

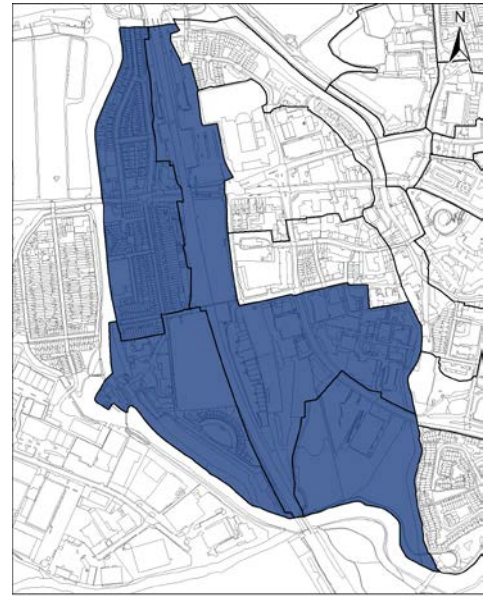
**HISTORIC URBAN CHARACTER AREA 3:
OSNEY ISLAND - TRANSPORT AND BUSINESS**

**The HUCA is located within broad character Zone A:
Osney Island**

This broad character zone comprises of the bulk of Osney Island, a sub oval Island which formed by two channels of the Thames River (the parish of St Thomas and land to the north, although also part of Osney, has been separated into a different zone). This part of Osney consists of Victorian and 20th century development around the railway and the site of medieval Oseney Abbey.

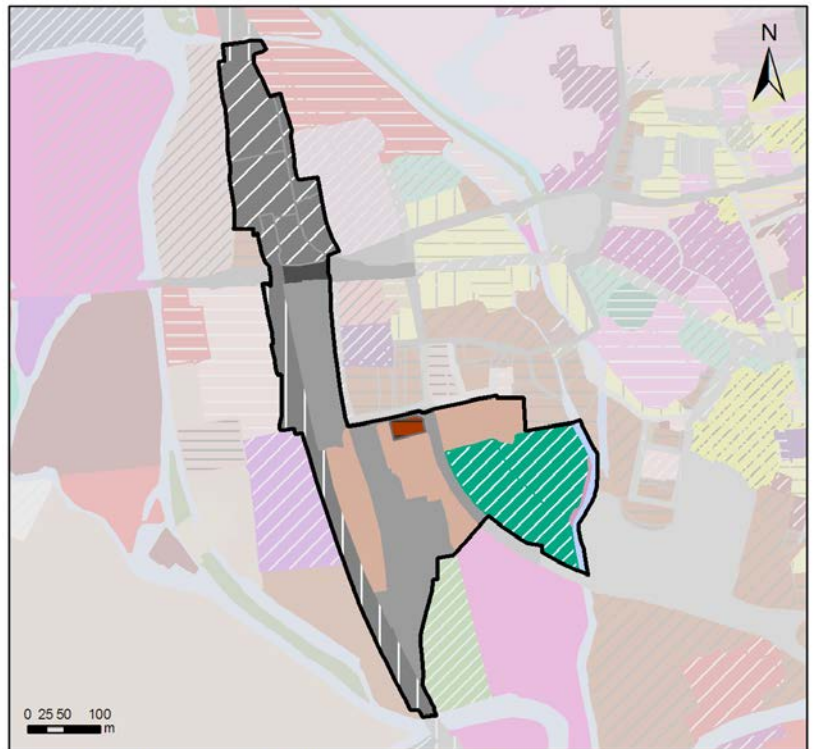
Summary characteristics

- Dominant period: 20th century.
- Designations: Scheduled Ancient Monument (Railway Swing Bridge County Mon. No. 175). Small part of Central Conservation Area.
- Archaeological Interest: The area contains part of the precinct of medieval Oseney Abbey and the projected line of the Royalist Civil War defences (under Oxford Cherwell Valley College). A series of water channels crossed this area in the post-medieval to early modern period and may preserve water management features. Notable Railway infrastructure includes the former sites of the goods shed and GWR station and an extant scheduled 19th century swing bridge.
- Character: Large industrial, commercial and educational buildings, car parks and the modern railway station.
- Spaces: Low density of development. Several open spaces are provided by railway corridor, adjacent scrubland, car parks and derelict spaces. The Oxford Cherwell Valley College campus maintains areas of lawn and tree cover.
- Road morphology: Irregular access roads, crossed east-west by the post medieval Botley Road and the modern inner ring road (intended to bypass the town centre in Christ Church meadow but never completed).



