area and views in, out and across it must be a key consideration of new development proposals. In managing the impact of development outside the conservation area, consideration should be given to the immediate setting as much as the wider city and landscape. Development on sites adjacent or close to the boundary of the conservation area could affect its significance. For example, they could harm the character and appearance of the historic approaches from the south, north and west.



The green setting forms a backdrop to listed buildings in high level views (OCC)

**Key issues:**

- Tall buildings or features within the centre obscuring/competing with the dreaming spires.
- Tall buildings skylining.
- Tall buildings resulting in a change of character of a view. Flat roofs detracting from the 'spikiness' and animation that characterises the famed Oxford skyline.
- The challenge is to support growth whilst still maintaining the ability to appreciate Oxford's green setting.

**Recommendations**

- Planning proposals which may affect the setting, skyline, or roovescape of the conservation area should demonstrate application of the methodology and guidance within the Oxford High Buildings Technical Advice Note.
- 3D models of planning proposals should also be viewed within the City Council's Vu.City 3D model of Oxford to assist with the assessment of impact on views and setting.

## 7.7 Archaeology

- There is a wealth of evidence of past human activity lying beneath the streets and buildings of the conservation area, particularly with reference to the Civil War. The conservation area's archaeology is integral to its special interest and inseparable from its history. Much is of national importance, including for example, evidence of the Saxon and Norman town, the medieval defences and some of the most significant civil war fortifications in the country.
- Not all of this is Scheduled, but its significance is no less for this. In the Local Plan and the Archaeological Action Plan, the city has well-established policies and guidance for managing this archaeology, which benefit from a long and unbroken tradition of scholarship and excavation in the city.
- Major development sites will require careful archaeological management and could yield valuable new information.

**Key issues:**

- Few areas of nationally significant archaeology have been protected under legislation as Scheduled Monuments.
- Development pressure from Colleges and the University on sites with large amounts of medieval urban archaeological remains preserved beneath (eg. quads and gardens) and the increased pressure to build below ground.
- The challenge is to support commercial and educational developments whilst avoiding significant cumulative loss of important buried remains.

**Recommendations**

- The Oxford Archaeological Action Plan should be reviewed and updated as necessary, including the resource assessment and research agenda.
- Continue collaboration between City and County Councils, local archaeology groups, and developers.
- Encourage colleges and major institutions to introduce archaeological management plans for the long-term preservation of buried archaeological remains.
- Ensure the impact on buried archaeological remains is considered at the earliest stages of development proposals to inform development design.
- Seek opportunities to secure greater public benefit, understanding and enjoyment relating to the conservation areas exceptional archaeological heritage.



## 7.8 Implementation

- Consultation and research for this appraisal in phase 1 of the project revealed a broad consensus for the recommendations made in this chapter. Turning this support into action requires collaboration from several parties.
- In this, the city has two advantages: the nature of land ownership and the strength of civic society. There is already considerable cooperation, both formal and informal, which can be built upon to strengthen.
- The principal responsibility for driving forward the recommendations of this Appraisal falls upon the City Council, not least because of the obligations placed upon it by legislation and in its role in advising on planning applications and listed building consent applications and it is through this process that the City Council will work with partners and landowners to deliver change.
- The City Council recognises and values the importance of collaborative working from stakeholders to help achieve its aims in the current fiscal climate against competing priorities. Therefore, it is essential to derive the most social and economic value from existing resources and budgets. The City Council will continue to work across departments to seek to achieve effective coordination, working together to realise opportunities and achieve successful outcomes.
- Close cooperation will be necessary with the County Council in particular, because as the highways authority it is responsible for the streets and many public space, whose character and use are both the cause of harm to the character and appearance of the conservation area and also an opportunity for significant enhancement.
- The pre-application process will also be an essential element to the success of managing the conservation area by continuing to communicate and emphasise the findings and recommendations of this appraisal.

### Key issues:

- Responsibility for the management and enhancement of the area is split between the City Council as planning authority, County Council as highways authority, landowners, especially the colleges and University, and other bodies.
- A coordinated approach and partnerships are required to meet the challenges and deliver enhancement.
- The partnership between the City Council and the County Council is of great importance because of the impact of transport on the character and appearance of the conservation area, and the contribution streets and public space could make to enhancing it.
- Effective management requires an on-going review of resources required and available.

## 7.9 Recommendations

- The City Council should adopt the management recommendations of this Appraisal and, where appropriate, implement them through the City Centre Management Function, the Local Plan or allied strategies.
- The City Council, with partners where necessary, should continue to review the need for the additional studies identified in this Appraisal and seek to undertake them where the resources for this are available.
- The City Council should seek to undertake a review of the Appraisal, ideally every 10 years where resources are available to reflect changes to the condition of the conservation area, emergence of new threats and progress with enhancement recommendations.

## Chapter 8

# Design Advice

Oxford Central (City & University) Conservation Area





## 8.1 Purpose and scope of the design advice

This chapter provides advice to applicants, designers and owners on how the design of new development and alterations to existing buildings might be approached within the conservation area.

- There is a presumption in favour of high-quality design and materials within the Central Conservation Area, as befits the international significance of the city centre and its buildings. The City Council will seek to improve the appearance of structures and spaces through the planning process, requiring justification when it is claimed that this cannot be achieved. Improving the appearance and experience of the area benefits all users, bringing greater economic benefits as well as recognising the high value and importance of providing a place to be proud of.
- The advice applies to proposals inside the conservation area and those outside that might affect the area's setting either because of their height, or their proximity to the boundary, or other factors.
- Good design is recognised in the Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the National Design Guide as fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve, and it is a core objective of the Council's Local Plan. Good design creates better, more sustainable places in which to live and work, affects health and well-being and promotes community cohesion.
- The purpose of this Design Advice is to help applicants apply the Government's national objectives and the City Council's design policies to the specific context of the conservation area. The international significance of the conservation area demands proposals of an exceptional standard that emerge from a deep understanding of the character, history and significance of the place. Because of this, generic solutions are unlikely to be successful. However, by properly applying both an understanding of the site and the following Design Advice, development is possible that can enrich the character and appearance of the conservation area.



