



## PART 2

# The Oxford View Cones: Views from the Western Hills

2015 Report



OXFORD  
PRESERVATION  
TRUST



Historic England



## Contents

### PART 2 Views from the Western Hills

2.1	Raleigh Park	3
2.2	Boars Hill	15
2.3	Hinksey Hill / A34 Interchange	25

## List of Figures

### PART 2 Views from the Western Hills

Figure 2.1.1	Photograph of the view from Raleigh Park	12
Figure 2.1.2	Illustration 1: Simplified render of the view from Raleigh Park	12
Figure 2.1.3	Illustration 2: Annotated render of the view from Raleigh Park	13
Figure 2.2.1	Photograph of the view from Boars Hill	23
Figure 2.2.2	Illustration 1: Simplified render of the view from Boars Hill	23
Figure 2.2.3	Illustration 2: Annotated render of the view from Boars Hill	24
Figure 2.3.1	Photograph of the view from the A420	31
Figure 2.3.2	Illustration 1: Simplified render of the view from the A420	31
Figure 2.3.3	Illustration 2: Annotated render of the view from the A420	32

## 2.1 Raleigh Park View Analysis Summary

### 2.1.1 Introduction

Raleigh Park now provides the most publicly accessible example of the view of Oxford from Harcourt Hill above North Hinksey, which has been admired since the early 18th century and recommended in some of Oxford's earliest guidebooks as one of the best prospects from which to view the city's architectural splendour. The view has inspired numerous artists in the past three centuries, although development along the hilltop and an increasingly wooded landscape has reduced access to it. Establishment of Raleigh Park in the early 20th century preserved public access to the view. Sadly this is one of the most compromised of the city's historic views due to the impact of later 20th century developments.

The view of the City Centre is framed by trees in the parkland. The historic high buildings in the middle distance are spread across the framed area and rise above the otherwise low scale roofscape of the City Centre. The foreground preserves elements of the rural hillside and meadows that were an essential element of

the beauty of the view portrayed by artists and writers in the past - the contrast between the 'rustic' and 'civilised' forming part of the 'sublime' quality of the landscape. Headington Hill also preserves a green backcloth against which the towers, spires and domes are seen. Commercial and industrial development in the later 20th century has included the construction of the Osney Mead Industrial Estate and other large buildings with low-pitched hipped roofs that appear as a continuous area of development leading up and into the historic City Centre, blurring its edges and cutting it off from the once admired green setting. In the background, the large rectilinear structures of the John Radcliffe hospital sits on Headington Hill drawing the eye from the historic high buildings and detracting from the fine architectural character of the City Centre. The impacts of these past developments make sustaining the positive characteristics of the view even more important in order to sustain its contribution to the significance of the City's heritage. Sustaining access to the view by managing the trees in the park should be a priority for protecting the view in the future.



*The Raleigh Park view in the 1960s*



**2.1.2 The Viewers**

This view was chosen by topographical artists to represent the view of Oxford in the 18th century and has been a widely recognised image of the city since that date. The popularity of their work guided the use of these locations by tourists during the wars of the 18th and early 19th century that prevented Britons from visiting the architectural and historical sites of the continent. The activity of walking out to view the city from Harcourt Hill is recorded in early 19th century tourist guides to Oxford, further cementing the practice of viewing the city from the hill as an important part of the experience of visiting Oxford. Later in the 19th century J. M. W. Turner painted the view of the city from above North Hinksey, continuing the tradition

of the earlier topographic artists. Experiencing the view today provides a connection to the experience of these past artists both famous and obscure. In 1924 philanthropist Raymond Ffennell gave land to form a park from which the view would be freely accessible for residents of Oxford and those in the nearby suburbs. As a founder of Oxford Preservation Trust, Ffennell's gift reflects a wider concern at the time to preserve the ability to appreciate Oxford in its green setting. The view is also experienced from the surrounding housing contributing to the quality of life for the residents of this area and adding to its attractiveness. Part of the park's management is now undertaken by local volunteers, who help to conserve the park's wildlife interest.

**2.1.3 Present Viewers**

<b>People of Oxford and Vale of White Horse and visitors</b>	<p>This is now a freely accessible view that many residents from the surrounding area enjoy every day.</p> <p>People walk out to the park from the city for gentle recreation and access to semi-natural open space that is enhanced by their access to the view over the historic City Centre, providing a link between the suburb and city.</p> <p>The Raleigh Park view is popular with photographers providing an opportunity to get close up to the skyline of the City Centre.</p> <p>More formal tours have brought visitors and local people out to the park to admire the view painted by Turner and others.</p> <p>Lower down the hill, residents of North Hinksey Village and walkers on local footpaths benefit from views across the meadows towards the City Centre.</p> <p>The Park provides part of a network of paths along the sides of Harcourt Hill and linking to Boars Hill and Hinksey Hill, which are used for recreational walks to which the view makes a special contribution.</p>
--	---

**2.1.4 Viewers in the Past**

<b>Early topographic writers and artists for tourists</b>	<p>This view was chosen by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck as the view of Oxford in their series of historical and topographical engravings published as Buck's Antiquities in the late 1720s and 30s and subsequently widely reprinted.</p> <p>It was also used by Joseph Farington in 1793 for his view of Oxford from the South West, published in Combe's History of the River Thames.</p> <p>John Britton, a noted early 19th century antiquarian and conservationist, in his 'Beauties of England and Wales' (1814) used an engraving of the view from Ferry Hinksey (North Hinksey) by E. W. Brayley to illustrate his description of the city in its setting "...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."</p>
---	---



	Wade's walks in Oxford (published in 1817 as a guide to the city's historic sights) describes an eminence near Ferry Hinksey where "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."
<b>J.M.W. Turner's later paintings of Oxford</b>	<p>Turner's paintings and sketches of this view date from the later part of his career when financial independence had allowed him to become more experimental in his art. One is an example of his pure light paintings whilst another is a detailed landscape now held in the Manchester City Gallery.</p> <p>Both paintings emphasise the uneven rural foreground, the open space of meadows and river in the valley floor and the City Centre and its skyline buildings standing on a low eminence forming a focus to the landscape. The more detailed painting uses people to emphasise the rural toil of the foreground, which provide counter point to the sublime quality of the landscape and city architecture. Two dons shown walking in discussion provide an unusual feature suggesting a different relationship between the city and its rural surroundings.</p>
<b>Matthew Arnold – Victorian Poet</b>	Matthew Arnold's poem the Scholar Gypsy refers to the journey across the causeway through flooded fields to Hinksey and up the hill to a viewpoint where, looking back the lights of Christ Church Hall could be seen on a winter evening. This seems to be an evocative description of the journey to view Oxford from Harcourt Hill above North Hinksey.
<b>20th century settlers</b>	Houses on the lower slopes of the hill were built with frontages facing the city to get the best value from the views.
<b>Early 20th century conservation campaigners</b>	<p>The land at Raleigh Park (27 acres) was bought by Raymond Ffennell in 1924 from the Harcourt family who were promoting the hillside for housing development. He later gave the land to the city for a park that would provide views of the famous city skyline.</p> <p>Land in the Thames Valley was protected through the designation of the Oxford Green Belt in 1975 to preserve the historic setting of the city and prevent urban sprawl.</p>



*Oxford from North Hinksey Hill, JMW Turner (c. 1835-1840) ©Manchester City Galleries*



**2.1.5 The Viewing Place**

The viewing place will contribute to what is seen in the view but may also have historical, evidential or communal value as a place for viewing the city that adds to the significance of the view. The park provides 'kinetic' views - that is a series of changing views seen as a person moves around the park, with views changing as a result of different angles, changing elevation in the park and the framing effects of trees. The park is now

partly wooded, restricting the area from which views of the city are seen. Where it does provide views to the city, the park preserves a rough grassland character as a foreground with framing by hedgerow trees that reflect the historic character of the views from the city's agricultural hinterland recorded in historic paintings. The Park lies within the Vale of White Horse District and forms part of the Oxford Green Belt, designated to protect the setting and historic character of the city.

