



Assessment of the Oxford View Cones

2015 Report



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View Cones foreword

Oxford is a rare City. It features an architectural history that spans nearly 1000 years, with set pieces designed by some of the best architects, past and present. These are evident at the City's core in its townscape and skyline. The location on a raised gravel bed allows Oxford's skyline of domes, spires and towers to be enjoyed in views from the surrounding villages and hills of the Thames valley, since the suburbs are mostly concealed within the lower lying topography and green landscape of the valley.

Oxford is a City of contrasts. It has an international reputation through two universities, the Oxford colleges, medical and scientific research, the motor industry and a remarkable cultural diversity. It features in the collective memory, both past and present, of the many who have studied or worked here or just come to enjoy the history and its culture.

Oxford is a vibrant and growing City. This means that there are particular challenges in achieving its economic potential in the 21st century and associated housing and infrastructure needs.

This View Cones Study is one of a suite of documents that seeks to understand the importance of this historic landscape and

how the views of Oxford's 'dreaming spires' contributes to our understanding and enjoyment of the City's cultural richness. This is as an evidence base to help all those with a role in helping to sustain the City's history and future.

The study has been made possible through the collaboration and support of Historic England and Oxford Preservation Trust and has involved local groups, individuals and businesses with an intimate knowledge and understanding of Oxford and its history.

Our thanks in particular to those who have contributed;

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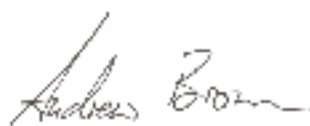
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Land Use Consultants – Rebecca Knight

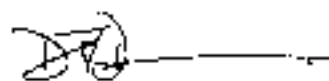
Oxford Archaeology – Julian Munby

Kemp & Kemp LLP – Steven Sensecall


SLR Consulting – Jeremy Smith



Andrew Brown
Planning & Conservation
Director South East
Historic England



Debbie Dance
Director
Oxford Preservation Trust



Michael Crofton-Briggs
Head of City Development
Oxford City Council



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PART 1

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1.1 Introduction

The 'dreaming spires' of Oxford are an internationally recognised symbol of the city and its renowned University. The image of the ancient city in its green setting draws visitors from around the world. The opportunity to walk into and through Oxford's countryside setting and look back on the city's domes, towers and spires from the green valley or hillsides is valued by its residents as a rich inheritance that should be carefully protected for future generations.

The surroundings of Oxford have long provided a destination for excursions using the footpaths which lead out from the city into the hills and along the river valleys. The rivers are also routes into the countryside with a special literary and poetic heritage of their own. The city remains intimately connected with its green setting as a result of these linkages whilst the preservation of these open spaces contributes to the opportunities to appreciate Oxford's landscape and architecture.

Nevertheless, Oxford faces continual challenges in meeting the needs of a modern city and, in particular, in accommodating new buildings that sustain its academic, research and consumer profile. In 1962 the City Architect and Planning Officer observed that the siting of high buildings in Oxford presents particular problems because of the city's unique skyline, which can be viewed as a whole from the surrounding hills and valleys (City of Oxford, 1962). These observations led to the establishment of high buildings and view

cone policies, which have served the city for fifty years in successive development plans.

In light of the continuing challenges of building within the city this study has been prepared to provide a basis of evidence and analysis that examines the significance of each of the views as a part of Oxford's heritage. This will be used to assess the impact of new development proposals and inform decisions in order to sustain the value of the contribution of the views to the city.

The ten view cones are by no means an exhaustive list of the important views of Oxford. They were only ever expected to form a sample. The study establishes a methodology of view assessment that can be applied to other views of the city in the future. In the past, the City Council has identified the views from Wytham Wood and up Cowley Road as significant. The study of Oxford in its Landscape Setting, prepared in 2002, identifies a total of 20 views of the city from its setting as of significance. Further views from within the city, such as those from Carfax Tower, St Mary's Church Tower and St George's Tower, are also now recognised as of importance for the city.

It is also recognised that planning policies alone are not sufficient to protect the views. The study provides a starting point of evidence and understanding to guide sensitive management of the places they are seen from.



A view of Oxford's spires, towers and domes across Christ Church Meadow, one of the most instantly recognised images of the City & University



1.2 Context of the Study

The economic regeneration of the city, responding to the challenges of climate change providing a supply of affordable housing are three of the highest priorities for the city in the early 21st century. Both are likely to require considerable investment in building within the city over the next decade. The need continues for up-to-date and world class research, teaching and administration buildings in addition to residential accommodation for students. The City Council needs to deliver a minimum of 8,000 new homes within its administrative boundary in the period 2006 and 2026. These priorities have resulted in proposals for large buildings in sensitive locations both within the city's historic core and on its periphery, which create challenges for sustaining the quality of Oxford's townscape as a city of international historic and architectural significance.

These challenges have shown that we need to improve our understanding of the significance of the views in order to appropriately assess what impact developments are likely to have on them. Recent planning decisions have reinforced the need to understand better this aspect of Oxford's heritage and the requirement:

- › For a robust methodology to identify the special qualities of the views and how they are experienced.
- › To inform future development, by being able to assess the impact of specific development proposals, clearly and consistently.

Oxford City Council, Oxford Preservation Trust and English Heritage* have worked in collaboration to produce a document that establishes a sound assessment methodology and defines the key characteristics and heritage values of the ten example views defined in the Local Plan as the Oxford View Cones. This will be used to better understand and enjoy the heritage of Oxford, as well as contributing to the evidence base that will inform future development management decisions.

The aim of the Oxford View Cones Study is to describe and evaluate the heritage significance of the 10 Oxford View Cones, as protected by the Oxford Local Plan (2001-2016) and the Oxford Core Strategy, in order to fully understand how they can be most effectively managed in the future. The study will thus contribute to the development of a unified evidence base for future planning, decision making and monitoring. Land Use Consultants (LUC) prepared an early draft of the study which the City Council has developed further with their partners.

The Oxford View Cones Study is one of a suite of studies being undertaken as part of the evidence base for the Heritage Plan. The Heritage Plan is being developed in response to the need to provide a strategic understanding and policy basis for the management of Oxford's historic environment.

*this study was commissioned prior to the creation of Historic England

1.3 Oxford's Historic High Buildings and the City's Skyline

1.3.1 A group of internationally and nationally important buildings collectively form the focus of the Oxford Views. These are the buildings that create the iconic 'dreaming spires', towers and domes of the Oxford skyline rising above the lower level roofscape of the city. They represent a thousand years of architectural history, patronage and ingenuity. They help to tell the story of the City and University. They have been recognised as buildings of exceptional or outstanding architectural and historic interest (Grade I and II*) and are some of the most significant historic buildings in the country. The following highlights the historic high buildings that are the focus of many views of the historic skyline and provides a brief description of their origins and architecture. This will inform the understanding of their contribution to each of the views assessed below. Other historic high buildings that contribute to individual views are highlighted within the View Assessment Summaries (see below).

The character of Oxford is influenced by its physical environment. Oxford straddles two rivers - the Thames and the Cherwell which flow to the west and east of the City Centre respectively. The city's historic core developed on the terrace of higher land at the confluence of these rivers. The lower-lying floodplains form green fingers that permeate the city extending right up to the historic city core. The valley containing these rivers is surrounded by hills which form a discontinuous ring around Oxford, and provide numerous prospects down onto and over the city.