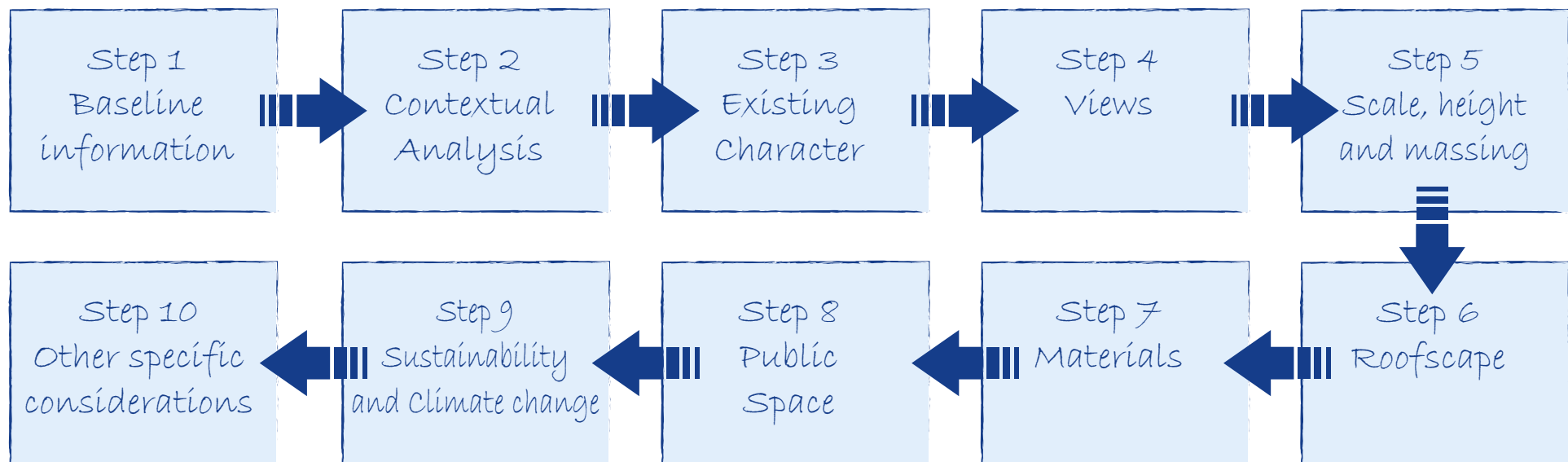
Oxford's historic skyline

## 8.2 A step-by-step approach to site appraisal

- The City Council believe that the right approach to achieving high quality development in the conservation area can be found in examining the context and relating the new development to its surroundings through an informed character appraisal.
- To aid in the design and assessment of new development in the conservation area, the structure of this document follows a step by step guide setting out what the City Council considers to be a best practice approach to site appraisal and relevant design considerations. This approach is consistent with the approach set out in the Heritage and Design policies in the Local Plan and with advice found in Historic England's Principles for good design set out in their document 'Building in Context' and relevant statements taken from the National Design Guide.
- While the steps are laid out as a sequential process, the development of a design may see a more iterative approach, where steps are revisited, combined or dealt with in parallel, as the design progresses.

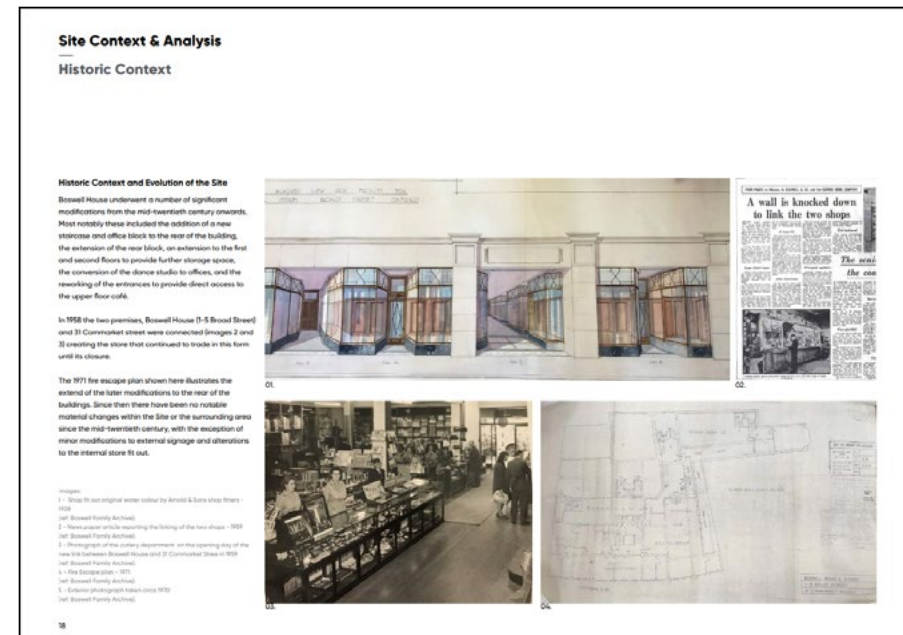
### Step 1: Baseline information

- Baseline information is required to understand the context
- The following information should be established at the very beginning of the design process and used to inform that process from the start. This will ensure that design decisions are properly informed and will complement and respect the existing context. Depending on the scale of the proposed development, the amount of information required should be proportionate.
- The council strongly encourage applicants to seek early pre-application advice where applications are located within the conservation area or within its setting, particularly if they may have a harmful impact on the significance of the conservation area, listed buildings, archaeology or historic landscapes. Early discussions with the City Council will help inform the level of information needed.





- The following baseline information is essential to understand the context and should be presented at the beginning of a pre-application process and in all planning application submissions:
  - understand the historical development of the place, site, building
  - identify, research and understand the significance of the heritage assets
  - assess the value of retaining what is there
  - scope out potential long distance and local views that could be impacted by the development and undertake a townscape and landscape visual analysis. A Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) will be required for any development that is likely to have a significant character or visual effect on an existing landscape or townscape setting
  - engage with the Council's Vu.City 3D model through the pre-application and planning application process by providing a 3D model of the proposal and undertaking reviews with the City Council during pre-application discussions
  - engage in early consultation with the City Council's specialist teams such as Heritage, Urban Design, Archaeology and Trees (through the pre-application process), Historic England, heritage and community groups, councillors and local residents.