<p><b>Aesthetic value of the foreground</b></p>	<p>The park provides a green foreground with soft framing of views to the City Centre by trees. This provides an attractive setting to the city that provides a strong contrast with the built up area but does not contain structures that would distract from the view of the colleges and other historic buildings of the City Centre.</p> <p>The park has been managed to provide rich wildlife habitat with birds and insects contributing to its attractive quality.</p>
<p><b>Historical value of the rural landscape of the hillside</b></p>	<p>Whilst land to the north west of the park has been developed for housing and land to the south west is expected to be developed shortly, the park preserves an area of open rural character that reflects the history of the hillside as open farmland as portrayed by artists and writers in the past.</p> <p>By preserving this character it maintains its associative value with the past viewers who have used it as an escape from the urban and academic life of Oxford, including the poets and artists who have taken inspiration from the juxtaposition of city and countryside.</p>
<p><b>Historical association with philanthropists and viewing</b></p>	<p>The park has a special association with Raymond Ffennell as the philanthropist who gave it to the people of the city for their enjoyment and to preserve the view of Oxford in its green setting.</p>



*A photomontage showing the contribution of the rural foreground environment and the fragile narrow area of skyline forming the focus of the view*

### 2.1.6 The Landscape in the View

Raleigh Park provides both framed and open views of the City Centre as you move around it at a relatively close point to the historic high buildings (the viewpoint is approximately 2.3 kilometres from Carfax). Within the view the landscape is seen as a series of narrow layers each representing a different area of the city.

In the foreground the parkland greenery is maintained as a mixture of rough pasture and woodland, reflecting the historic rural setting of the hillside, with rooftops and the pyramid topped church tower of North Hinksey village adding to the historic rural context. Unfortunately development of woodland in the park has also screened views to the city from a large area of it.

In the village and across the meadows to the east, tall trees continue the green character of the foreground and, in the summer months, help to reduce the intrusive impact of the roofscape of the modern industrial estate at Osney Mead on the remaining foreground (see below). The green meadows and the sinuous course of the River Thames running up to the feet of the city have been a feature of the view admired by artists over the centuries. However, the tall trees on the park's edge and beyond North Hinksey currently screen these features from view. Beyond Osney Mead, a small number of red brick industrial buildings, stand out within the landscape of development of West Oxford including Osney Mill, a 19th century mill that marks the site of Osney Abbey, as well as the brick chimneys of the Morrell's Lion Brewery. From lower slopes in the park a more open aspect allows views northward to the area surrounding Oxford Station including the stepped spire of the Said Business School

and the Victorian power station next to the River Thames. Historic high buildings in Jericho and North Oxford can also be seen rising above the tree canopy that generally obscures views of the rooftops of these suburbs.

The high buildings stand in a narrow row across the framed area of the City Centre allowing appreciation of the architecture and historic interest of each individually.

Behind, Headington Hill provides a green backcloth of woodland and the well-wooded gardens of houses on Headington Hill and surrounding developments. Peeping from among the trees is Headington Hill Hall, the home of one of Oxford's most successful mercantile families. The green open space of South Park is seen on the hillside just to the right of the City Centre and has further historic interest, as well as contributing to the green backcloth.

Beside the positive features there are also a number of features that detract from the quality of this view. The buildings of the Osney Mead Industrial Estate have introduced a roofscape of large shallow-pitch hipped roofs of white or light grey sheet materials that cross the framed area in front of the City Centre, drawing the eye away from the City Centre's architectural interest. The print hall of the Newsquest building is particularly prominent as a large boxlike structure rising up above the surrounding green landscape in the foreground of the view. Other buildings with similar roofs, including the Royal Mail Building and Oxford and Cherwell Valley College Jericho Building either side of Oxpens Road, continue the intrusive roofscape up to the edge of the City Centre. The bulky, flat-roofed structures of



*The view zoomed into the thin line of the City's historic skyline in October 2010*



the council offices at Castle Street and the Westgate Centre sit within the City Centre as intrusive elements that rise above the general roofscape without incorporating the pitched surfaces, and variations in height and material that characterise the more historic roofscape

of the city. In the background, the large rectilinear structures of the John Radcliffe Hospital break up the green backdrop to the city and also draw the eye away from historic high buildings, sitting directly behind some of them in the view.

**2.1.7 Topography and layout of the view:**

<p>The expanse of the view varies within the park.</p>	<p>At the viewpoint most commonly chosen the trees and hedgerows in and around the park frame the view of the city's historic core, providing an understanding of the extent of the medieval city set on its gravel ridge at the river crossings.</p> <p>Elsewhere in the park more open views can be experienced that provide a greater sense of the City Centre's connection with its historic industrial suburb to the west. Glimpsed views between dense groups of trees focus attention on individual high buildings.</p>
<p>Looking down on the city with Headington Hill beyond</p>	<p>The elevated position of the park allows the viewer to look down to the city and the high buildings, which are seen as rising from the more general roofscape of the City Centre and against the backdrop of Headington Hill.</p> <p>Development on the lower slopes of Headington Hill and in the Cherwell Valley do not rise up between the City Centre and the hill, preserving the sense of the city in its green setting.</p>

**2.1.8 Green Characteristics:**

<p>Rural landscape of the park</p>	<p>Contributes to both the aesthetic value of the view and the ability to connect with the historic experience of past writers and artists. This includes the rough pasture, grazed by cattle and the hedgerows and trees that frame views.</p>
<p>Rural landscape in the Thames Valley meadows</p>	<p>The trees in North Hinksey and in the valley beyond add to the green quality of the view, helping to set the City Centre within a green landscape. They also help to screen some of the industrial buildings built within the floodplain in the later 20th century, which intrude into this view.</p>
<p>Wooded hills in the background</p>	<p>The wooded gardens and landscape of Headington Hill adds to the aesthetic value of the City Centre by setting it against an attractive and contrasting green background. The greenery recalls the open countryside recorded beyond the City Centre by historic painters and writers and illustrates the development of Headington Hill as a picturesque suburb in the 19th century.</p>
<p>South Park as part of the background</p>	<p>South Park also forms an attractive part of the green Headington Hill background. Its open landscape preserves a section of the open countryside that provided the backdrop to the city in the 18th and 19th centuries when this view became popular. The preservation of the green space has further historic interest (see the South Park View Summary)</p>
<p>Trees along the Thames and Railway line</p>	<p>An area of large trees running along the River Thames and the Railway Line help to divide the roofscape of Osney Mead from that of the historic city core. They provide mounds of soft foliage above which the City Centre roofscape and skyline rise.</p>
<p>Trees in the City Centre</p>	<p>Notable trees in the City Centre rise within the roofscape, softening the outline of buildings and adding contrast to the predominant limestone and grey colours. Particularly notable are the trees on Oxford Castle Motte (drawing attention to this historic feature) and in Grove Quad at Lincoln College, which stand juxtaposed to the Radcliffe Camera.</p>



### 2.1.9 Architectural characteristics:

<b>Historic rural foreground buildings</b>	The village buildings of North Hinksey including the unusual pyramid roof of the tower of St Lawrence's Church provide vernacular forms and materials as well as unevenly spaced and oriented building that contribute to the rural character of the foreground indicating the relationship between the city in the distance and the village standing in its rural setting.
<b>City Centre roofscape</b>	<p>North of the Westgate Centre, the City Centre is seen as a narrow band of fine-grained roofscape of small pitched roofs of natural slate and red clay tile rising to a consistent level or ridgelines and above which the numerous historic buildings rise.</p> <p>This view is notable for the high number of smaller towers that are visible in the north and west part of the City Centre, representing the many medieval parish churches in the city, as well as Oxford's Castle.</p> <p>South of the Westgate Centre areas of fine-grained roofscape are seen, representing the ribbon of historic development along St Aldgate's and the area between the west end of High Street to Blue Boar Street. Occasionally the longer pitched roofs of buildings of colleges and churches are seen amongst these reflecting the concentration of colleges in the south east quarter of the historic City Centre.</p>
<b>Oxford Castle</b>	The long elevations of Oxford Castle's historic prison buildings stand out on the western edge of the City Centre marking the edge of the historic city and drawing the eye to this important historic feature.
<b>West Oxford buildings</b>	The larger rooftops of historic industrial buildings help to illustrate the development of this area as Oxford's riverside industrial suburb, part of its character that stretches back to the Middle Ages and continued into the late 19th and early 20th century. These tend to be red brick buildings of up to three and half storeys. Osney Mill, recently renovated, stands out as a red brick building with traditional pitched slate roof with cornered gables.
<b>The high buildings</b>	<p>The historic high buildings stand above the general roofscape and form the focus of the view. The two groupings of high buildings seen from the east are also discernable in this view (The University Group focused on the Radcliffe Camera and the Christ Church Group focused on Tom Tower). These reflect the two foci of investment in prestigious architecture by patrons including Kings of England, bishops and magnates, among others. Both provide attractive groupings of historic buildings with a juxtaposition of attractive architectural detailing.</p> <p>Other high buildings are spread across the historic centre of the city illustrating the extent of Medieval and Early Modern Oxford, the presence of numerous medieval parish churches in the City Centre and the extensive spread of the historic colleges, each with their own prestigious buildings competing for prominence on the skyline.</p> <p>Oxford Castle's St George's tower acts as a marker for the early locus of civil administration and Norman overlordship as well as marking the historic entrance to the city from the west.</p>