1.3.2 High buildings that pre-date the University

The rubble stone St George's Tower, built c1071 to guard the north-west angle of Oxford Castle by Robert d'Oilly, is now a rare piece of stone military architecture surviving from the conquest period. As well as its military function it served as part of the chapel of St George, which was an important centre for scholars in the 12th century including Geoffrey of Monmouth, and is seen as a monument of the origins of the University. After the end of the Castle's military function the tower remained as a part of the County Gaol acting as a visible symbol of authority and law

and order. It stands next to the Castle Mound or Motte, which would have supported the keep of d'Oilly's castle and is also a feature of several views of the city as a grass covered mound.



St George's Tower

1.3.3 Building representing the early University

The University Church of St Mary the Virgin was the University's main meeting place in the 13th century. The tower and spire are the oldest remaining parts of the church today built in the early 14th century (subsequently repaired and partially rebuilt). Its use as the University Church (it was used for meetings of Convocation, the supreme governing body of the University, and of its disciplinary body, the Chancellor's Court) makes it an important feature of the story of the University. It has also played an important part in the history of Christianity in England as the scene of Thomas Cranmer's trial and recantation in 1555 and through its connections with the Oxford Movement (the 19th century Anglo-Catholic revival in the Church of England). The spire is the highest in the City Centre and has a pre-eminent role in the skyline often seen in the views from the surrounding hills as the only structure breaking above the horizon of the fields and woodlands behind the city.



Further to the southeast is Christ Church Cathedral, dating from the 13th century and formerly the priory church of St Frideswide from the mid 12th century, when it is considered by some to have been the most impressive ecclesiastical building in medieval Oxford. It was subsequently made a Cathedral by Henry VIII in 1546. It has a curiously squat spire that is easily recognised within the skyline. Christ Church Hall, dating from 1529, is a survival from Wolsey's former Cardinal College (now Christ Church) and represents the lavish architectural treatment of the Oxford Colleges. Other notable Medieval towers include the ornate tower of St John the Baptist (Merton College Chapel), constructed in 1452, the listed Magdalen College Bell Tower, built in 1492 and the tallest of Oxford's medieval towers. It stands apart from other towers in many views due to the historic position of the College outside the city's walls and now marks the eastern entrance to the City Centre.

The Tower of Five Orders is a surprising classical addition to the otherwise Gothic Schools Quadrangle (1613-24) of the Old Bodleian Library, although in most views from outside the city its Gothic angled turret and spirelets make it a natural addition to the other Gothic towers and pinnacles of the city skyline.



University Church of St Mary the Virgin's Spire

1.3.4 High buildings of Early Modern Oxford

One of Oxford's most recognisable towers is Wren's Tom Tower at Christ Church (built in 1681 to house Great Tom, the bell from Oseney Abbey) with its distinctive ogee dome. Wren's choice of Gothic style for the work was motivated by the antiquity of the surrounding buildings.



The Spire of All Saints' Church (now Lincoln College Library)

Wren also designed the Sheldonian Theatre (1664) as a ceremonial space for the University. The cupola, replaced in 1838 by Edward Blore, is a slender feature of white painted timber with a copper dome that catches and reflects sunlight drawing attention to it in many views of the city.

Also of notable historic and architectural value are the elegant rotunda and spire of All Saints' (built 1707-8, now Lincoln College Library). This is an important design influenced by Nicholas Hawksmoor (one of the great architects of the early 18th century). Hawksmoor's additions to All Souls' College (1715) provide a striking and original example of early 18th century Gothic Revival architecture in Oxford that was carefully matched to the college's 15th century ranges. The twin towers of Hawksmoor's range are an extraordinary embellishment that are easily recognised in short and medium distance views of the city. Of contemporary date is the cupola of Queens' College (1714-19, rebuilt 1911), finished in copper and often glimpsed alongside the taller structures.

James Gibbs' Baroque Radcliffe Camera (1737-49) is the most readily recognisable 18th century embellishment of Oxford's skyline and forms the centrepiece proposed by Hawksmoor. It joins Tom Tower and the Spire of St Mary the Virgin Church as one of the most iconic buildings of Oxford and is often seen grouped with the latter and other buildings surrounding Radcliffe Square.



The Radcliffe Camera's dome seen across the rooftops of the Old Bodleian Library

The Radcliffe Observatory (or Tower of the Winds) was built for the Radcliffe Trustees by Henry Keene and finished by James Wyatt in 1794. It is described in the *Buildings of England* as "architecturally the finest observatory in Europe". Its octagonal tower is topped by a sculptural group of Hercules and Atlas supporting a globe. The tower was recently re clad with ochre coloured render, restoring a feature of its original design, making it a distinctive and eye catching feature of the skyline on the northern edge of the City Centre.



Sir Christopher Wren's Tom Tower (on the left) and the Victorian spire of St Aldate's Church (on the right)

1.3.5 Victorian high buildings of Oxford's skyline

The roofline and spire of Exeter College Chapel (1856-9) were designed by George Gilbert Scott. The steeply pitched roof and sharply pointed fleche create a brooding mass in the skyline.

The spire of St Aldate's Church (built 1873-4 by John Thomas Christopher) was a Victorian addition to a church of possibly 12th century origin. It is slightly lower than the nearby spire of Christ Church and is of similar height to Tom Tower but is a more slender structure, leaving the Christ Church buildings as the focus of the view, whilst contributing to the cluster of high buildings focused on St Aldate's.

The square tower of St Peter-le-Bailey, now the Chapel of St Peter's College (1874) is a lower structure among the historic high buildings, built to replace an earlier medieval church demolished the previous year as part of a road widening scheme. Its design, by Basil Champneys, is conscientiously Gothic but very simple, contributing to the overall presence of high stone buildings but not competing for attention. The elegant spire of the Wesleyan Memorial Church (1877-8) is a more eye catching feature, which is unusual among Methodist churches and required a dispensation from the Church of England for its construction. Its presence commemorates the early origins of Methodism in Charles and John Wesley's studies in Oxford.



In addition to the embellishments of the University and College in the City Centre, later 19th century high buildings provide evidence of the suburban expansion of the city. To the north are the tower and Italianate campanile of St Barnabas' Church marking the suburb of Jericho (completed in 1874 to designs by Sir Arthur Blomfield), the Gothic Revival spire of St Philip and James' Church (consecrated 1862) by G.E. Street, which was built to serve North Oxford and the gothic pyramid of the Museum of Natural History (built 1856-60 by Sir Thomas Deane, Son and Woodward), which represents the University's Science Area (reflecting an important development in the direction of the University's teaching and research in the late 19th century).

The spirelet and large roof structure of Oxford's Town Hall marks the historic centre of the City's administration on St Aldate's (1893-7). It is one of the few large roof structures that can be seen above the general roof level of the city.

1.3.6 Twentieth and twenty first century additions to Oxford's skyline

20th century buildings recognised as contributing positively to the city skyline include the tower and copper clad spire of Nuffield College (built 1949-60) which was conscientiously designed to echo the historic spires of the city. Its construction provides a memorial to the influence of William Morris (Viscount Nuffield); whose motor vehicle manufacturing businesses had such a decisive influence on the development of the city.

The most recent addition to the city skyline is the copper clad ziggurat of the Said Business School. Completed in 2001, the business school represents an expansion of the University's teaching facilities into West Oxford, and has extended the breadth of the skyline of high buildings seen from the north east in particular.