Contextual analysis (Reef Group - Former Boswell's Department Store)



The view from South Park

## Step 2: Contextual analysis

- An understanding of place should influence the design of new development and this is achieved through a detailed contextual analysis, created from the gathering of the baseline information set out in Step 1. This information should be set out early in the pre-application process and contained in the Design and Access Statement (DAS) and/or Heritage Statements and include:
  - identification of the existing features of the site and the wider area
  - use this information to reveal opportunities for the design of new developments to link well into the context and enhance these features
  - set out the immediate context of the site and the thematic context. For example, the immediate context may be a College but the site may lie in a historic retail area or a 19th Century residential area. Refer back to the relevant character zone that the site lies within
  - understand whether a site is suitable for restrained architecture or a landmark, or something in between.
- To be successful in an historic environment as complex and significant as the centre of Oxford, the nature and design of proposals will need to exhibit a deep understanding of the context in which they sit. Successful proposals will have a strong sense - or spirit - of place. Spirit of place is the unique, distinctive and cherished aspects of a place derived from the history and character of both the site and its context and setting. Spirit of place is not just the physical appearance of a location, but how a place engages with all of the senses. To understand this, it may be necessary to look beyond the immediate context and consider the relationship between the site and the wider city.
- One important conclusion to determine from analysis of the history and character of the site and its context is whether a site is suited to a landmark building or to more reticent architecture that defers to its neighbours. Oxford city centre contains exceptional historic buildings, but its character and appearance is a subtle balance between architectural set-pieces and 'good ordinary' architecture, for example the combination and juxtaposition of the colleges and University buildings on the one hand, and more modest houses and shops on the other. In this context, not every site is appropriate for a landmark.
- There is some middle ground, however and a building can comfortably harmonise with its surroundings by responding to its context in an honest and confident way. By following a truly context led design approach, the decision about whether a landmark or more restrained building will be more obvious.



A landmark building - The Ashmolean Museum



More restrained buildings - St. John Street (OCC)



## Step 3: Respecting and working with the existing character

- An understanding of the significance of the site will inform the appropriate character and identity for new development. Well-designed new development is influenced by an appreciation and understanding of vernacular, local or regional character, including existing built form, landscape and architectural precedents. The following considerations and elements are all important factors in understanding and relating to the existing character and were identified during the public consultation phase of the appraisal.

### Retain, re-use and adapt

- The aim should be to preserve the spatial and structural patterns of the historic fabric and the architectural features that make it significant. Preservation and re-use should always be considered as the first option.
- Where a site presents an opportunity for redevelopment to enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area, it may still be possible to use part of the existing structure of the building with the associated savings in embodied carbon.

### Advice

- It is preferable to retain buildings which make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area
- this includes non-designated heritage assets which are important to the historic and architectural character and appearance of the area
- historic shopfronts, boundary walls and other historic features such as paving should also be retained
- in some cases, retaining the existing frame of the building will be supported where a suitable high quality design can be achieved.

### Urban grain, plots, streets and spaces

- Analysis of townscape and significance, supported by consultation, identified the importance of plot size and shape in defining the character and appearance of the conservation area. These historic plot boundaries reveal historic land uses and organisation. They are fundamental to generating the character of streets and sites and make a major contribution to the architectural composition of streets by determining the width of elevations.
- In the historic core, long narrow plots date back to the Saxon Burh and medieval town and are hugely historically significant. They were combined to create colleges and other significant institutional buildings. Outside the core, boundaries are often larger and relate to, for example, historic land ownership or field boundaries.
- As they are significant, these boundaries should be expressed in the new development. This includes rear boundaries, such as walls.
- Where historic boundaries have been combined in the twentieth century the opportunity should be taken to reinstate them when such sites are redeveloped. Limiting such reinstatement to the front elevations is likely to be superficial and unconvincing if it is not also extended to the plan, massing and roof arrangements of the building and the organisation of the site. This might be an opportunity to introduce or improve foot and cycle routes across sites, in order to encourage walking and cycling.



The Jam Factory - a good example of re-use and adaptation (OCC)

**Advice:**

- Development should respect and reflect historic plot divisions in elevation, plan and roofscape
- where opportunities arise, redevelopment should reinstate the pattern of historic plot boundaries where these have been lost or merged
- historic boundary walls, railings and other structures should be conserved.

**Addressing the street**

- The relationship of buildings to streets makes a strong contribution to the distinctive character of the conservation area, and to the way in which this changes from one part of the conservation area to another. In the medieval and Saxon streets, buildings are built up tight against the pavement line. This differentiates them from areas developed since the nineteenth century, where front areas or gardens are more common. These characteristics should be conserved including historic boundary structures such as railings. The same characteristics should be incorporated into new development. Further, active frontages in new development are encouraged because these are historically characteristic of the conservation area.
- Gaps in street frontages are often historic access to yards, gardens or other historic backland use. These are shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1876. Where these survive they should be retained. College perimeters are a highly distinctive part of the character and appearance of the conservation area. By design, the historic college precincts have a perimeter with few openings and little activity.
- Development within gardens and grounds: proposals for historic college sites should respond very carefully to the characteristic perimeter treatment of these precincts. Walls and railings provide glimpses of gardens and create openings in the skyline that are highly characteristic of the distinctive sense of place and historic land use in central Oxford. These gaps in building frontages and the sense of green spaces beyond should continue to be legible (see also section 8.8 below).
- Conversion of residential, retail and commercial buildings: to provide



St. Thomas Street - more recent development which reinstates historic plot widths (OCC)



The Eagle and Child Public House - an example of historic burgarge plots



additional accommodation, colleges convert buildings. These may adjoin historic college precincts, enabling direct access from the rear into college, for better security and collegiate interaction, but at the expense of traditional street activity that is part of the character of the conservation area. Therefore, the City Council encourages active use of building frontages in these circumstances, such as continued use of historic front doors and shop units.

- Development on other sites: accommodation and other development on satellite sites such as playing fields should be designed to address the street in a positive manner rather than face predominantly inwards behind a fence or wall, because the concept of a traditional college perimeter is not appropriate to the more suburban or open character and appearance of these locations, outside the historic core.

#### Advice:

- Street frontages should:
  - include activity at street level with active frontages in because these are historically characteristic of the conservation area
  - be designed with care and attention to detail regardless of whether they are the primary or secondary facades of the building
  - have a building line that follows the prevailing historic character
  - retain historic gaps between and under buildings and restore them where they have been lost
  - retain historic boundaries; where these have been lost it is desirable to restore them.