### 2.1.10 The Influence of light and the Seasons:

<b>Breadth of sky varies but balances the enclosed character of the foreground</b>	The openness of the skyscape varies at different points within the park. From the apex of the view cone the surrounding foliage provides a frame that constrains the skyscape and focuses the view toward the City Centre roofscape in the valley below. As such it generally balances the contained open space within the park. From lower down the slope the foliage is less constraining on either side, with a wider skyscape that provides more of the open rural character that it has been valued for in the past.
--	---



<b>Optimum view conditions</b>	The optimum conditions for viewing are in mixed cloud and sun in the late afternoon in high summer, when the light illuminates the limestone high buildings with the dark green foliage of Headington Hill behind providing a strong contrast.
<b>Less favourable view conditions</b>	From October until May the loss of tree cover makes the intrusive impact of more recent developments more dominant in the view, whilst in overcast or misty weather the focus shifts to the foreground and the City Centre can become indistinct.

**2.1.11 Detractors:**

<b>Osney Mead Industrial buildings</b>	<p>The industrial buildings of Osney Mead have replaced the former open rural character of the meadows that formed the middle ground of the view up to the edge of the City Centre. They tend to have large low pitched areas of sheet roofing that are either white or of a light colour that are very reflective, drawing the eye to the foreground and away from the historic high buildings of the City Centre. They have reduced the extent of the rural setting to the city that was historically part of both its aesthetic and evidential value and historic and artistic interest. The buildings are seen cumulatively as a quilt of roof surfaces extending right across the middle ground of the view, although the tree cover provided in high summer helps reduce their visual impact.</p> <p>The print hall of the Newsquest building is particularly intrusive, rising well above the general roofscape of Osney Mead with conspicuous blue cladding. From the main viewing point in the park it is in line with the buildings of Christ Church and competes with them for attention, marring the low level character of the middle ground of the view.</p>
<b>West Oxford Buildings and the Westgate Centre</b>	<p>Several buildings on the edge of the city and running into its centre continue the extent of the intrusive 'quilt' of low-pitched large roof surfaces established by Osney Mead. The Royal Mail building (King Charles House) and Jericho Building of Oxford and Cherwell Valley College both contribute to this roofscape. These blur the visible edges of the City Centre, reducing the distinctive sharp edge between the historic city and its rural setting that was historically part of its historical and aesthetic value and artistic interest.</p> <p>The Westgate Centre forms two large blocks that rise up within the City Centre landscape. These have a distinctive rectilinear form that detracts from the pattern of steeply pitched rooftops that are characteristic of the City Centre beyond. The white painted cladding elements on the upper floors of the building draw the eye, highlighting this element of the building, which competes for attention with the high buildings in the historic core of the city beyond. This impact is partially mitigated by the steeply pitched pyramids that form part of the building's roofscape, helping to break up the horizontal mass it creates in the City Centre roofscape.</p>
<b>John Radcliffe Hospital</b>	The earliest structures of the John Radcliffe Hospital were built on a hilltop location outside the City Centre to provide access to fresh air. Nevertheless the buildings constructed in the 1960s and more recently have not generally been considered as having any aesthetic value. Early staff members referred to it in derogatory terms as 'The John' due to its appearance. The buildings break up the wooded slopes of Headington Hill that form the backdrop to the City Centre with a large mass of white rectilinear surfaces that draw the eye away from the historic high buildings marring the architectural character of the view.
<b>Pylons</b>	The line of Pylons and high level electric power lines that runs from Hinksey/Botley across the view and then down into the city introduces a jarring feature that contributes to the modern intrusions of industrial development to the formerly rural foreground of the view.

Tree management	Trees within the park have grown to a point where they screen the view of the city from the majority of it. Maintaining views from within the park towards the City Centre need to form a consideration for future management that reflects the origins of the park as a place for viewing Oxford from its countryside setting.
-----------------	---

### 2.1.12 Sensitivity to change:

Change in the viewing place	<p>The growth of trees in the park has resulted in a gradual loss of the view of the City Centre and the small cluster of historic rural buildings of North Hinksey village at the foot of the hill. Further unmanaged tree growth threatens to further reduce the visibility of the view and would represent harm to the view that is likely to result in under appreciation of its importance when considered in decision-making. Conversely, there is potential to enhance the view through gradually revealing views from other parts of the park by careful tree thinning.</p> <p>Loss of the rural character of the viewing place either through change within it, or by increasing the visibility of surrounding developments would result in harm to the significance of the view.</p>
Change in the middle ground – Osney Mead and Oxpens	<p>Further development that extends the coverage of the area of large shallow-pitched roofs between the viewing place and the historic City Centre or makes it more visibly prominent would have a negative impact on this view. The impact of the Newsquest Print-hall rising up from the industrial estate demonstrates how increasing the prominence of these buildings detracts further from the view.</p> <p>However, there are also opportunities to enhance the view by reducing the prominence of the industrial estate’s roof-surfaces. This might include using darker or less reflective materials for roofs when they are replaced or using tree planting to break up the area of roof-surfaces.</p>
Change in the City Centre	<p>New development that detracts from the prominence of the historic high buildings, or that reduces their visibility would be regarded as having a negative impact on the view. Development that detracts from the positive character of the city centre roofscape as a mass of steeply pitched small roofs would also be considered to detract from the view.</p> <p>The long side elevations of the Westgate Centre are noted as detracting from the view at present. Breaking these up through use of shorter lengths of different materials to reflect the finer grain of other roof-surfaces in the City Centre could enhance the view.</p>