The 20th century spire of Nuffield College with the reconstructed tower of St Peter le Bailey seen from Oxford Castle's Motte

1.4 The History of the Views and Viewing Oxford

1.4.1 Early appreciation of the city's views

Few cities have attracted as much interest from artists and writers as Oxford. The earliest published views of Oxford date from the 16th and 17th centuries and include the skyline from the London Road in Braun & Hogenburg's *Cities of the World* and views from the 'East or London Road', and the 'South near Abbingdon Road' in David Loggan's *Oxonia illustrata* (published in 1675).

Recognition of the quality of the views of Oxford from the surrounding hills is suggested in William Campden's description of the City in his antiquarian work *Britannia* (a best seller of the late 16th century);

"A faire and goodlie Citie, whether a man respect the seemely beauty of private houses or the statelie magnificence of publicke buildings, together with the wholesome site or pleasant prospect thereof"

The Oxford Almanac (an annual broadsheet academic calendar) has played a particularly important role in documenting views of the Oxford skyline since 1674.

1.4.2 Viewing Georgian Oxford

The contribution of the city's setting to its views was well described by 'A Gentleman of Oxford' in the *New Guide to Oxford* (first published in 1759)

"The Town is situated on a broad eminence which arises so gradually as to be hardly perceptible, in the midst of a most beautiful extent of meadows, to the south, east and west and of corn fields to the north ... From some of the surrounding hills, the traveller is surpris'd with an unparalleled prospect of magnificence and plenty; of numerous spires; domes, and turrets with the combined charms of verdure, water and trees".

The drawing master J.B. Malchair further promoted appreciation of the views of the city in the late 18th century. He led groups of students into the countryside surrounding Oxford for lessons on expeditions recorded in his amusingly titled drawings, such as "Bacon and Eggs at Hingsey" and "Porck Griskin to Headington", suggesting these were highly sociable occasions. Many of today's most highly appreciated views were first recorded by Malchair. Other notable



Oxford from North Hinksey Hill by JMW Turner ©Manchester City Galleries



artists attracted and inspired by Oxford include Samuel and Nathaniel Buck (probably the most important topographical artists of the 18th century) and Joseph Farington, whose work included records of the newly set out grounds of Nuneham Courtenay by Capability Brown with views up the Thames Valley to the city.

J. M.W. Turner's contribution to the iconography of the city is outstanding. His paintings of the city include the view of Oxford from the South West (painted in 1787-8), from the Abingdon Road (1789 and 1811), from Headington Hill (1803-4) and two of Oxford from just above the Hinksey Conduit House (1839). He also made sketches from many other locations alongside his paintings of views from the streets and meadows of the town. The importance of these views has been recorded by Colin Harrison of the Ashmolean Museum, observing that *'no other place in England engaged his attention for so long, or to such extraordinary effect'*¹.

William Turner of Oxford (1789–1862), an English painter who specialised in watercolour landscapes and was a contemporary of the more famous artist J. M. W. Turner.

1.4.3 The view of Oxford for poets and travellers

J. M.W Turner's paintings span the transition in the use of the landscape in painting from the Topographical Art, intended to inform and edify, to Romantic Landscape Painting intended to stimulate a more emotional response from viewers. His paintings draw out contrasts in the landscape of Oxford between the rustic countryside setting, from which the city is seen, and the urbane and enlightened (often literally by rays of light) city at the focus of the view. Turner used this illustration to contrast the human or mundane and sublime or awe inspiring features of both city and countryside.

Whilst Turner found a Romantic muse in the setting of the city, the views of Oxford have also inspired Romantic writers. The great Romantic poet William Wordsworth captured the power of Oxford's skyline in his poem 'Oxford, May 30, 1820':

*"Much have ye suffered from time's gnawing tooth
Yet, O ye spires of Oxford! Domes and Towers!
Gardens and groves! Your presence overpowers
The soberness of reason;"*

As a poet Matthew Arnold bridged the gap between Romanticism's use of symbolic landscapes and the more pessimistic mode of the Modernism movement. His elegiac poem 'Thyrsis' (1866) compares the constancy of the city's beauty with the changing world around it as a metaphor for the changes wrought through the loss of a friend. Lines from the poem gave rise to the often quoted description of the city based on its well known skyline;

*"And that sweet city with her dreaming spires,
She needs not June for beauty's heightening,
Lovely all times she lies, lovely to-night!"*

His earlier work 'The Scholar Gipsy' (1853), also speaks of how *"the eye travels down to Oxford's towers"* and of the views towards Oxford from the hill above Hinksey;

*"And thou has climb'd the hill,
And gain'd the white brow of the Cumner range;
Turn'd once to watch, while thick the snowflakes fall,
The line of festal light in Christ-Church hall"*

A student at Oxford's Balliol College, Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) is recognised as one of the great Victorian poets. Hopkins was strongly influenced by the aesthetic theories of Pater and John Ruskin. His poetry often reflected his feelings towards the landscape surrounding Oxford. Changes in the surrounding rural scene are lamented in Gerald Manley Hopkins' poem describing the felling of the Binsey Poplars in 1879: *"After-comers cannot guess the beauty been"* whilst he celebrated the Oxford skyline in 'Duns Scotus' Oxford':

¹ Harrison, *Turner's Oxford*, 92-6, No. 66, Pl. 31

*"Towery city and branchy between towers;
Cuckoo echoing, bell-swarm'd, lark-charm'd,
rook-racked, river-rounded".*

Whilst poets and artists drew attention to the beauty of Oxford's skyline, travel writers described how to find it. John Britton describes the view as the traveller journeys down the River Thames in his *Beauties of England and Wales* (1814); *"The vale now expands into a spacious amphitheatre, bounded by some striking hills, in the centre of which the majestic towers, domes, and spires of Oxford burst upon the sight, appearing proudly ranged behind the thick shade of venerable groves"*. Wade's *Walks in Oxford* (published in 1817), for example, guides visitors to Ferry Hinksey above which a great view of the city might be seen; *"Oxford is seen to great advantage rising like the queen of the vale from the bosom of a thick grove, between which and the spectator the Isis rolls his mazy waters"*. Bradshaw's great travel guide of the mid-Victorian age of railway travel (first published 1866) also guided visitors to the view of Oxford from its setting as one of the city's most distinctive features;

"It is situated on a gentle eminence in a rich valley between the rivers Cherwell and Isis – the prospect being bounded by an amphitheatre of hills. From the neighbouring heights the city presents a very imposing appearance, from the number and variety of its spires, domes and public edifices; while these structures, from their magnitude and splendid architecture, give it on a near approach an air of great magnificence ... Distant prospects of the city may be obtained from the Shotover and Hinksey hills"

Later in the 19th century Thomas Hardy used the experience of viewing Oxford from afar in his novel *Jude the Obscure* (the name Christminster is used for Oxford) as the lure that drew Jude away from his rural home. Hardy also recognised the effect of changing sunlight on the view of the city;

"The other tiler ... had also turned to look towards the quarter designated. "You can't often see it in weather like this," he said.

"The time I've noticed it is when the sun is going down in a blaze of flame, and it looks like—I don't know what."

"The heavenly Jerusalem," suggested the serious urchin.

"Ay—though I should never ha' thought of it myself.... But I can't see no Christminster to-day."

[Later, Jude's patience is rewarded with a long distance view of the city in the light of sunset]

"Some way within the limits of the stretch of landscape, points of light like the topaz gleamed. The air increased in transparency with the lapse of minutes, till the topaz points showed themselves to be the vanes, windows, wet roof slates, and other shining spots upon the spires, domes, freestone-work, and varied outlines that were faintly revealed. It was Christminster, unquestionably; either directly seen, or miraged in the peculiar atmosphere."