The Clore Music Centre - A new development which positively addresses the street (OCC)



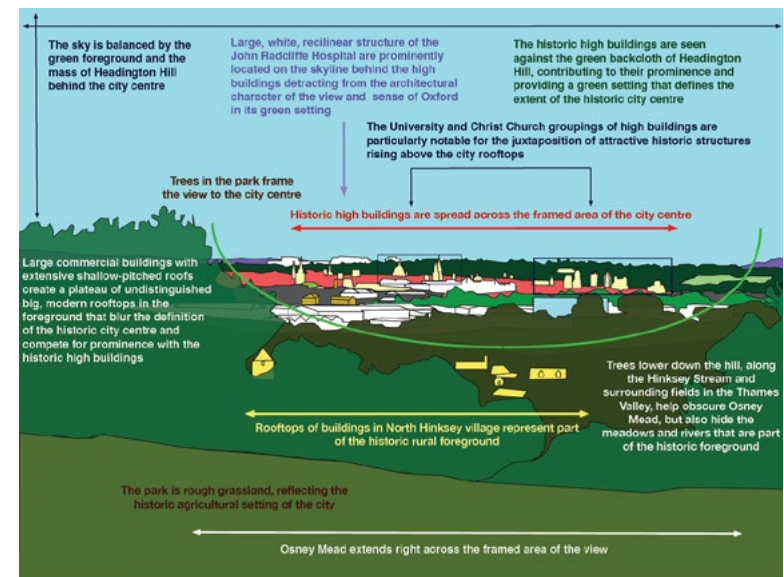
Pembroke Street - facades have been retained but the loss of their original use is to the detriment of the vitality of the street (OCC)

## Step 4: Views

- Views are one of the key themes identified in chapter 6, under the assessment of significance (Theme 22).
- Well-designed new development is influenced by views, vistas and landmarks. The significance of the historic core and its setting can be understood in views looking outwards from the historic core from the many publicly accessible towers and in views looking towards it from the surrounding hills and suburbs. The historic core and its landscape setting are intrinsically linked.
- The relationship between the historic city centre and its setting, and its contribution to heritage significance, can be appreciated in three main ways:
  - views towards the city from the surrounding landscape with a distinctive cluster of historic buildings signalling the location of the historic core of the city in its landscape setting (including those identified within the Oxford View Cones)
  - views out from elevated viewpoints within the historic city centre revealing the topographic position of Oxford in its landscape setting
  - views between the edge of the historic city centre and the floodplains of the Thames and Cherwell to the south and east of the city, illustrating the original siting of the city on dry ground adjacent to an early river crossing point.
- A views analysis should be undertaken and presented at step 1 to inform all of the following steps. The applicant must refer to the View Cones Study to establish what view cones are affected by the proposal. View positions should be agreed with the City Council as part of the pre-application process.
- The High Buildings Study and evidence base also provides information about some of the high level views within the historic core.
- Views analysis. This appraisal identifies typical types of view that characterise the experience of the conservation area and reveal its unique history, character and sense of place. It does not identify specific views because the conservation area townscape is so rich and complex that its visual experience cannot be reduced to a selection of individual viewing points.



The view from Raleigh Park (View Cones document)



The View from Raleigh Park annotated (View Cones document)



**Advice:**

- Has the impact of the development in views and vistas been assessed in the wider setting using the City Council's High Building Study?
- Has the impact of the development in close views been assessed in the wider setting? Is it either weak or overpowering? Does it respect the scale and rhythm of its neighbours?
- Have you considered views towards the historic core of the conservation area and views out from it towards the surrounding hills, both of which form its setting?
- Have you used a 3D model to test the impact on views?
- Has a Landscape Visual Impact Assessment with verified views been provided for development which would have a significant character or visual effect on the existing landscape and/or townscape setting?
- Does the development create new views and juxtapositions which add to the variety and texture of the area and/or setting? This could be focal points at the end of a view or glimpsed views of spaces beyond and between that give you that sense of space and unfolding visual townscape interest.



View West from The Church of St. Michael (OCC)



New College Lane - overhanging greenery gives interest (OCC)



Visual competition (The High Buildings TAN)

## Step 5: Scale, proportion, height and massing

- Built form is determined by good urban design principles that combine layout, form and scale in a way that responds positively to the context.
- Scale means the size of a building in relation to its function and surroundings. In order to make a positive contribution to their context and setting, new buildings should be of a similar scale to those around them.
- Proportion is the relationship between different building elements such as walls and roofs, or window openings and solid walls. These proportions may relate to the large scale, for example the vertical sub-division of terraced housing, or to the small scale, such as the size and shape of windows on an adjacent building. New buildings should respect the proportions of existing buildings; this needs to be carefully considered when designing new buildings which often have lower ceiling heights than older buildings. This can give their elevations a more 'cramped' appearance and scale which can be at odds with that of older buildings.
- The height of any new buildings in or adjacent to a conservation area is important, as any particularly tall buildings can have a visual impact over an extensive area. Careful consideration and assessment using the High Buildings Study will need to be given to any proposal for a tall building and its potential impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area and its setting. Proposals for tall buildings should be supported by a Landscape and Visual Townscape Assessment where the impact of the proposal on views outwards from the historic core towards the city's landscape setting and views in towards the historic core should be identified and the significance of those views set out and then the impact of the proposal on that significance assessed.
- Massing is the three-dimensional form of a building or group of buildings resulting from the combined effect of the height, bulk and silhouette of the building or group.
- The scale, proportion, height and massing of proposed development in conservation areas should be carefully considered in relation to that of surrounding buildings and the area in general, to ensure that the character and appearance of the conservation area is not detrimentally affected.

- This does not necessarily mean that development has to copy adjacent buildings, as the character of townscape depends on how individual buildings contribute to a harmonious whole, through relating to the scale of their neighbours.
- The following principles refer back to the contextual analysis and achieving a good development that meets them will come from a study of the site context and the implementation of the learning from that.

### Advice:

- Respect the context and setting so that new buildings within the conservation area and in its setting are of an appropriate scale and do not result in harm to the significance of long distance views across the conservation area and from within and towards its setting
- respect the proportions of existing buildings
- ensure the height and massing of a building has been tested using 3D modelling, LVIA's where necessary and against the City Council's High Building Study
- use the contextual analysis to identify opportunities for instances where a new building could create a visually interesting townscape for example, by providing a focal point or enclosing a view or vista
- respect the scale of neighbouring buildings.