Figure 2.1.1



*Photograph of the view from Raleigh Park*

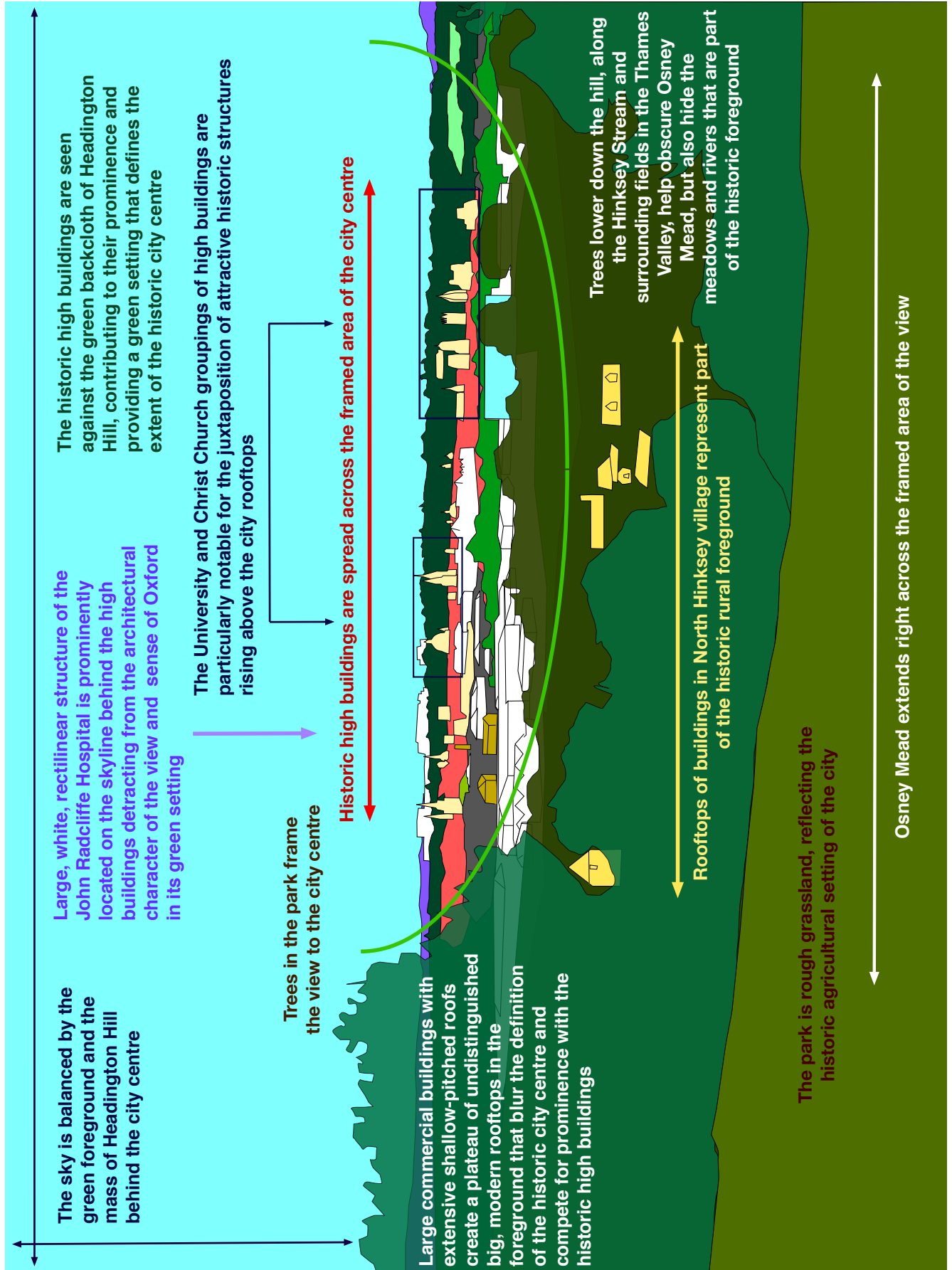
Figure 2.1.2



*Illustration 1: Simplified render of the view from Raleigh Park*



Figure 2.1.3  
 Illustration 2: Annotated  
 render of the view from  
 Raleigh Park





OXFORD  
PRESERVATION  
TRUST

## 2.2 Boars Hill View Analysis Summary

### 2.2.1 Introduction

The Boars Hill view is one of the most famous and unspoiled views of Oxford. It has inspired painters and poets since the 18th century, providing the origin of Oxford's identity as "... that sweet city with her dreaming spires". Despite threats that the viewing place would be lost to prestigious suburban development in the early 20th century, the former Berkeley Golf Course and Sir Arthur Evans' Jarn Mound are now publicly accessible, thanks to their ownership by Oxford Preservation Trust. The former golf course now contributes to the pastoral character of the foreground. The City Centre is seen at a distance of several miles looking from a point within the Vale of White Horse District over land in Oxford's Green Belt. The rolling green fields and woodlands appear to continue unbroken to the feet of the medieval city. The limestone churches and University and college buildings are seen forming a mass in the south east of the City Centre. These include long elevations of college

buildings with intricate rooflines of pinnacles or spirelets, above which the towers, spires and domes rise. To the west (left) the rest of the City Centre is mainly comprised of a more humble mix of small, pitched rooftops. St George's Tower and the prison buildings of Oxford Castle with the spire of Nuffield College indicate the western limit of the City Centre. The rooftops, spires and domes of 18th and 19th University and college buildings and churches (including the Tower of the Winds and the Churches of St Barnabas and Ss Philip and James) continue to the left of the view where North Oxford and Jericho are seen as an extension of the City Centre. Nevertheless the mass of the suburbs' buildings are disguised by the dense tree canopy. The modern suburbs of New Marston and Northway are hidden behind the City Centre in the Cherwell Valley, whilst East Oxford is screened by woodland in the foreground. The hills of Elsfield and Woodeaton form a wooded backcloth with 'blue' hills beyond.



*An example of the Boars Hill view taken by a professional photographer*



**2.2.2 The Viewers**

The view provides historical value by connecting us to past viewers through a shared experience of seeing Oxford’s landscape and architecture. The view from Boars Hill is one of Oxford’s most romanticised views, described in poetry by Matthew Arnold (sometimes considered the third great Victorian poet) in his wistful eulogy *Thyrsis* (1866) as well as the *Scholar Gypsy* (1853) and painted by J. M. W. Turner in one of his earliest works (in 1787/8 at the age of 14). These poems also point out that the hilltop was a regular destination for scholars from the University either for sociable exercise or as a quiet location to study in the rural surroundings. The Berkeley family made the hill their home in the late 19th century, building *The Heath* (later *Foxcombe Hall*) as a replica of their ancestral castle. Subsequently, house builders exploited the views from the hill to attract wealthy buyers. A golf course was

also established attracting more people to the hilltop. In the early 20th century, concern for the preservation of the views attracted the attention of conservationists. Oxford Preservation Trust bought the Old Berkeley Golf Course in 1927 to protect it from the spread of housing development that was threatening to destroy opportunities to see the famous view. The purchase brought the Trust into being as one of the country’s earliest amenity societies, with the express purpose of protecting the world famous views of the city. During the years of the Great Depression (1931-33) Sir Arthur Evans, the famous archaeologist, provided work for unemployed men by building *Jarn Mound*, which offered a prospect of Oxford over the canopy of trees that was developing. How past viewers have recorded or portrayed the view can reveal features that have historically been considered significant about it and that continue to have significance today.

**2.2.3 Present Viewers**

<p><b>People of Oxford and Vale of White Horse residents and visitors.</b></p>	<p>It is now a freely accessible view that hundreds of people enjoy every day. People walk out to the hill to enjoy the view whilst having a picnic or relaxing and it is still normal to see students reading on the grass at the Old Berkeley Golf Course on sunny days.</p> <p>The Boars Hill view is very popular with photographers who often zoom in to catch the detail of the group of University buildings, unimpeded by development in the foreground.</p> <p>The regional headquarters of the Open University is now based at Foxcombe Hall and many visitors are able to admire the view over the Old Berkeley Golf Course.</p> <p>Lower down the hill the Hinksey Heights Golf Course and a network of footpaths are used by local residents for recreation, which include routes that are either the same or similar to those recorded by the poets. Viewers use these paths to move from one viewing place in the western hills group to another with the links from Boars Hill to the Harcourt Hill views (including Raleigh Park) to the north and the Hinksey Hill Views (including those from Bagley Wood and the Hinksey Hill Interchange) to the south east.</p>
--	---

**2.2.4 Past Viewers**

<p><b>One of J.M.W. Turner’s earliest painted landscapes</b></p>	<p>1787 “View of Oxford from the South West”, Tate Collection.</p>
<p><b>Other 18th and 19th century artists</b></p>	<p>Examples of other artists who have shown appreciation for the view include J. B. Malchair, (A distant view of Oxford from Hinksey), Skelton (South West view of Oxford after Malchair, c. 1820), and William Turner of Oxford (Oxford from Hinksey Hill, c. 1840, Oxford City Council Collection).</p>



<b>19th and early 20th century poets – including Matthew Arnold</b>	<p>Matthew Arnold was introduced to the view in 1841 by his friend and fellow poet Arthur Hugh Clough. His poems the Scholar Gypsy (1853) and Thyrsis (1866) both refer to the view from the hill, referencing pastoral landscape of Hinksey, Bagley Wood and Cumnor (Boars Hill was part of Cumnor Parish until the mid-19th century) and the distant view of the city and particularly of Christ Church.</p> <p>Later in the 19th century, poets including Margaret Louisa Woods, Robert Bridges and John Masefield (the latter both poet laureates).</p> <p>Following the First World War the poets Robert Graves, Edmund Blunden and Robert Nichols all lived on the hill. Elizabeth Daryush, the daughter of Robert Bridges was also a prominent 20th century poet and lived on the hill. Her husband later bequeathed their house, Stockwell, with its ground to Oxford Preservation Trust.</p>
<b>19th and early 20th century settlers</b>	<p>Houses on Boars Hill were built in the early 20th century to exploit the high quality of the view, each borrowing the city and its green setting to add to the attractiveness of the property.</p>
<b>Early 20th century conservation campaigners</b>	<p>Oxford Preservation Trust bought the golf course to protect the land from housing development and to preserve public access to the famous views of the city.</p> <p>The land in the middle ground was protected through the designation of Oxford's Green Belt to safeguard the setting and historic character of the city.</p>



*View of Oxford from the South West* by J.M.W. Turner, c. 1787 © Tate, London 2014



**2.2.5 The Viewing Place**

Boars Hill forms part of the western hills, which provide a series of views down to the city from a network of paths and open spaces. To the north the paths lead to Harcourt Hill (see the Raleigh Park View) and to the south to Hinksey Hill (see the Hinksey Hill/ A34 Interchange View). The Boars Hill view can be appreciated from several viewing places, each of which might make a contribution to the historical, aesthetic, or communal values of the view. The view across the Old Berkeley Golf course provides one

assessment point, although the golf course itself provides a kinetic viewing experience; that is a series of views as the viewer moves through or around the viewing place. Other viewing places include Jarn Mound, built by Sir Arthur Evans, which is a more fixed viewing point, as well as Hinksey Heights Golf Club and footpaths across Boars Hill between South Hinksey, Boars Hill, Chilswell Priory and Harcourt Hill. All of this area, west of Oxford's Southern by-pass lies within the Vale of White Horse District and forms part of Oxford's Green Belt.