1.4.4 From admiration, to concern, to conservation

The interest in views of Oxford has inspired efforts to preserve them by protecting the land from which they are seen. From the mid-18th century it is evident that a view over the city added to the amenity of a home. Country houses for well-to-do merchants were built on Headington Hill and at Summertown in the early 19th century from which prospects of the city would have been seen. Meanwhile the effect of Oxford's expansion in cutting off the city for its rural surroundings was recorded in the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins;

*"Thou hast a base and brickish skirt there,
sours
That neighbour-nature – thy grey beauty is
grounded
Best in; graceless growth, thou hast
confounded
Rural, rural keeping – folk, flocks, and flowers"*

(Duns Scotus' Oxford, 1879)



In the 1870s the Morrell family prevented developments surrounding their family home at Headington Hill Hall by buying-up the surrounding farm land. During the early 20th century there was further pressure for suburban development, partly as a result of development of the motor industry, which led to growing concern for the preservation of the view. Men of wealth and influence, inspired in part by the nostalgia for a more innocent age that followed the First World War banded together to ensure views of the venerable city in its green landscape could be enjoyed by future generations. This included the foundation of Oxford Preservation Trust in 1927. John Buchan and Raymond Ffennell in particular contributed through gifts of land at Elsfield, Wytham Hill, Harcourt Hill and Boars Hill to the City, Trust and University. Later the Trust also acquired South Park and Shotover Country Park. These were both gifted to the City Council in 1952, with covenants to ensure the preservation of their character and accessibility for the public.

1.4.5 Development of Oxford's View Management Policy

By the early 1960s it was clear that the views could be harmed as much by development within the city as in its rural setting. Construction of the Hans Krebs Tower and Thom building had introduced two substantial edifices within the views that were seen to affect their quality. The University planned a Zoology department tower as a third tall building. In 1962 the City Architect and Planning Officer wrote a report on 'High Buildings in Oxford'. He recognised the potential impact of further tall buildings on the city's unique and historic skyline and quality of the townscape and roofscape, its vulnerability to the programme of development that was proposed at the time and set out measures for managing this problem. He described the main characteristics of Oxford's skyline as:

- › *"the tower of St. Mary the Virgin, which is the dominant point of the skyline from wherever it is viewed. When walking around the City, the respective positions of the spires and towers change continually, but the spire of St. Mary's remains the dominant*

feature of the composition. Anything, that would endanger this predominance should be resisted;

- › *its extreme fragility - the skyline seems to be composed mainly of pinnacles; the occasional dome and spire only serve to accentuate the spikiness of the silhouette. In other words, it is a matter of scale. The scale of the elements in the skyline is extremely small in height and volume. The introduction of any bulky elements would destroy this essential character;*
- › *its compactness - although from certain points of view the towers and spires seem to be spaced very widely, the area from which the silhouette sprouts is, in fact, very compact and does not extend far beyond the old city wall." (City of Oxford, 1962)*

However, he did not view the skyline of Oxford as a finite composition, but noted the importance of maintaining certain characteristics of the skyline. His report identified six points, spread evenly around the perimeter of the City to provide a sample of the views of the city based on "points which are well known and accessible to the public", from which the skyline of Oxford could be appreciated. These were:

- › Port Meadow,
- › Elsfield,
- › Crescent Road,
- › Rose Hill,
- › Boars Hill and
- › Raleigh Park.

View cones were drawn from these points to the centre part of Oxford each based on the extent of the range of historic high buildings considered to form the skyline of significance. The report recommended that the areas within the view cones were unsuitable for tall buildings (see diagram overleaf).

Figure 1.1

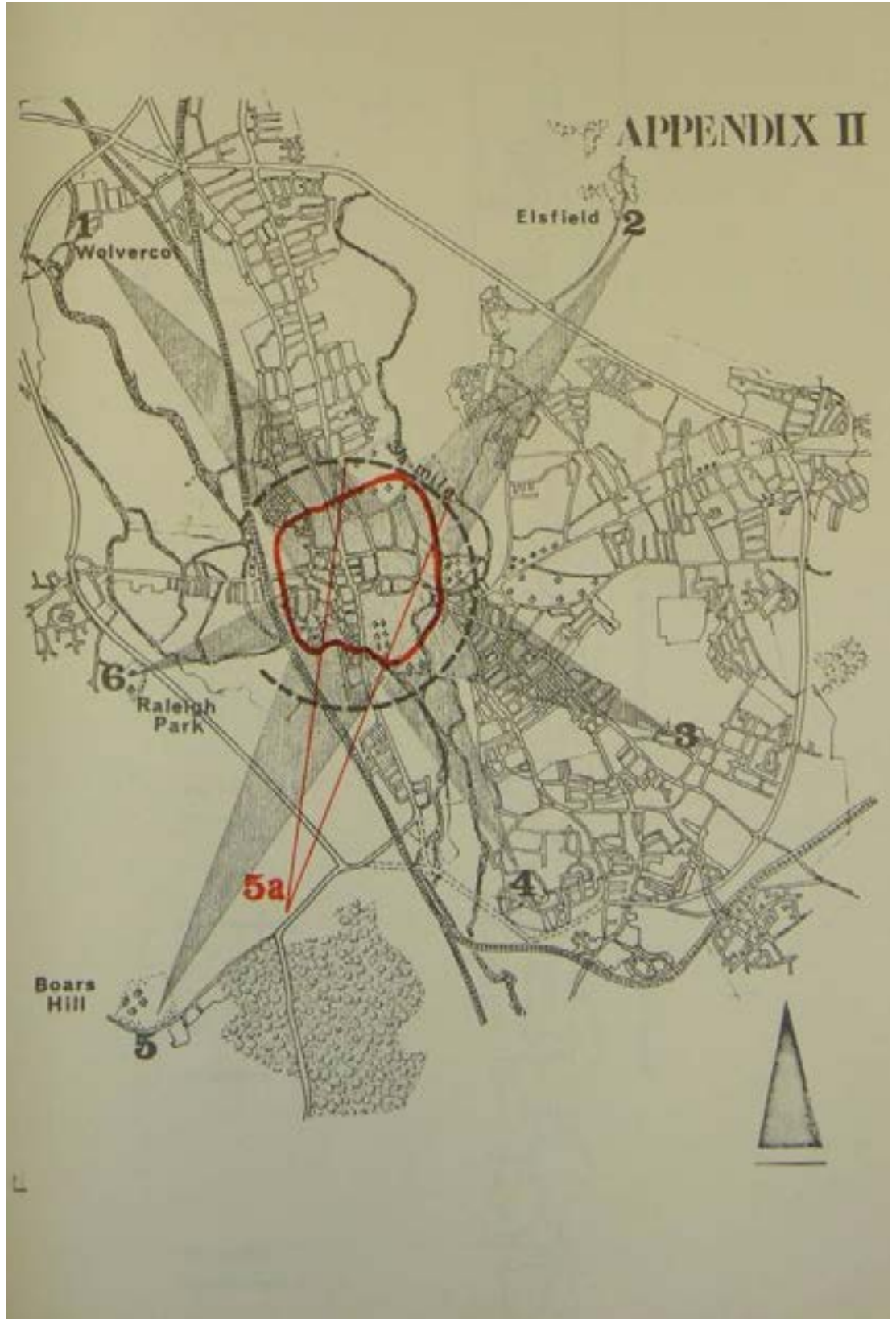


Diagram from Oxford City Council's City Architect and Planning Officer's Report, 1962



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In addition, the City Architect and Planning Officer's report introduced the idea of 'townscape' (being the more intimate views obtained from street level) and 'landscape' (being the views of the City as a whole obtained from outside). He recommended that *"every building within a ¼ mile radius from Carfax which exceeds (wholly or partly) OD 260 related to a ground level 200-210 or exceeds 240, related to a ground level 180 must be carefully examined in its relation to the townscape as well as the landscape and may be rejected on either account"* (City of Oxford, 1962).