St John College Kendrew Quad by MJP - relates well to its context (OCC)



## Step 6: Roofscape

- Roofscape is one of the key themes identified in chapter 6, under the assessment of significance (Theme 21).
- The highly significant and world famous skyline of the city is created by a balanced combination of spires, domes and towers emerging from a roofscape of pitched and leaded roofs, chimneys, parapets, pinnacles, party walls, turrets and other details, creating a combination of strong horizontal and vertical accents. All development proposals, whether alterations to existing buildings or new construction, should contribute positively to this roofscape through animated and delightful design, showing as much care as the main elevations.
- The following requires careful consideration and a sensitive design response:
  - high buildings. Proposals for tall buildings and structures that might break the skyline, whether inside the conservation area or not, could have a significant impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area and the settings of listed buildings and other heritage assets. Proposals for such development should be developed in accordance with the methodology and guidance set out in the Oxford High Buildings Technical Advice Note, as well as section 8.7
  - flat roofs. Large, unbroken flat roofs are not characteristic; until the 20th century only narrow spans were technically achievable, even for large complexes. The cumulative impact of long rows of flat roofs would result in the closing of gaps between historic pitched roofs, chimneys, gable ends and dormer windows from being visible against the sky
  - plant and services. Visible or poorly integrated mechanical and electrical engineering plant does not contribute to this exceptional roofscape and requires careful screening or relocation
  - roof-mounted photovoltaic panels: these should be integrated well into the roofscape where view testing indicates they would be appropriate
  - any proposals within the Historic Core Area that may impact on the foreground of views and roofscape (including proposals where they are below the Carfax datum point, for example plant) should be designed carefully, should be based on a clear understanding of roofscape in the area, and contribute positively to it. Any such proposals will have to be justified by a



Exeter College Fleche and All Souls - the spikiness of Oxford's world famous skyline (OCC)



Beaver House - long flat rooves detract from the skyline (OCC)

comprehensive analysis of place and setting (see section 8.3)

- new landmarks. The character of the roofscape and skyline of the conservation area is created by a combination of mostly average building heights and relatively few taller landmarks. It follows that not every site will be suitable for a new landmark without causing harm to the character and appearance of the conservation area. Where it can be demonstrated and agreed that a location for a higher building or landmark element will make a positive contribution to its setting and the skyline, it will need to be limited in bulk and of the highest design quality.

#### Advice

- In order to conserve and where possible enhance the internationally famous roofscape and skyline of the city centre:
  - all new or altered roofs should make a positive contribution to the roofscape and skyline by creating animation and delight
  - large or unbroken areas of flat roof are not considered appropriate



Mansfield College - Flues visible from the quadrangle

- plant should be fully integrated in roof design and screened, or located elsewhere
- the appropriate height for new development should be informed by the context and a full understanding of the impact on views, roofscape and Oxford's precious skyline
- the process, visual tests and guidelines of the Oxford High Buildings Technical Advice Note should be applied where appropriate
- the location for new elements that break the skyline these must be very carefully chosen, the proposed design must be of the very highest architectural quality corresponding to the significance of the skyline and the historic structures that form it
- where possible and appropriate, new or altered roofs should be designed to prevent additional water run-off through the use of innovative green and/or blue roofs
- applications for roof terraces and/or gardens should be accompanied by careful analysis of long distance and high level views to ensure that appreciation of the famous city skyline is not impeded by building elements or temporary structures
- flues: where flues may be appropriate (such as in the science area) they should be considered as an integrated part of the building from an early stage of the design. Flues must be included in view studies which should be used to inform their placement and design.



Science Area - Flues visible amongst the Oxford skyline



## Architectural style and authenticity

- Good design is not the same as architectural style and successful design will authentically express its purpose and location. Therefore no one architectural style is more likely to be successful in the conservation area than another. Nevertheless, Oxford has a strong and recognisable building tradition, one that has long been associated with the use of limestone and the Gothic language, creating a townscape of warm, matt tones, deep shadow-casting reveals, careful and delightful details and an animated roofscape.
- As the many fine Classical buildings and the best of postwar architecture illustrate, different architectural styles can work successfully within this earlier tradition if they:
  - intelligently apply a thorough understanding of site and context, as explained in 1.3 above
  - understand the 'grain' of the townscape, and when to defer and when to assert
  - respect historic building footprints land organisation
  - respect the scale of neighbouring buildings
  - treat the roofscape as importantly as any facade
  - use appropriate materials and high-quality detailing
  - use high quality building methods
  - authentically express their function
  - materials, colours and forms.



St John College - Recognisable Oxford architecture (OCC)



Nuffield College - A newer contribution to the roofscape and skyline of Oxford

## Step 7: Materials

- Materials are one of the key themes identified in chapter 6, under the assessment of significance (Theme 14).
- The choice and use of materials is central to successful design in the conservation area.
- Historically, a limited range of materials was employed in the conservation area, frequently from local sources. They therefore express a specific sense of place by the direct link to the geology on which Oxford is built. Individually and in combination these are significant and contribute substantially to the character and appearance of the area.
- Localised use of materials such as red brick, buff brick, slate and clay tiles.
- Oolitic limestone is the most famous type of stone and is used as ashlar and rubble. Because good quality stone from the local quarries at Headington and Wheatley is worked out, limestone may now be sourced elsewhere. Bath stone is considered a good match in many circumstances. However, it is always necessary to carefully match stone to adjoining walling, which may vary considerably because of the employment of different stones over the centuries.
- Other types of stone have proved less successful, for example because their tone does not complement local materials or because of the chemical reaction with oolitic limestone. The merits of other stones must therefore be carefully assessed against their context. Importantly, this must take into account how the stone will weather, both in terms of how its appearance might change over time, how quickly it will deteriorate or fail, and how it may interact chemically with any existing adjoining stone.
- Brick has been used in the conservation area for hundreds of years. Until the middle of the 19th century, it was handmade from locally dug clay, creating a texture and warm tone. From the 19th century onwards, modern manufacturing permitted outstanding new effects, with multiple colours and details. Keble College is the most celebrated example of this. Subject to analysis of the site and its context, new brick could be employed but it must always to be a very high standard of material quality and detailing.



Oolitic limestone - St John Street (OCC)



Red brick - St. Thomas Street (OCC)



- Concrete. Concrete has been used successfully in the conservation area when it is employed with a tone, texture, level of detail and articulation that is consistent with the architectural traditions of central Oxford.
- Glass, metal, ceramics. Aside from 19th century retail architecture, there is no tradition for the use of reflective materials for elevations.
- Other materials: The use of other materials will require strong justification and careful consideration to explain why the proposed materials and the way they are to be used would preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area where development is proposed, taking into account impacts on setting and wider context.
- Roof materials: Slate, lead, copper and clay roof tiles have all been used successfully in the conservation area. However, careful detailing of roofscapes is critical to the appearance and good management of the conservation area.
- Detailing and workmanship. Attention to detail and the highest standards of workmanship characterise much of the architecture in the conservation area. In particular, the conservation area is distinguished by the exceptional quality of masonry and the City Council will expect stonework, brickwork and concrete to be detailed and executed to the highest standards, consistent with the exceptional significance and the celebrated architectural and craft traditions of the city centre.
- Depth of facades. Deep reveals for windows and doors, together with projections such as buttresses and cornices, are a characteristic element of the distinctive tradition of architecture in Oxford. By casting deep shadows, they create architectural rhythm and a sense of depth and solidity. These characteristics should be applied to the handling and modelling of materials in new development. Thinly moulded and poorly articulated façades are unlikely to be successful in this architectural and townscape context.