<p><b>Aesthetic value of the foreground</b></p>	<p>The rural foreground provides an attractive setting to the city with no structures that distract from the view of the historic buildings of the City Centre.</p> <p>Small farm cottages and farm buildings have scale, materials and detail that contribute to the aesthetic of this rural landscape – that is, they contribute to its rural picturesque beauty even though they may not have been designed with this in mind.</p> <p>The former golf course has been maintained as an open green space with undulating topography portrayed in early paintings of the view adding interest to the foreground.</p> <p>Hedgerows further down the hill add further attractive greenery in the view and provide reference features for understanding of perspective.</p>
<p><b>Historical and evidential value of rural landscape of the hillside</b></p>	<p>The rural character of the hillside provides evidence of its development as a farming landscape.</p> <p>By preserving this character it maintains its associative value with the past viewers who have used it as an escape from the busy urban and academic life of Oxford, including the poets and artists who have taken inspiration from the juxtaposition of city and countryside.</p>
<p><b>Historical value of the Old Golf Course</b></p>	<p>The grassland and flora of Old Berkeley Golf Course illustrates the area's use as open grazing land, enclosed in the early 19th century, but maintained more or less as a heath whilst in use as a golf course.</p> <p>The association with the early champions of Oxford's views provides further historical value to this viewing place that is heightened by the conservation of its character.</p>
<p><b>Historical value of Jarn Mound</b></p>	<p>Jarn Mound provides associations with Sir Arthur Evans a great archaeologist but also a philanthropist, and benefactor of the Scouting movement. The mound is surrounded by a 'wildlife' garden created in the 1930s that also illustrates an early example of British nature conservation.</p>
<p><b>Ever-changing views</b></p>	<p>The extensive green open space and public routes on the hillside provide an enormous number of views in which the continuously changing perspective creates different groupings and juxtapositions of historic buildings seen within the green setting of Oxford's rural surroundings. From lower down the slope, at the Hinksey Heights Golf Club the floodplain of the River Thames also comes into view, as open space interspersed with woodland.</p>



*The Boars Hill View in 1962*

### 2.2.6 The Landscape in the View

From Boars Hill the historic City Centre, particularly the buildings of Christ Church, the dome of the Radcliffe Camera and spire of St Mary the Virgin Church, are seen as a tightly focused group within an extensive green setting of rolling hills. This creates a juxtaposition of the fine architecture of historic buildings with the soft green pastoral landscape (a contrast between the built, civilised, urbane or intellectual with the rural, rustic or 'natural' landscape). This is an important part of the experience of the city appreciated by artists and writers since the late 18th century. Seen as a group in the east of the city a number of the historic high buildings can be admired as a collection of competing pleasing forms, which vie for attention. This reflects their designers' intent to create buildings that would stand out in the landscape and compete for prominence with their neighbours as symbols of wealth, patronage and taste. The buildings are too distant for appreciation of their detailing, but the breadth and extent of the view allows an appreciation of the city in its setting of the surrounding hills.

The City Centre is raised just above the floodplain of the Thames, which is seen as meadows running from the lower slopes of the hill up to the wooded line of the railway. The City Centre's mass screens buildings in the Cherwell Valley. The mass of Oxford's northern suburb is seen to the west (left) of the City Centre, but is generally of low enough scale that it is largely hidden by the dense tree canopy of its gardens and streets. Historic high buildings in this area include the Radcliffe Observatory, the spire of Ss Philip and James' Church and the pyramid of the Museum of Natural History, which illustrate the 18th and 19th century expansion of the city and University. Elsfeld Hill and Woodeaton Hill provide a green backdrop to the City Centre and historic high buildings, against which the limestone and lead of the towers, spires and domes provide a strong contrast. Buildings in the foreground illustrate the dispersed settlement of the countryside and provide both historic and architectural interest. From the higher points on the hill the view is framed by woodland to either side, with areas of woodland crossing the foreground adding to its aesthetic interest.



**2.2.7 Topography and layout of the view:**

<p><b>Wide view seen from a high point and far away in a broad green setting.</b></p>	<p>The City Centre is a point of interest set within a broad green landscape of rolling hills (a jewel in a sea of green). The fall of ground into the valley draws the eye down to the City Centre without significant structures that distract in the foreground. Woodland and the shoulder of Harcourt Hill provide framing to an otherwise expansive view, screening East and West Oxford from view.</p> <p>This view exemplifies the historic experience of seeing Oxford in an amphitheatre of green hills recorded by poets, writers and artists.</p>
<p><b>The City Centre from the south west</b></p>	<p>The view illustrates the compact nature of the medieval and early modern city between the two rivers and north of the main river crossing.</p> <p>The main group of high buildings forms a cluster in the right half of the City Centre's visible mass. They are seen as a pyramid of high buildings competing for attention rising to the spire of St Mary the Virgin Church as the highest point. Their position reflects the historic concentration of university and college that are clustered on the main routes into the city from the south and east.</p> <p>St George's Tower is seen at the left limit of the City Centre, marking the western entrance to the medieval city.</p>
<p><b>North Oxford to the left is an indistinct spread of development</b></p>	<p>The North Oxford suburb is seen as an indistinct mass of development softened by the extensive canopy of mature trees illustrating its picturesque planning and preventing an undue distraction for the historic experience of viewing the City Centre.</p>
<p><b>Woodeaton and Elsfield Hills as a green backdrop</b></p>	<p>The two hills rise up seemingly from directly behind the historic high buildings as the Cherwell Valley and buildings of New Marston are hidden behind the City Centre.</p>

**2.2.8 Green Characteristics:**

<p><b>Green rolling foreground crossed by agricultural hedgerows and woodland</b></p>	<p>Contributes to both the aesthetic value of the view and the ability to connect with the historic experience of past writers and artists. Escaping to the green environs of the city to enjoy the open rural landscape is an important activity itself, to which the views of the city provide a unique element that is highly valued.</p>
<p><b>Green up to the City Centre</b></p>	<p>The apparent continuity of green spaces up to the feet of the historic City Centre preserves its integrity as a compact medieval city and contributes to the attractive juxtaposition of the 'natural' countryside and 'civilised' University City.</p>
<p><b>Wooded hills in the background</b></p>	<p>The woodland of the two hills in the background provides a strong contrast of colour with the City Centre high buildings that emphasises the nature of both.</p>
<p><b>Tree canopy of North Oxford</b></p>	<p>The roofscape of North Oxford is softened by the extensive canopy of mature trees illustrating its picturesque planning and preventing an undue distraction for the historic experience of viewing the City Centre.</p>



### 2.2.9 Architectural Characteristics:

<b>City Centre roofscape</b>	The City Centre is mainly seen as a fine-grained roofscape of small pitched roofs of natural slate and red clay tile rising to a consistent level or ridgelines and above which only the high buildings and the roof of the town hall rise.
<b>The Colleges</b>	In the east of the City Centre the long limestone ashlar elevations of College buildings are seen with spirelets rising from their parapets, creating a masonry forest of detail and low lead covered roofs.
<b>Speedwell House and Oxford Castle</b>	The long elevations of both buildings are seen as the edge of the City Centre. In the most distant views Speedwell House can be mistaken for a college building, whilst the Castle's prison blocks create a 'wall' defining the edge of the City Centre. The combined effect replicates part of the experience portrayed by Turner.
<b>Buildings of the historic rural landscape</b>	These have a vernacular character, rising to only two storeys in limestone or brick with prominent gables and steeply pitched roofs of limestone slates or clay tile.
<b>Georgian and Victorian spires and high buildings of Oxford's suburbs</b>	Outside the focal group of historic high buildings (see below) a series of high buildings document the spread of Oxford northwards during the late 18th and 19th centuries. These include buildings that reflect the special academic history of the city including the Radcliffe Observatory's Tower of the Winds and the distinctive pyramid roof of the Museum of Natural History and colleges built in the late 19th and early 20th century (Keble and Nuffield College, as well as religious buildings that are representative of the suburbs within which they stand including the Church of Ss Philip and James and St Barnabas. These buildings share the palette of materials and forms that are used by those in the focal group, providing a shared character that is part of the attractive character of the view.
<b>The high buildings</b>	<p>The 'pyramid' of high buildings draws the eye to this part of the City Centre, reflecting the focus of the University and colleges' development.</p> <p>There is no other competing focus of high buildings in the City Centre that competes with this grouping allowing it to dominate.</p> <p>Oxford Castle's tower acts as a marker for the early locus of civil administration and Norman overlordship as well as marking the historic entrance to the city from the west.</p>