These principles have been carried through subsequent local plans, largely unchanged, with the exception of an addition of four view cones to the original six. These four extra view cones (South Park; Oxford Brookes University Morrell Hall site at Cuckoo Lane; Jack Straws Lane; and A34 Interchange at Hinksey Hill) were introduced by the Oxford Local Plan 1986, which was never formally adopted. However, the Local Plan for 1991 - 2001 (adopted in 1997) included these additional four view cones (now totalling 10 views) and they remain in the current Local Plan. The ten view cones are shown overleaf.

Over the years, regular block forms of consistent height and parapet length have emerged which represent the maximum dimensions allowed under the policies on townscape character and the skyline. This effect of uniform height and lack of variety can be seen in views from the top of St George's Tower at Oxford Castle (see photograph below).

The policies and guidance of the current development plan, including the Oxford Core Strategy 2026, 'saved' policies in the Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016 & the West End Area Action Plan 2007 – 2016, makes it clear that views of Oxford's skyline of the historic centre will be protected and acknowledges the need to create more high-level visual diversity and to avoid continuous roof lines without any vertical emphasis.

In addition to the development plan, regard must also be had for the National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012) (NPPF) and relevant advice from English Heritage.

The planning policy framework relevant to this study is set out in detail in a separate chapter.



Modern Oxford rooftops from St George's Tower illustrating the impact of the 18.2m building height limit

Figure 1.2



The ten view cones shown in the Oxford Local Plan 2001 - 2016



1.5 A Method for Heritage Assessment of the Oxford Views

1.5.1 What is a View?

In the context of this study a view is a sight or prospect (the word commonly used in the past) of a landscape, that can be taken in by the eye from a particular place. This provides three elements that are required for each of the Oxford views:

The first is the **viewer** or the person who sees and determines that a view exists and imbues it with meaning. A viewer has a personal subjective experience of a view although many responses may be experienced by others with shared cultural associations or knowledge.

The second is the **viewing place**, which determines what is seen and how it is experienced and to which meaning may also be applied. This is an acknowledged place or area from which the view can be seen and from which the features of the view are more or less consistently visible in an arrangement that is considered to be 'the view'. The view may be seen from one or more points within the area or as a kinetic viewing experience seen during movement through the area with subtle changes to the view which, nevertheless, maintains fundamental characteristics. The viewing place may have been specially designed or adapted to provide the view but this is not essential.

The third is the **landscape in the view**, i.e. the material world that provides the scenery that is seen and to which meaning is applied. A landscape is formed of many separate elements and might be divided into recognisable parts subject to their relationship with the viewing place and viewer, such as foreground, middle ground and background, vanishing points, focal points, skyscape and framing among others.

Each of these three elements interacts with each other and will contribute to the quality, understanding and experience of the view.

The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) methodology, which is promoted by the Landscape Institute, provides a methodology for assessing the impact of proposed new development on landscapes as experienced

in views. This is based on an assessment of the significance of a landscape, its sensitivity to change and the impact of a development. These are based on "... changes in available views of the landscape, and the effect of those changes on people". Its methodology includes consideration of the contribution of the viewing places from which views are experienced and the people affected by change who are the viewers. In developing a methodology for assessing the heritage significance of views of Oxford we have sought to provide an assessment that can be used in a similar manner to understand the significance of the view, its vulnerability to change and the impact of development within the landscape on it. The Oxford views assessment methodology adopts a similar consideration of the significance of the viewer, the viewing place and the landscape in the view.

1.5.2 How do views embody and contribute to Heritage Significance?

The View Cones were conceived as a means of assessing and managing the impact of change on the views of the historic core of the city and its skyline. In the language of modern planning the city is experienced in these views as a single large heritage asset formed of numerous buildings, areas and landscape features (such as open spaces, belts of trees, rivers), each of which gains significance from its contribution to the heritage interest of the city as a whole and the historic experience of viewing it. The landscape surrounding the historic core of the city provides the setting of this asset, contributing to how the city is seen and understood, partly through its contrast with it. The surrounding landscape can itself be divided into a series of discrete landscape blocks, each an asset in its own right, with specific historical associations and archaeological, architectural, and artistic interest.

The visual experience of seeing the historic core of Oxford from its periphery is part of its significance as a heritage asset due to the long history of viewing the city from its green setting (documented above). These experiences, captured in text and illustration, have become

part of the historic and artistic interest of the city. External views have been instrumental in the design and appreciation of the city's historic buildings and therefore have contributed to the city's architectural interest, providing the context and understanding for the buildings that are seen. Occasionally, the views may even capture archaeological interest, containing information about past experiences in the landscape, such as the conduct of the siege of Oxford or the processes that drove the expansion of the city into its countryside setting.

However, understanding historic, architectural, archaeological and artistic interest is only a part of understanding heritage significance. How these interests contribute to the lives of the people of Oxford and to a visitor's experience of the city depends on how they are valued. English Heritage has developed a scheme of heritage values (based on concepts set out in ICOMOS's Burra Charter 1979) that can be used to help understand significance and make assessment of it more objective. These are briefly summarised as:

- › Historical value: The ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present. This can simply be through the associations the place has with these people, events or aspects of life or through the way its features provide a visible illustration of these associations and their influence on the heritage asset;
- › Evidential value: The potential a place has to yield evidence about past human activity through the physical remains;
- › Aesthetic: The ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place, which can be a result of their design or the fortuitous outcome of the way it has developed over time or a combination of the two;
- › Communal: The meanings of a place for the people who relate to it or for whom it figures in their collective experience or

memory. These are often closely related to the historical associations of a place, as well as its aesthetic values but have aspects that contribute to the identity, cohesion, spiritual life or memory of communities.

The original six views of the Oxford View Cones policy were chosen as a sample of publicly accessible views that are representative of the wider experience of viewing the city from locations outside its historic core. Others were added in recognition of their importance when faced by significant change. However, many of these views have a history of appreciation spanning several centuries that has contributed to the image of Oxford and to its identity over time. As such, individual views may make a particular contribution to the significance of the city and its historic buildings through their particular histories and associations of viewing in addition.

Many have been valued historically for the aesthetic quality of the view, or encompass specially created or preserved viewing places designed or chosen for their aesthetic value. Several have associations with prominent past viewers, with both the viewing place and view illustrating this association. A number of the views also have significance for the value they bring to the identity of the communities of Oxford and its environs. As such, it is important to understand the specific contribution of each view to the significance of the city, as much as the value of what is seen in the view.

1.5.3 Understanding the Heritage Values of the Views

Views of heritage assets can add to their significance as a shared experience, which may contribute to communal identity, form a part of the asset's aesthetic value, provide a connection with past viewers or provide understanding of their history. The views of Oxford in its landscape setting contribute to the significance of the city as a heritage asset. The views must be assessed with regard to how they contributes to the significance of the city core as a whole, and to the individual heritage assets that are seen, as well as their contribution to the significance of the places from which they are seen.



Understanding the contribution of the viewers, both past and present, forms an important step in this process. As such we have developed a methodology that assesses the heritage value of the viewers, the viewing place and the landscape in the view respectively.