Rhodes House - coursed rubble stone with Clipsham dressings and slate roof (OCC)

#### Advice

- The character and appearance of the conservation area is shaped by a range of long-established materials, originally sourced locally
- the use of other materials will require strong justification
- hard, reflective materials such as glass, metal or ceramics are not part of the historic character and appearance of the conservation area
- the highest quality workmanship and careful detailing are central to the architectural qualities of the conservation area and are expected in all development and alterations
- depth in the use of the materials, creating shadow and articulation, is an important architectural characteristic of the conservation area and is strongly encouraged
- consideration must be given to how materials will change over time, both in appearance and performance.

## Step 8: Public green space and landscaping

- Public space is one of the key themes identified in chapter 6, under the assessment of significance (Theme 19).
- Green space makes a substantial contribution to the distinctive character and appearance of the conservation area, by its extent, history, ecology and design. Much of this is visible or publicly accessible, such as the University Parks and the water meadows of the flood plain.
- Colleges and gardens. In the centre and east of the conservation area there is much less green space and the majority is private college land and rarely accessible. Nevertheless, it contributes to significance by:
  - virtue of its inherent significance as historic gardens and grounds (many Registered)
  - its expression of historic land use (education, recreation, produce)
  - its fundamental contribution to the distinctive arrangement and character of the historic college precincts.
- This is experienced in the streets of the conservation area as gaps in building frontages that are filled with boundary walls and allow more openness to the sky, by glimpses of gardens through gates and by overhanging trees and planting.



Christchurch Meadow (OCC)

- These green spaces should be protected and enhanced in order to preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area whether it visible or not.
- New green space. Green space is good for biodiversity, for well-being and for the climate. New publicly accessible green space is therefore encouraged, especially in the centre and east of the conservation area where there is little. The design of such space should draw on the long tradition of gardens and parks in the city centre to avoid a generic appearance that does not reflect the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- New public space: the medieval street pattern is easily navigable and the streets themselves are public spaces. There are however, few areas of public space aside from the streets. New publicly accessible space is encouraged where it would be an enhancement of existing facilities or the creation of new ones. It should be easily accessible for all users and encourage a variety of uses, including after-dark entertainment spaces. New public space should be carefully designed to sit comfortably with existing historic structures and streets, using a variety of hard and soft landscaping techniques and materials.
- The treatment of existing public realm: The public realm within the conservation area plays a key part in its character. The treatment of and any changes to areas of existing public realm requires a sensitive approach in terms of design and execution. As the public realm within the conservation area is precious and has such an impact on its character, opportunities to enhance it and make it more accessible, usable and attractive are encouraged.



Trinity College on Broad Street



### Advice

- The character of new public and green space should reflect and respond to local characteristics, which vary across the conservation area; this includes soft and hard landscaping, seating, cycle storage, use of both innovative and traditional materials, sensory features, and future maintenance
- it should also take into account the historic environment, including opportunities to enhance heritage assets and or impact on known or potentially unknown archaeological remains.



Public realm in Bonn Square (OCC)



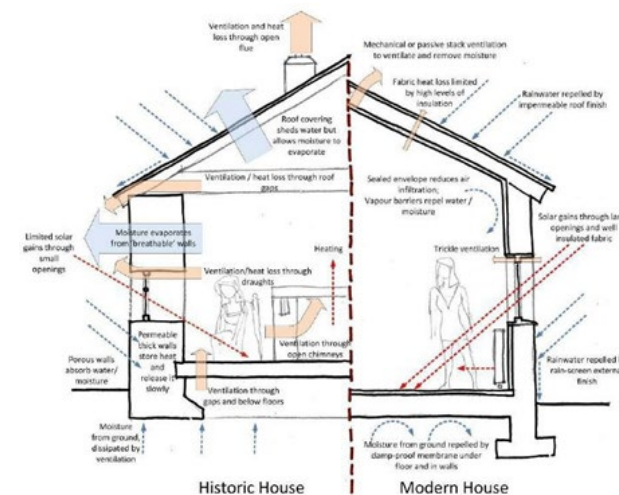
Public realm on Broad Street (OCC)

## Step 9: Sustainability and climate change

- Buildings – including historic buildings and conservation areas – have a significant part to play in these efforts. The Heritage and Sustainability Guidance for Householders TAN and emerging Climate Change and the Historic Environment sets out how building and home owners can take practical steps to reduce carbon emissions and adapt buildings for changing weather, without harming those characteristics that make the historic environments special and significant places.
- Retaining historic buildings is inherently sustainable. The inherent embodied energy of historic buildings means that their retention and care is consistent with modern concepts of sustainability and with the ambitions of reducing carbon emissions. There are a range of measures that can be taken to improve the performance of existing buildings and even more options are available when designing new buildings and spaces. In a conservation area there are some additional considerations to be had around the choice between those options including the impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- As a broad principle, historic features should be retained wherever possible, this does not mean that buildings cannot be made more energy efficient however, for example historic window frames and glass should be retained because they contribute strongly to the character and appearance of the conservation area and historic buildings, but options such as careful maintenance, draft proofing or secondary glazing can offer real but sensitive benefits. Where buildings have poor performing modern, or unsympathetic replacement windows, consideration should be given to their replacement with new high-performance windows of a suitable appearance, such as double-glazed or vacuum-glazed timber sash windows. This can benefit both the building's character and its energy performance.
- Solar panels can be appropriate in the conservation area where it can be demonstrated that their appearance and attachment will not cause harm to significance of historic buildings and the character and appearance of the conservation area. Proposals to improve the thermal efficiency of buildings must take into consideration the performance of historic fabric and construction techniques, including breathability.