### 2.2.10 Infrastructure:

<b>The Railway Line</b>	The railway line into the City Centre crosses the interface between the green foreground and the City Centre. It is generally hidden by a belt of scrubby woodland, although trains can be seen running between gaps in the canopy or through the screen of trees in winter. It is most prominent in views from lower down the slope, including from Hinksey Heights Golf Club, where it forms the edge of Meadows and playing fields in the foreground.
-------------------------	--

### 2.2.11 The Influence of light and the Seasons:

<b>Skyscape</b>	<p>Looking down to the city the unconstrained skyscape is balanced by the extensive green foreground. This is part of the essential rural character of the view.</p> <p>The optimum conditions for viewing are in sunny weather with some high cloud in the late afternoon, when the sun is at a low angle behind or to the left of the viewer reflecting from the limestone of the high buildings, churches and colleges.</p> <p>The extensive setting can often mean that different parts of the view are in sunlight and shade. When the sunlight reaches the City Centre the limestone of the historic high buildings is illuminated picking these buildings out as bright but delicate structures in contrast with the greenery of the hills in front and behind and making an important contribution to the attractiveness of the combination of disparate landscape features.</p>
-----------------	--



**2.2.12 Detractors:**

<p><b>Pylons</b></p>	<p>The line of pylons and high level electric power lines run from Botley to the left of view across the view and then down into the city and introduces a jarring feature that distracts from the rural character of the foreground and the aesthetic quality of the experience recorded by historical viewers.</p>
<p><b>University Science and Engineering Towers (Hans Krebs Tower and Thom Building)</b></p>	<p>These two high buildings constructed in the 1960s have tall and bulky rectilinear forms that provide a negative contrast with the graceful spires and domes of the older high buildings. Whilst they represent the continued development of the University as a centre for the development of science they failed to support the aesthetic standard of high buildings in the view and inspired the view cones policy.</p>

**2.2.13 Sensitivity to change:**

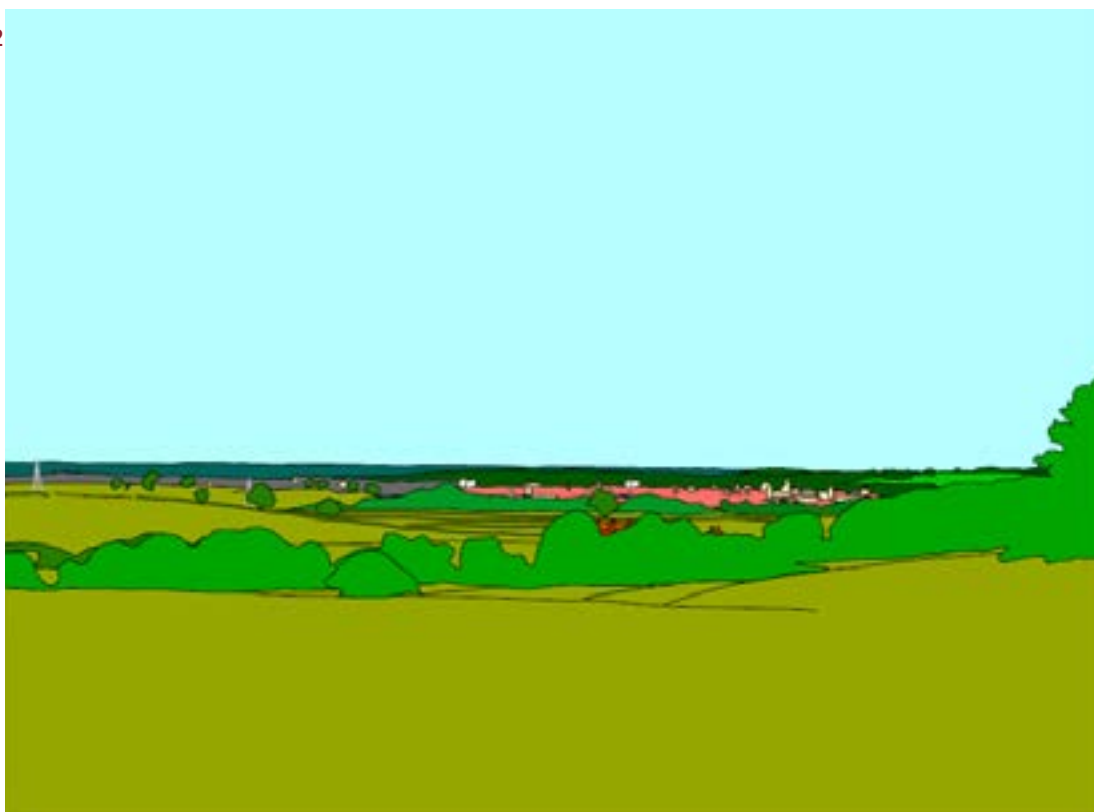
<p><b>Change in the rural setting</b></p>	<p>The view from the Old Berkeley Golf Course is one of the most unspoiled views of the city due to the careful management of the viewing place to sustain its historic rural character, and the absence of visible development in the foreground that would create a buffer between the historic City Centre and the countryside.</p> <p>Change that detracted from the rural character of the foreground or that introduced any feature which intervened in the crisp interface of the historic City Centre and the countryside setting would detract from the quality of the view.</p> <p>Removing the electricity pylons that run across the rural foreground and detract from its character by running the lines underground would represent an enhancement of the view.</p>
<p><b>Change in the City Centre</b></p>	<p>The group of historic high buildings that forms the focus of this view has a pre-eminence that has remained unchanged since the age of Turner. Together these provide the distinctive skyline that makes an attractive view of a city into world class historic vista. Development within the City Centre that reduces their visibility or draws attention away from these buildings would result in harm to the view.</p> <p>The positive historic character of the City Centre’s roofscape is a rough textured plain of steeply pitched short roof surfaces, with a focus of longer shallower pitched roofs adorned by numerous Gothic pinnacles marking the focus of the colleges. Development that alters this character would be regarded as resulting in harm.</p>
<p><b>Changes in the suburbs</b></p>	<p>Low-level development in the city’s suburbs is unlikely to have a significant impact on the view. Loss of tree cover, either within the suburbs or in the surrounding areas that made the suburbs more prominent in the view, reducing the dominance of the City Centre as the focal area in the middle-ground would result in harm to the view.</p> <p>Taller development of any great mass in the suburbs that draws the eye away from the historic City Centre would result in harm to the view. Both the Thom Building and the Hans Krebs Tower have demonstrated this potential impact in the past. Careful design can, to some extent mitigate this impact, as for example was achieved with the stepped spire of the Said Business School.</p>