1.5.4 Considering the viewers

By focusing on the viewers first the method emphasises the history of the view’s appreciation to build understanding of the shared experience it may provide. The appreciation of features of acknowledged merit in the view is what makes it stand out from any other visual experience of landscape. This should establish what historical associations (historical value) the view has with past viewers or events and how it contributes now to the identity of communities, including the communal identity of the city (communal value).

For each view a simple statement should summarise the history of viewing and the contribution this makes to the significance of the view as a recognised and appreciated experience of the heritage assets.

This should be followed by a simple table setting out:

How the view is used by present viewers and who these are likely to include.
The key viewers who have added to the significance of the view through their association with it.
Other evidence of recognition of the importance and quality of the view and of particular features of it over time.
How recognition of the importance of the view in the past has influenced its use and management over time.

Often the work of past viewers, particularly artists and writers or poets provides an immediate means of demonstrating how viewers have appreciated the view in the past, or occasionally in the present.

1.5.5 Considering the viewing place

The next step is to consider both how the viewing place contributes to the significance of the heritage assets in the view and how the viewing place, as a potential or known heritage asset, gains significance from being the place from which the view is seen.

For each view it is necessary to define the viewing place, this might be a single point or a wider area, such as a park or area of open countryside within which the view is visible from many points. The view of Oxford from Boars Hill, for example, is available from a network of footpaths running across the hillside, as well as from the purpose built viewing station at Jarn Mound (although this is presently obscured by tree growth), from the Old Berkeley Golf Links (bought by Oxford Preservation Trust to protect the view), from the houses just to the south of it (built in this location to benefit from the view), as well as from the modern Hinksey Heights Golf Course. This broad viewing place and range of viewing points incorporates the designated viewpoint at Berkeley Road and the view cone defined in the Oxford and Vale of White Horse Local Plans but also provides numerous other potential viewpoints, which may contribute to the heritage values of the view.

In defining the extent of the viewing place consideration should be given to how well defined it is as a distinct ‘place’ in its physical features and historical development. Further matters to consider are whether the viewing place is appreciated as a destination, the extent of the area from which the view is actually visible, and its history of use or management to provide the view. This can be set out in a brief statement that broadly describes the characteristics of the viewing place.

This should be followed by an assessment that considers how the viewing place contributes to the significance of the view. The following questions are used as a series of prompts to consider various ways that the viewing place may do this, they are not all relevant in every case:

1.5.5 Table 1

What contribution does the viewing place make to the aesthetic or picturesque quality of the view?	
	Does it help the focus of the view to be prominent by framing it or through the absence of distracting features?
	Does it contain features that contribute an attractive focus in their own right?
	Does it have a particular character that allows you to share a historic experience of the view?
Has the viewing place been designed or managed to preserve the view?	
Does the viewing place illustrate a particular period of historical development or use that contributes to its historical associations with viewing?	
	For example, South Park preserves features of the tree planting by the Morrell family when Cheney Farm was transformed into a park as part of their country estate with views over Oxford.
Is there any potential that archaeological investigation of the viewing place might reveal more evidence of the history of viewing?	
How does the extent of the viewing place and your ability to move around it contribute to the experience of the view as a fixed point or kinetic viewing experience?	
Do other features of the management of the viewing place contribute positively or negatively to the experience of the view?	
	For example, a viewing place managed as a nature park may have a more interesting array of wildlife contributing to the view, whilst a view from beside a busy road may be a noisy and noxious environment that discourages appreciation of the view.

If the viewing place is considered to include several viewing points it might be necessary to answer one or more of these questions separately for each viewpoint. Photographs that pick out key features of the viewing place can help to illustrate this analysis. The extent of the viewing place and any particular viewpoints of note within it should be recorded on a map to help understanding of the analysis presented. Key features of the viewing place might also be emphasised through a graphical representation of the view as in the 'simplified renders' we have prepared for the Oxford View Cones.

1.5.6 Considering the landscape in the view

This is the most complex element of the analysis. For each view a brief statement should seek to describe the key features of the view that contribute to its heritage values. Each view should be considered as a whole landscape to which constituent elements contribute in different ways. The statement should characterise the contribution of these different

elements including the features that make them, and draw out how these contribute to the heritage values of the features in the view. This may include the way different elements of the landscape in the view interact. For example a part of the landscape might lead the eye to a focal group of buildings, or provide a particular contrast with an adjacent area.

Landscape features to be considered should include the following:

- › topography and layout (including the extent and framing of what is seen, definable fore, middle and backgrounds or areas within these and the impact of elevation of the viewing place or other features in the view);
- › changes in the view that result from movement around the viewing place, such as changing elevation, distance from the focal features or changes in the framing of the view;



- › green character features, such as the locations of belts of woodland, formal tree planting or areas of farmland or parkland;
 - › areas of different architectural character, such as areas of buildings of different age, scale or materials that make different contributions to the character of the landscape;
 - › focal features, such as individual buildings or landscape features or groups of buildings that draw the eye and/or make a particular aesthetic contribution to the view, in Oxford these are likely to be the historic high buildings of the City Centre (an example outside Oxford would be the stone outcrops or ‘tors’ of Dartmoor);
 - › infrastructure (including roads, railway lines and power lines);
 - › changeable but predictable factors including sunlight conditions, weather and seasonal changes of vegetation or agriculture, to understand how experience of the views will vary; and
 - › the conditions that provide particular aesthetic impacts that are well recognised.
- The analysis of significance is dependent on knowledge of the landscape, which may vary between viewers. However, the analysis should be well informed and assume a high degree of knowledge, including understanding of the historic character of different areas of the landscape in the view (for example understanding the rooftops of North Oxford as representing a suburb of the historic City Centre, or of the use and history of notable buildings that stand out), as well as familiarity with the historic associations of the view, such as its descriptions by poets or portrayal by artists.
- The analysis should identify how the following elements of the view contribute to its significance:

1.5.6 Table 2

Context of the view – how does the location of the viewing place affect the experience of the heritage asset as a whole?	
	From what direction is the heritage asset seen and how does this affect what is most prominent?
	Is it seen from close up or far away and how will this affect what is appreciated about it?
Layout, expanse and framing of the view – Does the absence of framing provide a majestic sweeping vista or does framing by trees, buildings, etc. create a channelled view that emphasises a focal feature or other features of interest? How are the features in the view distributed and how does this affect the way the eye moves around the view?	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › How broad is the arc of the view (e.g. narrow and focused or broad and expansive)? › Does this apply to all of it or just a part (e.g. broad foreground with trees framing a narrower, middle ground)? › How far can you see? Is this a short view in which all features are clearly discernible or is it a long view in which features in the distance recede into an obscure horizon? › What are the characteristics of the foreground, mid-ground and background and how do these vary? › Where are the focal features in this landscape? › How open is the skyscape? Does it balance or contrast with the openness of the landscape? › What provides framing if there is any? › How have these characteristics changed over time based on historic appreciation of the view?

Topography – how does the elevation of the viewing place or other elements in the landscape affect character of the view?

- › Does the eye naturally travel down a hillside to focus on whatever is in the valley below?
- › How does the elevation influence the relative dominance of the foreground, middle ground, background and skyline?
- › Does the elevation provide an expansive foreground or is this foreshortened by a steep slope that makes the middle and background more dominant in the view?
- › Does a low level viewing point make the skyline more dominant and leave areas of the middle ground and background hidden from view?
- › Does a feature on a hilltop or raised area in the landscape appear more prominent than other features?
- › How does the influence of elevation vary across the viewing place?