### Advice:

- Adapt to our changing climate: For example, changes to gutters and downpipes to cope with more intense rainfall, better shading to prevent overheating during heatwaves
- reduce carbon emissions. Better controls, fewer drafts, improved insulation, window improvements. Switching from carbon emitting gas to renewable electricity, and generating your own energy
- take a whole building approach by understanding how your building 'works' and target improvements to maximise gains and minimise harm to its heritage importance and traditional building fabric, otherwise you might unintentionally create new problems
- seek advice from a heritage expert when considering making alterations to a historic building or where any alterations or additions would have an impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area
- Historic England publish free to download publications include technical advice and guidance on retrofitting historic buildings to improve their energy efficiency. <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/technical-advice/retrofit-and-energy-efficiency-in-historic-buildings/>



Comparison of Historic and modern houses from the (Climate change TAN)



## Step 10: Other specific considerations

### Rear extensions and backland development:

- Rear elevations may have considerable significance regardless of any formal architectural qualities. They often reveal evidence of the history and evolution of the building that can be absent from the main frontage where it has been re-faced. They can also illustrate important functional aspects of historic buildings and plots, such as stairs, cooking and sanitary facilities, workshops and other ancillary facilities.
- For these reasons, it is important that the significant aspects of rear elevations and roofs are retained and remain visible in proposals for rear extensions
- Rear plots make an important contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. They provide the setting and ancillary space to the frontage building and afford views of it. They indicate historic land divisions, and frequently demonstrate the narrow historic plots that are characteristic of the area. They provide evidence for the history of ancillary uses and businesses in the conservation area, and sometimes include freestanding buildings. Existing buildings on rear plots may contribute positively to the character and appearance of the backland areas of the conservation area, because of historic uses or design.
- In considering if and how to develop on plots behind buildings, there is not one standard solution. It is necessary to comprehensively understand the particular character and significance of these areas in order to develop and justify proposals that avoid harm to the conservation area and listed buildings (see section 8.3).

### Advice

- Proposals for rear extensions or development on plots behind existing buildings will only be supported where:
  - they would not require the destruction or obscuring of significant fabric or evidence of historic uses and activity
  - the footprint, height and architectural character are demonstrably subordinate to the building on the front of the plot (so that its roof and roof form remains clearly visible) and allow views from public areas of the rear of the host

- historic plot shapes, divisions and boundaries are maintained, and are clearly legible in the plan, elevation and massing of the proposals
- architecturally, the proposals respond thoughtfully to a thorough understanding of the character and significance of the host buildings and context, and use high quality materials
- any necessary access via the main frontage can be incorporated without harming the significance of historic elevations and shop frontages
- proposals for bin and bike storage are incorporated within the development site.

### Shopfronts

- Oxford was established as a trading centre a thousand years ago and shops have been an integral part of the character and appearance of the conservation area for centuries. Please refer to the Shopfronts Technical Advice note 2021 which expands further on the following information and advice.
- Historic shop fronts and elements. Many historic buildings were built or used as shops, though there are few complete or largely complete shop frontages and interiors. Therefore any surviving historic shop elements are considered significant. These elements illustrate the historic function of the building, how retail and shop designed has evolved over time and are often attractive and carefully considered pieces of design in their own right. For this reason proposals to remove such features will not be supported if they are capable of repair. These include historic fascias, pilasters, cornices, consoles, awning boxes and stall risers.



Guidance (Shopfront and Signage TAN)

- New shop fronts. Choice of design and materials for new shop fronts will need to be justified by analysis of the history of the site and its context. Large areas of glazing are more likely to be acceptable if they are composed in a framework that responds to the architecture of the building above and / or neighbouring buildings if these are historically and architecturally relevant.
- Shops signage – both on the fascia and projecting – has been a characterful component of Oxford's shopping streets for hundreds of years. The City Council's Shopfront and Signage Technical Advice Note advises recommends retaining the traditional elements of the shopfront, returning signage to the traditional fascia zone, removing extraneous signage above and beyond the fascia zone and as a result reducing visual clutter and improving the appearance of the individual buildings and area as a whole.
- Security shutters. The appearance of security shutters can create a blank and hostile appearance which is harmful to the character and appearance of the conservation area, particularly out of shopping hours. The City Council therefore views all applications for replacement or new security shutters as an opportunity to enhance the appearance of the conservation area. The ideal is for no shutters within the conservation area. Where these can be justified, they should be open mesh or 'brick bond' roller shutters, with or without a solid lower panel. The existence of similar or inappropriate shutters at or near the application site will not be accepted as justification for the approval of similarly inappropriate shutters.

#### Advice

- Proposals for new or replacement shopfronts should:
  - retain and refurbish historic elements and fabric where this survives
  - use durable, high quality materials. Timber is historically appropriate in most cases; alternative materials will be considered subject to the quality of the proposed design
  - avoid entirely frameless designs
  - include retractable awnings rather than Dutch blind canopies
  - contain fascia signage within the historic fascia zone of shopfronts, and it should not be boxed out
  - locate projecting/hanging signs within the fascia zone (it will be resisted on the elevation above).



*Left: Existing detailing has been retained and incorporated into the shopfront which does not obscure or detract from the design of the existing shopfront. Lettering is painted onto the fascia board which is of an appropriate scale and proportion to the building, in accordance with Policy DH6.*

Guidance (Shopfronts and Signage TAN)



*Left: The materials used for the fascia board and lettering are bulky, shiny and of an inappropriate colour. The signage is not appropriate to the setting and does not reflect the materials or design of the building above. The use of plastic for advertisements is generally discouraged, particularly in this historic setting within a conservation area. This shopfront would not meet the criteria set out in Policy DH6, in particular criteria a) and criteria c).*

Guidance (Shopfront and Signage TAN)



## Painting

- Painted render, in a coordinated range of colours, is an important component of the character and appearance of streets in the historic core, decorating historic town houses and complementing the limestone facades.
- In the mid-twentieth century most of these buildings were painted in whites and greys. Beginning in the 1970s the City Council has pursued a policy of repainting these in colours carefully chosen to enhance the conservation area. Earthy tones – such as ochres, pale greens and blues, and browns have been selected to respond to the, limestone, brick, light conditions, architecture and townscape of the city centre.
- With a few exceptions, buildings are not unified compositional groups such as terraces. Therefore colours have been applied in combinations to enhance the mixture of architecture and townscape: exploiting and emphasising changes in height, projection, finish and design.
- Brilliant white and bright tones will be resisted unless they can be convincingly justified in the specific context of the proposal because they are not historically appropriate - they were not achievable with the lead based paints used until the mid twentieth century – and because they look harsh against the warm earthy tones of limestone and brick. For woodwork, therefore, ivory is preferred.
- In most cases limewash is not considered necessary because it requires frequent reapplication, but there may be occasions where it makes a significant contribution to the significance of specific historic buildings or is preferred as part of a fabric conservation strategy.