Figure 2.2.1



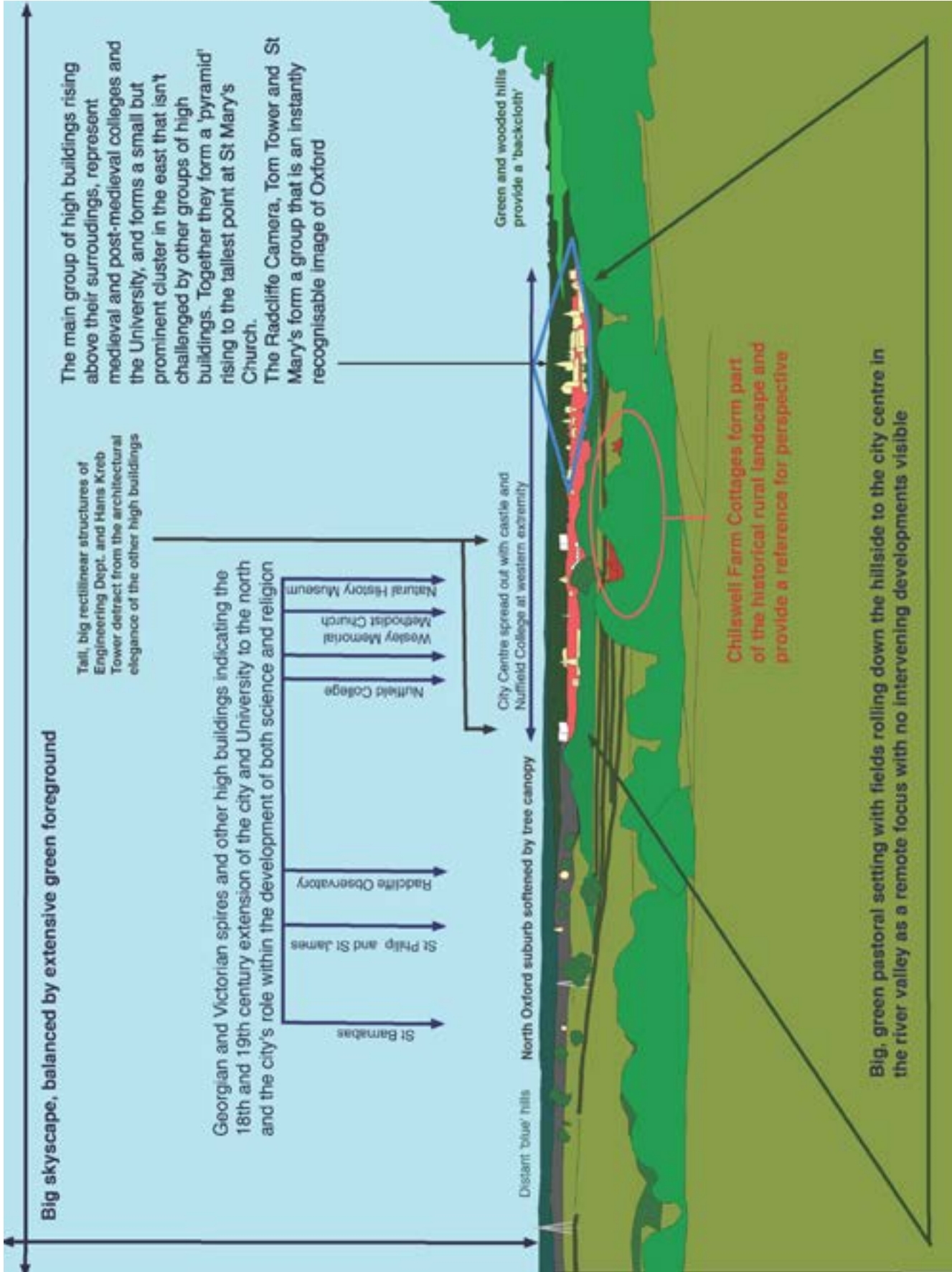
*Photograph of the view from Boars Hill*

Figure 2.2.2



*Illustration 1: Simplified render of the view from Boars Hill*

Figure 2.2.3  
 Illustration 2: Annotated  
 render of the view from  
 Boars Hill



## 2.3 Hinksey Hill A34 Interchange View Analysis Summary

### 2.3.1 Introduction

Recognising the prospect of the city from a modern highways interchange as a significant view may be surprising to many. However, the A34 Hinksey Interchange is in fact the site of a much older meeting of highways. It marks the point where the high road from Oxford to Abingdon over the Cumnor Hills, met the route along the west side of the Thames valley through South and North Hinksey. This has been the first view of Oxford seen by many travellers approaching from the south since the Middle Ages.

J. M.W. Turner's paintings of this view highlight the broad expanse of the floodplain with the city's historic high buildings seen at eyelevel as distant pinnacles against the sky. In his more mature work, dating from 1818 the pairing of Tom Tower and All Saints' Church (Lincoln College Library) provides a central focus to the view, whilst the grouping of St Mary the Vigin Church Spire and the Radcliffe Camera's dome

is supported by the shorter spire of Christ Church Cathedral and provides a mass to the left that adds to this focus. Other artists have focused on this central area.

The building of the interchange cemented the role of this point as the first point of arrival for many travellers approaching Oxford from southern England. The interchange provided a raised platform from which motorists would see the famous skyline across the green landscape of the valley. However, the development of dense foliage surrounding the interchange now makes it hard to see this view, whilst the two lines of pylons running up the valley from the south dominate the landscape setting of the city.

### 2.3.2 The Viewers

This view provides a shared experience that provides a connection between past and present viewers. As a result the view can gain significance from those who have seen



*Oxford from the Abingdon Road by J. M. W. Turner (engraved by J. Pye), 1818 © Crown copyright: UK Government Art Collection*





it before, including artists and writers who have portrayed it in the past. This view is one of those portrayed by J. M. W. Turner both in his childhood and later in his career and was a regularly reproduced image in the 19th century. It has been an important view for travellers arriving on the edges of Oxford, looking down from the Abingdon Road across the green Valley

of the River Thames to the City Centre with its famous skyline. It continues to be the first view of the city that travellers arriving from the south have the opportunity to see and forms a link in the chain of views that are seen by walkers and others enjoying the routes along the line of hills west of Oxford.

### 2.3.3 Present Viewers

<b>People traveling on the A34 and A423 into Oxford</b>	This view is seen by hundreds of people everyday as they arrive in Oxford either from the A34 or descending from Hinksey Hill. Although the view from the interchange is currently screened from view by the thick vegetation on the embankment, the view is still seen looking from the A423 southern bypass between the interchange and the junction with Abingdon Road. For vehicle passengers this is likely to be a fleeting view but nevertheless is significant as a first view of the city from an arrival point in the south.
<b>Local residents</b>	Whilst the roadside environment is not an attractive prospect for a leisurely walk the footpath running alongside the A423 is still used by pedestrians and cyclists from nearby areas as part of a route between Oxford and Kennington and Hinksey Hill, to which the view to the historic city and rural setting of the meadows adds considerably to the otherwise unexceptional highways landscape.
<b>Walkers, joggers and cyclists</b>	The interchange and roadside footpath form a link in the routes from the city to the hillside walks from Hinksey Hill to Harcourt Hill that are enjoyed by many as recreational routes through Oxford's countryside setting, to which the views down to the city provide a unique historic and aesthetic value.
<b>Vale of White Horse District Council and Oxfordshire County Council</b>	Designated view cone shown on both district and city council's local plan map and forming part of the Green Belt designated by the Secretary of State, County, District and City Councils to protect the historic character of Oxford.

### 2.3.4 Viewers in the Past

<b>Travellers approaching Oxford</b>	This is likely to have been part of a route to Oxford and to the midlands from southern England since at least the late Middle Ages and will have been seen by many travellers descending the hill as their first view of Oxford and its famous skyline.
<b>J. M. W. Turner, copied and reproduced as an engraving in the 19th century</b>	Turner painted this view twice. Once in 1787 as a child in a relatively naïve style (and with a number of discrepancies in the topographic detail) and again as a more accurate topographic view in (or shortly before) 1818. The latter painting was engraved and replicated, reaching a wider audience.
<b>Other 19th century artists</b>	Other artists used this view as a subject in the early and mid 19th century, using the hill slopes to frame the views of the valley, including the meandering course of the River Thames, which leads the eye up to the two groups of historic high buildings. Generally, these use foreground figures (including animals) to emphasise the bucolic character of the setting in contrast with the urbane subject of the city's architecture. Locating academics in the rural foreground setting is also a common motif used, emphasising the contrast of city and country. Examples include Mackenzie and Keux View of Oxford, from the Abingdon Road used in James Ingram's Memorials of Oxford 1837, J. Jackson engraving, c. 1845 and Joseph Skelton's engraving "after Malchair" (c. 1820).

### 2.3.5 The Viewing Place

Where you see the view from can add to its significance through its historic associations as well as the visual aspects of the view and the viewing experience. Today the interchange of roads on Hinksey Hill is an unpleasant place, dominated by traffic and its associated noise and odour. However in the past this was an important point on the road network, providing the first view of Oxford from the south as the traveller descended the hill along the Abingdon Road. It provides a point in the

Oxford Green Belt from which the historic city can be appreciated in its landscape setting. The construction of the road interchange in the 1960s enhanced this viewpoint by providing a raised viewing platform. The viewpoint is now a point that thousands of motorists pass through everyday, making it one of the city's most visited viewing places. However, the growth of trees on the road embankment has now obscured the view from the interchange itself and requires management to open this out again.

Part of the historic Abingdon Road	The antiquity of this route may not be apparent to many of today's travellers arriving via the A34 (Oxford's southern bypass), although it may be more obvious to those travelling down the narrow green route of the older high road Hinksey Hill (the A4183) from Abingdon or Boars Hill. Abingdon was the County town of Berkshire in the Middle Ages and the location of one of the country's largest monasteries. As such the route between the two towns is likely to have been a significant thoroughfare.
The first view of Oxford from the south	Today the interchange is important as the point where motorists leave the A34 trunk road to enter Oxford from the south. Up to this point the road is too low in the valley to afford a prospect of the city but from the interchange the first view to the city is seen.
Part of the Green Belt	Designated in 1958 and reviewed through local plans since then recognises that seeing Oxford in its landscape setting is part of the city's special character.
A new viewing point	Although this is an ancient viewing point, the construction of the ring road in the 1960s created an accentuated platform at the interchange providing a new raised viewing place from which the city could be seen. The importance of the resultant view as a part of Oxford's green setting was recognised in the 1980s.