Green characteristics – How do trees, hedgerows and other greenery contribute to the character of the view?

- › What are the different characteristics of the contribution of greenery in the fore, middle and background?
- › How does greenery contribute to the transitions between these areas?
- › What contribution does this make to the aesthetic value of these areas in the view or parts of them?
- › Does the greenery represent formal planting that is intended to have an aesthetic impact in the view or is it representative of an historic activity or use of the landscape?
- › How does this contribute to the historic experience of the view and connection with past viewers?
- › How does the greenery influence appreciation of focal features in the view?
- › Does any area of greenery make a particular contribution to the identity of a community – such as the trees in a historic park or a parish graveyard?

Architectural characteristics – How do buildings contribute to the character of the view?

- › Which individual buildings, areas or groupings of buildings can be identified in the view?
- › How do the materials, heights, shapes, densities and alignments of buildings influence their aesthetic contribution to the view?
- › What features do different groups of buildings have that provide evidence of different periods of development, different uses or other influences that mean they contribute to the aesthetic or historical value of the view differently?
For example, buildings constructed before natural slate was widely distributed as a roofing material in the late 18th century are more likely to have steeply pitched roofs, that will appear different from the shallower pitch of later development. Buildings in historic villages may be distinguished in a view by their varied alignment, size and roof plans from the more uniform form, alignment and spacing of buildings in areas of 20th century suburban development.
- › Are any buildings or groups particularly prominent and does this contribute to the aesthetic or historical value in the view?
- › Are there any gaps between areas of buildings that contribute to their historical or aesthetic value? – For example by allowing them to stand apart or by illustrating their separate development?
- › Do any areas of architectural character contribute to the identity of a particular community?



<p>Focal features – What provides the focus of the view, how does it do this and how does it contribute to the historical and aesthetic value of the view?</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Is there one focal feature or several? › Is its/their focal role in views an intentional feature of their historical design or accidental? › Is it spread out across the view or confined to a narrow part of it? › If several features are clustered together, how does their juxtaposition affect their aesthetic and historical value – Are they designed to compete with each other or to contribute to a unified design? › What in the surrounding landscape contributes to its/their prominence? E.g. does the absence of other competing features make them more prominent or does the presence of a feature in the background or foreground draw attention to them. › Are these features that contribute to the identity of one or a number of communities by memorialising their origins or history or representing their activities?
<p>Infrastructure – How do features that run across the landscape, contribute to its structure or lead the eye around the view contribute to its historic and aesthetic value?</p>	
	<p>Examples to consider might include roads, rivers, canal or railway lines. These represent specific features that have influenced the development of the landscape and have had specific uses in the past. They may have particular historical and aesthetic associations relating to their development and function.</p>
<p>Skyscape, light and the seasons – How do diurnal and seasonal changes in light influence the character of the view? What features of the landscape are likely to change in a predictable fashion? Which conditions are recognised as the best to view it?</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › How does the extent of skyscape contribute to the quality of the view? Is it constrained by surrounding features such as trees that frame views and contribute to a formal parkland setting or is the openness and lack of framing part of a wider rural character that is part of the picturesque quality of the view? › How does this affect your appreciation of features in the view – e.g. by casting shadow, highlighting or illuminating particular features or creating silhouettes? › Are there any materials in the view that will react particularly strongly to changes in sunlight or cloud cover? › What seasonal changes can you predict that will affect the colour and texture of farmland or tree canopies and what impact will this have on the historical and aesthetic value of the view? › How will seasonal changes in foliage affect what is visible, including architectural characteristics and focal features? › Are there other changes, such as seasonal flooding that are expected to influence the character of the view?
<p>Unique features – Is there anything unique in the view not covered by the questions above that contributes to its ability to provide a connection with past people and events, that could reveal more about past human activity and experience, that contributes to its aesthetic impact or contributes to the identity or cohesiveness of communities?</p>	
<p>Detractors – How do features perceived as incongruous or unattractive detract from its heritage value?</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Do they hide features that are considered to make a positive contribution to the heritage assets' significance? This includes its aesthetic value but might also include historical, evidential and communal values. › Do they draw the eye away from features that make a positive contribution to the heritage asset's value by being more prominent? › Do they significantly alter the characteristics of an area within the view that was appreciated in the past for making a particularly positive contribution to the view's historical or aesthetic value?

1.5.7 This long list of criteria may seem intimidating, however, by working through the list of headlines the process of assessment is undertaken systematically and an understanding of the view built up that can then be summarised as a shorter statement.

Whilst it is necessary to assess the landscape in the view from a recognised viewpoint to provide an experience that can be replicated, it is also important to move around the viewing place to consider how the experience of the view changes from other angles, or changes in the elevation, framing or foreground. This can be presented within the assessment of each view by using a selection of photographs that represent the variety of experiences of the view that the viewing place provides.

The analysis should not rely on photographs alone to illustrate the positive features of the view. Key features of the landscape in the view might also be emphasised through a graphical representation of the view as in the 'simplified renders' we have prepared for the Oxford View Cones. This study can include annotations that characterise the contributions made by different elements of the landscape. These should emphasise how their historical or aesthetic value contributes to the quality of significance of the landscape in the view as a whole.

It is expected that each assessment is illustrated using a photograph taken from the identified assessment point. The Landscape Institute have stated that relying on photographs taken using a 35mm lens with a focal length of 50mm alone is a somewhat outdated method of reproducing a visual experience of a view (Landscape Institute, 2011) . They suggest using photographs taken with a telephoto lens or enlargement of areas of photographs to show details that are too small to be seen in a standard image. This is necessary to replicate the eye's propensity to focus on particular details within a view rather than taking in the whole vista at once.



1.6 The Oxford Views

1.6.1 The ten viewpoints in the current Oxford Local Plan are examples of places from which Oxford can be appreciated in its landscape. Each has its own history of viewing and provides a different viewing experience, whilst the view seen from each point has its own special qualities. These may be representative of the viewing experience; as such the ten views are grouped by the areas they represent.

They can be broadly grouped into:

- › Views from the western hills - examples: Raleigh Park, Boars Hill and A34 Interchange at Hinksey Hill
- › Views from the north eastern hills - example: Elsfield
- › Views across the Thames floodplain - example: Port Meadow
- › Views from the eastern hills - examples: Doris Field Memorial Park, Headington Hill Allotments and South Park
- › Views from south-east Oxford - examples: Crescent Road and Rose Hill

There are many other views of Oxford, examples of which are set out in the 'Character Assessment of Oxford in its Landscape Setting' (prepared for The Countryside Agency and Oxford City Council by Land Use Consultants in March 2002). Although the ten views from the Local Plan will be analysed in this report, it is anticipated that other views may also be identified and analysed in the future. Others are currently being identified through other projects in the city's Heritage Plan including the Oxford Heritage Assets Register and Conservation Area Appraisals.

1.7 The Planning Policy Framework

1.7.1 National Planning Policy Framework 2012

Conservation principles, policy and practice seek to preserve and enhance the value of heritage assets. The publication of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in March 2012 re-affirmed the government's overarching aim that the historic environment and its heritage assets should be conserved and enjoyed for the quality of life they bring to this and future generations.

The Government sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development and explains that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of this. For development to be sustainable it must, amongst other things, perform an environmental role contributing to the protection and enhancement of our natural, built and historic environment.