## Advice

- Where new rendered elevations or a change in the colour of existing painted elevations are proposed, the colours must be agreed with Oxford City Council in order to conserve and where possible enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area
- the use of brilliant white or bright tones will not normally be supported because these are not historically accurate colours



Painted facades on Broad Street (OCC)



Painted facades on Walton Street (OCC)

## Archaeology

- The archaeology of the conservation area forms part of the City Centre Archaeological Area and is of national significance, with, for example, particularly good survival of the Saxon and medieval town and medieval and Civil War fortifications.
- Proposals for basements, foundations, including piling, and for buried services could have a substantial impact on these and other remains. Any significant breaking of the ground in this location will require an archaeological assessment. A full archaeological desk-based assessment and the results of evaluation by fieldwork (produced by an appropriately qualified contractor) may be required. Pre-application discussion is encouraged to establish requirements.
- Development should seek to avoid harm to archaeology through design. New development should seek to find creative innovative ways to conserve and protect Oxford's exceptional and irreplaceable archaeological legacy from cumulative harm and loss. Building designs should therefore aim to preserve significant archaeology in situ.
- Where harm to an archaeological asset has been convincingly justified and is unavoidable, mitigation should be agreed with the City Council and should be proportionate to the significance of the asset and impact. The aim of mitigation should be where possible to preserve archaeological remains in situ, to promote public enjoyment of heritage and to record and advance knowledge. Appropriate provision should be made for investigation, recording, analysis, publication, archive deposition and community involvement.

### Advice:

- Development proposals must take account of the below ground archaeology of the conservation area and Oxford City Council's policies for managing this
- development will not be permitted where it would have a harmful effect on nationally significant remains or their settings, whether scheduled or not.



Excavation of burials at the medieval Hospital of St. John the Baptist, Longwater Quad, Magdalen College (David Radford)



## Lighting

- There is a growing interest in adding architectural lighting within the conservation area. Excessive, poorly designed lighting can have a harmful impact on the character of the conservation area during the day and night. Within conservation areas, this can harm the visual appreciation of the historic environment, particularly where seemingly small changes can cause cumulative erosion of the character.
- Poor lighting can obliterate striking architectural details and the colour of building materials. Bright white LEDs are more energy efficient than older more traditional lighting options, but they have a harsh appearance which drains an area of colour and vibrancy. Strings of lights across wide streets can de-value their appearance while providing minimal lighting, whereas their use in narrow and vibrant streets can enhance the experience for users.
- Good lighting positively contributes to a human scale after dark, improving safety by providing legibility through vertical surfaces. Well-designed, the overall amount of light can be reduced, thereby improving energy use and amenity, by using it strategically where needed rather than flooding areas which would not benefit from it. The flexible use of lighting can enhance an area's character by changing it as needed, utilising existing historic light fittings, reducing the impact on amenity and ecology.
- Safe and secure cycling and walking can be achieved after dark with a coordinated approach to lighting throughout the city centre. This would involve working with landowners, applicants, and the County Council's highways department to ensure that lighting is functional yet appropriate for its historic setting.

## Advice

- Applications for lighting within the conservation area should:
  - include a lighting assessment that takes into account the historic environment, existing lighting facilities and fixtures, and propose alternatives which not only provide more appropriate light levels (e.g. for security), but also enhance the appearance of the area.
- The City Council will:
  - consider an holistic, collaborative approach to lighting within the city centre to balance light and dark to meet both a functional and aesthetic need
  - encourage lighting to be used architecturally to enhance places and spaces, highlight key landmarks, and provide conditions to support night-time events
  - use conditions to control lighting colour temperature, hours of illumination, fittings and fixtures.
- Landowners and developers are encouraged to:
  - take opportunities to upgrade poorly functioning light sources with lower energy LEDs with appropriate colour temperatures for the location.

## Making an application

- The conservation area is a highly complex and internationally significant historic environment. Applicants will need to be able to demonstrate that this context has been comprehensively understood and applied to proposals in the accompanying Design and Access Statement and a Heritage Statement (which could be combined). Fully complying with the council's validation requirements and its design checklist can help to demonstrate how proposals are consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework. This will help speed up the application process.
- Heritage Statement requirements. The Heritage Statement should not rely solely on this appraisal for research (see section 8.2 below). It should explain how the site contributes to the significance of the conservation area as it is defined in the appraisal - as well as other heritage assets such as listed buildings and registered parks and gardens.
- It should include an impact assessment that demonstrates how the proposals conserve or enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area by reference to the significance themes in chapter 6 and the analysis of the relevant character area assessments.
- The impact assessment must also assess the effect of the proposals on all other heritage assets affected by the proposed scheme. Where harm is found, the Heritage Statement must outline appropriate mitigation measures and any public benefits to justify remaining harm.

## Pre-application advice:

- Pre-application advice. Seek pre-application advice from the Planning Department. This may help you to prepare proposals that are more likely to be supported, saving wasted time and cost
- please see Step 1 above which sets out the baseline information that may be necessary to submit with a pre-application, depending on the scale of development to get the most out of the process.

## The planning application:

- Any formal submission needs to clearly demonstrate how the contextual analysis and understanding of the sites heritage significance have informed the brief and design response to site
- comply with Oxford City Council's planning validation requirements
- follow the Oxford Local Plan policy requirements
- submit a Heritage Statement incorporating an Impact Assessment with any application
- provide views analysis through Visual Impact Assessment with 3D modelling
- engage with other stakeholders such as Historic England and local amenity societies prior to submitting an application.



## 8.3 Further reading



### **Oxford View Cones Study 2015**

Oxford View Cones Study provides an understanding of the ten protected view paths in Oxford, which are important heritage assets and fundamental to the city's distinctive character.

[https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/1610/oxford\\_view\\_cones\\_study\\_full\\_report](https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/1610/oxford_view_cones_study_full_report)

### **Oxford High Buildings Technical Advice Note (TAN)**

Informs decisions regarding the growth and intensification of Oxford in a positive and structured way. Includes the four visual tests.

[https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/7509/tan\\_7\\_high\\_buildings](https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/7509/tan_7_high_buildings)

### **Shopfronts and Signage (TAN)**

Provides guidance for the design of shopfronts and signage in Oxford.

[https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/7673/tan\\_10\\_shopfronts\\_and\\_signage](https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/7673/tan_10_shopfronts_and_signage)

### **Planning Validation Strategy**

Explains the process of submitting a planning application.

[https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/6853/planning\\_application\\_validation\\_strategy](https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/6853/planning_application_validation_strategy)

### **Pre-application Planning Advice**

Explains the pre-application advice service to applicants.

[https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20066/planning\\_applications/724/making\\_a\\_planning\\_application/4](https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20066/planning_applications/724/making_a_planning_application/4)

### **Historic England Guidance on Retrofitting**

Free to download publications including technical advice and guidance on retrofitting historic buildings to improve their energy efficiency.

<https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/technical-advice/retrofit-and-energy-efficiency-in-historic-buildings/>