*The historic high buildings of the City Centre are seen as a distant group across farmland. The photograph illustrates the impact of tree growth and the pylons on the view.*



**2.3.6 The Landscape in the View**

This is a medium distance view of the city looking across the green rural landscape of the Thames Valley floodplain. Within the framing of the hills to the east and west the City Centre is seen at the end of an extensive green middle ground with the historic high buildings rising above the general level of the rooftops of the city and without structures in the background to compete with them. The mass of building of Christ Church are seen from the south, forming a large block of limestone buildings with Tom Tower and All Saints' Church provided a focus to the view at the centre of the skyline. To the right, the Radcliffe Camera and the

spire of St Mary the Virgin Church provide a second focus to the view combining two of the most memorable features of the city skyline. Comparison with historical portrayals of this view demonstrate that the historic experience recorded at the beginning of the 19th century is still recognisable, partly due to the screening of the later 19th and 20th century suburbs of South Oxford on the right hand side of the view by lies of mature trees. Unfortunately the overgrown hedgerows and developing tree canopy in the foreground and on the edge of the City Centre currently obscures the view from the viewing place restricting the opportunity to appreciate it.

**2.3.7 Context:**

<b>From the Western Hills</b>	This is the most southerly of the views from the hills to the west of Oxford looking north east over farmland from the edge of the wooded slopes of the hill.
<b>Next to a busy road</b>	This makes viewing the city a noisy experience with the unsettling feeling of passing vehicles. For motorists the view is likely to be fleeting, if seen at all, although many commuters could see it on a daily basis.

**2.3.8 Topography and layout of the view:**

<b>A medium distance view looking across the undeveloped floodplain</b>	The City Centre's historic high buildings are seen in the middle distance, some indistinctly but with sufficient clarity to make out the architectural features of the largest structures. No intervening development in the floodplain blocks the view to the City Centre.
<b>From the edge of the embankment</b>	The steep embankment next to the interchange provides a platform from which the view over the floodplain in the middle ground to the City Centre should be unhindered by hedges and trees lines. However, at present the embankment is covered by foliage which is blocking the view.
<b>Rural middle ground setting to the city centre</b>	The fields of the floodplain in the middle ground reflect the historic pastoral setting of the city that was admired by artists and writers in the past and continues to be both an aesthetically pleasing setting for views to the city and provides historical value to the city by illustrating the relationship of the city with its agricultural surroundings.
<b>City Centre as the horizon</b>	The historic high buildings of the City Centre form prominent features on the horizon seen in the distance as a line of spires against the sky. Lower buildings are screened by the foliage of trees on the city edge.  No other buildings are seen in the background to the view giving the historic high buildings an important role as the end point of the vista.

**2.3.9 Green Characteristics:**

<b>Green fields and hedgerows</b>	The fields in the foreground and mid ground provide the green setting to the view of the City Centre that is part of both its attractiveness and sustain the historical experience of seeing the city in its green valley setting.
-----------------------------------	--

<b>Trees marking the railway and on the city edge</b>	The trees draw the eye up to the City Centre and contribute to the green character of the city's setting. They mark the course of the railway line, which is an historic feature, but also help to hide the engineered landscape of the modern trackside. They also screen the late 19th and 20th century suburbs of New Hinksey and Cold Harbour running down the Abingdon Road from the view, helping to preserve the green character of the city's setting.
---	--

### 2.3.10 Architectural Characteristics:

<b>The historic high buildings</b>	The historic high buildings rise in a line across the central part of the view with a broad area to either side without high features visible. Nuffield College's spire marks the edge of the skyline on the left (west) side, whilst the dome of the Radcliffe Camera marks an edge on the right, with Magdalen College's tower providing an outlying high building (originally located outside the City Centre).  As a group the buildings share a common palette of materials and a vertical emphasis contributing to the famous spiky skyline interrupted by the curvaceous forms of domes.
<b>Two focal groups</b>	The pairing of Tom Tower and All Saints Church spire lies close to the centre of the view and provides the initial focus, which then moves to the right where a second pairing is seen of St Mary's Church Spire and the Radcliffe Camera's dome, providing building on the skyline and the most instantly recognisable.

### 2.3.11 Infrastructure:

<b>The railway</b>	The railway line is a feature of historic interest, the construction of which influenced Oxford's continuing development in the 19th century although the modern engineered landscape is unlikely to make a positive aesthetic contribution.
<b>The pylons</b>	The Pylons and power lines that cross the view are a major feature of infrastructure but are considered to mainly be a detractor in this view (see below)

### 2.3.12 The Influence of light and the Seasons:

<b>Seasonal Changes</b>	The green character of the view is likely to be strongly affected by changes in the seasons as foliage changes in colour. There is likely to be some flooding in the low-lying meadows in the middle ground during the winter. Adding a waterscape to the view.
<b>Sunlight and optimum viewing conditions</b>	The view is north facing and is likely to be well lit on most sunny days. For the optimum viewing conditions the view is best seen with dark clouds in the background and the City Centre's historic high buildings illuminated by direct sunlight.

### 2.3.13 Detractors:

<b>The pylons</b>	The pylons are massive structures with an industrial quality to their design, which dominate this view. They are seen as considerably larger than the historic high buildings whilst the connecting power lines join them up to give them even greater visual presence in the view. Despite their 'see-through' quality they out-compete the historic high buildings from the viewer's attention.
<b>The overgrown embankment and the disappearing view</b>	The foliage around the interchange has grown to a point where the view is largely hidden from the viewing place. A view can still be seen from the A423 above Redbridge Hollow.
<b>Temporary buildings at Redbridge Hollow</b>	The small settlement of temporary dwellings for travelling families at Redbridge Hollow has reduced the undeveloped, rural quality of the foregrounds. The single-storey structures do have the benefit of being less visible than larger conventional houses might be.
<b>Poor quality viewing environment</b>	The noise, business of passing traffic and noxious exhaust fumes of motor vehicles combine to make this a poor quality viewing environment in spite of the efforts to provide carefully managed and planted verges to the traffic intersection.



*Current View of Hinksey Interchange view*

**2.3.14 Sensitivity to Change:**

<p><b>Potential for enhancement of the viewing place</b></p>	<p>Potential for the enhancement of the roadside environment is limited and is likely to be constrained by the needs of highways safety. However, lowering of the roadside hedgerow would provide views out towards the City Centre.</p>
<p><b>Increased and continuing loss of view through lack of management of roadside scrub</b></p>	<p>Without adequate management it is likely the area from which the view cannot be seen will continue to grow. Whilst this might be regarded as a temporary harm to the view there is potential that the inability to appreciate and understand its value will result in inadequate consideration of the impacts of other change on the view.</p> <p>The current screening of the view is resulting in ongoing loss of value to the city of the experience of viewing its world famous skyline at a major arrival point in the city and a corresponding loss of the city's status.</p>
<p><b>Change in the rural foreground and middle ground</b></p>	<p>Loss of the green, open and rural character of the foreground and middle ground would result in harm to the view by disrupting the role it plays as the rustic contrast with the sublime architecture of the City Centre that has been admired over the centuries.</p>
<p><b>Change on the city edge</b></p>	<p>At present the lower scale 'brickish skirt' of the 19th and 20th century suburbs that surrounds the City Centre is hidden from view by tree lines that allow the City's historic high buildings and City Centre roofscape to be appreciated in direct contrast with the historic rural landscape. Development that raises the scale of the suburbs, such that they appear as an intervention between the City Centre and countryside setting would be regarded as resulting in harm to the view.</p>
<p><b>Change in the City Centre</b></p>	<p>The positive features of the City Centre skyline depend on the visibility and prominence of the historic high buildings as the focus of the view and the character and grain of the lower level city roofscape as a complex mass of short lengths of steeply pitched roofs representing a historic City Centre. Development that does not reinforce these characteristics would result in harm to the value of the view.</p>



Figure 2.3.1



*Photograph of the view from the A420*

Figure 2.3.2



*Illustration 1: Simplified render of the view from the A420*

Figure 2.3.3  
 Illustration 2: Annotated  
 render of the view from  
 the A420