The elements of the historic environment that we value and that merit consideration in planning are called heritage assets and of these some will be defined as 'designated' heritage assets – for example scheduled monuments, listed buildings, conservation areas, registered historic parks and gardens. The features of the history, architecture, archaeology and artistic expression that give these assets interest determine their heritage significance. The NPPF explains that in developing a positive strategy for the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment local planning authorities should 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 wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits that conservation of the historic environment can bring;
- › the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness; and
- › opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place.

The NPPF advises that local planning authorities should have up to date evidence about the historic environment in their area and use it to assess the significance of heritage assets and the contribution they make to their environment. It is therefore important in Oxford that evidence about Oxford's views and their heritage significance is clearly documented.

In addition, the NPPF requires local planning authorities to identify opportunities for changes in the setting of heritage assets that would enhance or better reveal their significance and to treat favourably applications that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to, or better reveal, significance.

1.7.2 Oxford's Designated Heritage Assets and the Views

The historic high buildings that are the focus of the Oxford View Cones are statutory listed buildings protected under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The historic core of Oxford and large parts of its northern and eastern suburbs have been designated Conservation Areas under the same act. Under Section 66 of the Act the City Council have a duty to have **special regard** for the desirability of preserving listed buildings and their settings and any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses, when determining whether to grant planning permission for development. Similarly under Section 72 they must pay **special attention** to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas when exercising their powers as a planning authority.

The National Planning Policy Framework defines the setting of a heritage asset as; "The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral."



The Oxford View Cones provide a means of providing this special consideration of the impact of development on the setting of the historic high buildings of the city centre and several of the city's conservation areas where these are experienced from the wider landscape setting. They should be regarded as a sample of the views that allow appreciation of the setting of the city and its listed buildings and conservation areas.

English Heritage's Guidance on the Setting of Heritage Assets (2010) is intended to assist the implementation of the policies and guidance on decisions affecting the settings of heritage assets. The guidance points out that *'the heritage significance of places derives not only from their physical presence, but also from other attributes including their relationship with their surroundings, particularly their setting'* (Preface, English Heritage 2010).

The draft guidance acknowledges that the contribution of setting to the significance of a heritage asset is often expressed by reference to visual considerations, including views. It acknowledges that some views may contribute more to understanding of the heritage values of an asset than others, either due to the relationships between the asset and other historic places or natural features; or due to the historical associations of a particular view or viewing point; or because the composition within the view was a fundamental aspect of the design of the asset. It also suggests that where complex issues involving views come into play in the assessment of setting, a formal views analysis may be merited.

The study presented here provides such an analysis of the complex assemblage of heritage assets that form Oxford's historic views.

1.7.3 Current 'saved' Local Plan 2001 – 2016

The policy in the current Oxford Local Plan, 2001-2016 that aims to protect the character of the skyline is as follows;

*"POLICY HE.9 - HIGH BUILDING AREA:
Planning permission will not be granted for any*

development within a 1,200 metre radius of Carfax which exceeds 18.2 m (60 ft) in height or ordnance datum (height above sea level) 79.3 m (260 ft) (whichever is the lower) except for minor elements of no great bulk. A lesser height may be considered more appropriate for buildings that have to fit into the existing townscape. If existing buildings (at, or in excess of, these limits) are redeveloped, the City Council will consider carefully whether rebuilding to their previous height is acceptable in terms of how it would affect the appearance of the existing townscape and skyline".

The policy in the current Local Plan that aims to manage Oxford's view cones is as follows:

*"POLICY HE.10 - VIEW CONES OF OXFORD:
The City Council will seek to retain significant views both within Oxford and from outside, and protect the green backcloth from any adverse impact. Planning permission will not be granted for buildings or structures proposed within or close to the areas that are of special importance for the preservation of views of Oxford (the view cones) or buildings that are of a height which would detract from these views."*

1.7.4 Core Strategy 2026

The skyline's importance is also recognised in adopted Core Strategy Policy CS18, which states that;

"Views of the skyline of the historic centre will be protected"

1.7.5 West End Area Action Plan

And in West End AAP Policy WE10, which reads as follows:

"...Applicants should demonstrate in their Design and Access Statement...that new development has been designed with an understanding of the area's heritage, street patterns, views, skyline and important buildings" (Our emphasis)

This study seeks to provide the decision-maker with additional tools by which to assess whether development proposals meet these policy requirements.

1.8 References

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Appendix 1: Glossary

Accurate Visual Representation (AVR)	A still image, or animated sequence of images, intended to convey reliable visual information about a proposed development to assist the process of visual assessment [From The London Plan (Spatial Development Strategy for Greater London) Revised Supplementary Planning Guidance London View Management Framework, July 2010].
Arc of the View	The total extent of view that is seen from a point as a result of the presence or absence of framing features.
Background	<i>'Part of a scene or description that forms a setting for the main figures or events'</i> ² . For the purposes of this assessment the background is described as the part of the view that forms a backdrop, where outline, colour and texture are more important than individual elements. This will include the area beyond the principal focus of the view.
Diurnal Changes	The changes to light and activity that take place on a daily cycle
Dominant	Having a commanding or imposing effect. Most important or influential.
Focal Feature	The main feature or one of several features of the view that draw the eye to a particular point of interest.
Foreground	<i>'The part of a view or picture nearest to the observer'</i> ³ . For the purpose of this assessment the foreground is defined as the viewing place itself and its immediate context, where the texture, materials and colour of elements can be clearly seen and contribute to the viewing experience.
Framing	The contribution to the character of the view of the foreground features that determine the extent of the view.
Grain (Urban Grain)	The pattern and arrangement of street blocks and plots.
Heritage	All inherited resources which people value for reasons beyond mere utility [from English Heritage's Conservation Principles]
Heritage Assets	A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. Heritage asset includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing).
Heritage Values	An aspect of worth or importance, attached by people to inherited resources. The 'family' of heritage values set out in English Heritage's Conservation Principles comprise the following component parts: evidential value, historic value, aesthetic value, and community value
Kinetic	Relating to or resulting from motion. In this report the kinetic nature of a view refers to the way in which the view is perceived as the viewer moves around or through a space (usually the viewing place).

² Definition from the Oxford Dictionary

³ Definition from the Oxford Dictionary

Middleground	For the purposes of this assessment the middle ground is defined as the link between foreground and background, where identification of individual buildings is possible, and the scale, grain, massing and pattern of buildings is particularly apparent.
Optimal Viewpoint	Best or most favourable place for the view providing the greatest appreciation of its heritage values due to the composition of the view and the associations of the point from which it is seen.
Prominent	Particularly noticeable.
Setting (of a Heritage Asset)	'The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral' (from Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment, PPS5).
Skyscape	The extent and character of the visible sky the character of which is determined by framing and the features of the horizon in addition to any intrusive features such as power lines.
Vanishing Point (also nadir)	The point at which a feature disappears from view, normally where it meets the horizon.
View	A sight or prospect, typically of attractive natural scenery, that can be taken in by the eye from a particular place (from Oxford Dictionaries online)
View Cone	The corridor between the viewer and the subject which encompasses the view up to the focal feature.
View Significance	A combination of the sum of the heritage values of the view and how clearly they are expressed, including whether the view forms an 'iconic image', perhaps an image used in paintings, postcards and guidebooks. It also relates to the scale at which the view is valued (international, national, regional or local scale).
Viewing Place	A public space from which the view can be experienced. The viewing place may have defined physical boundaries or may be a looser zone.
Qualitative Views Analysis	Analysis of a view by qualitative, rather than quantitative, means.