Osney Island (Zone A)

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HUCA 3

OAP Characterisation

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Blocks of Flats 1945-1980 | Lane |
| Schools & Colleges post 1945 | Major road scheme |
| Universities post 1800 | Transport infrastructure/links |
| Industrial | Railway |
| Water feature | Rail station |
| Medieval long distance route | |

Historic urban character area showing modern urban landscape character types.

- Plot morphology: Large irregular planned plots for railway, educational and commercial use.
- The underlying geology largely comprises the alluvial floodplain at a height of around 57m OD with a small outcrop of the Northmoor First Terrace underlying the College area.
- Survival of townscape elements:
 - Line of 19th century railway.
 - Sheepwash Channel (Rewley Abbey Channel).
 - 19th century scheduled railway Swing Bridge.
 - Façade of St Thomas the Martyrs School and wall along Osney Lane.
 - Mature pollards west of railway line.
 - Castle Mill Back Stream defines eastern boundary of character area.

Description

The Character Area comprises of an irregular block of land broadly defined by the railway corridor stretching from the railway bridge over the River Thames to the south northwards to the old LNWR swing bridge over the Rewley Abbey (Sheepwash) channel. Adjacent plots that have been used for the railway station and associated infrastructure, car parking, modern commercial and educational use have been included. The modern railway is largely concealed by embankments and vegetation. The northern part of the character area is dominated by the modern simply designed railway station and associated surface car parks. The Botley Road crosses the character area east-west and drops down under the railway line. The eastern part of the character area is occupied by a mixture of mostly purpose built modern office, industrial and educational buildings. The southern part of the area comprises of plain single storey uniform rectangular business units alongside the railway, a modern postal sorting depot and large area of hard standing and scrub. The area includes part of the east-west route of the post medieval Botley Road Causeway which was re-cut under the 19th century railway and Oxpens Road completed in 1931. The mostly three or four storey Further Education College was purpose built in 1965-71.



Oxford Railway Station looking north

Historical value- means of connecting with the past

Oseney or Osney Island is believed to have been formed in the late Saxon period as a result of artificial channelling of the River Thames in order to create the channel now known as Castle Mill Stream. The word 'Osney' is first mentioned in 1004 and is thought to be a personal name meaning 'Osa's Island' combining the name Osa or Osna with 'ey' the Old English word for an island. Alternatively the name may derive from the ancient British word for river - 'ouse'. Documentary evidence suggests a small settlement or manor likely existed here in the Late Saxon period, an estate at Oseney was devised by Archbishop Alfric of Canterbury (d. 1005) to St. Alban's abbey. The first firm evidence of settled activity occurs in the 12th century with the foundation of Osney Abbey and the subsequent development of the suburb at St Thomas's located further to the west of the character area. The Augustinian Abbey was founded by Robert D'Oilly from his manor at South Osney. Roger D'Ivri was the other main landowner in Osney, his estate later known as North Osney, formed part of the foundation of Rewley Abbey in 1281. The site of the once grand Abbey church now lies below the railway and part of Becket Street Car Park. The detail of the early abbey layout is not known although its high medieval extent has been hypothesized, based on documentary evidence, cartographic sources and small scale excavations

and observations. After the Dissolution this area of Oxford lost its economic significance and reverted back to meadow and farmland.

The coming of the railway in the mid 19th century marked the first major period of development with the north-south aligned railway and station built by the Great Western Railway Company arriving in 1844, opening a station on the site of the modern station in 1852. A second adjacent line was opened up by the Buckinghamshire Railway in 1851, later becoming London and North Western



Botley Road railway bridge looking west

Railway. The surviving LNWR Swing Bridge (a scheduled ancient monument) is one of only two scheduled Swing Bridges in England and is the last significant hand-operated main-line rail Swing Bridge in existence in Britain. The 1876 1:500 Ordnance Survey map provides a fairly detailed map of the railway including the Pump Room adjacent to the Botley Road, the two Goods Sheds south of the road and the numerous switches and signal boxes along the line. The area to the east of the railway remained undeveloped until the 1930s when a recreation ground, cattle market, school and several industrial units were added.

The railway was subsequently extended with new sidings added along with the modern

Oxpens Road. The earliest buildings of the College of Further Education were established in the 1960s (this later became the Cherwell Valley College).

The present landscape has since been significantly redeveloped; the sidings have been replaced with modern low rise industrial units and commercial properties between the railway and Oxpens Road while to the east of the road the entire site has been redeveloped for the extended College of Further Education main campus. The extent of the north-south railway line has been reduced and redeveloped.

Due to the scale of redevelopment the character has limited illustrative value, however the swing bridge provides an excellent illustration of the competition between two competing 19th century railway companies (the rival line being situated adjacent on the current rail route) and of Victorian railway mechanics designed by Robert Stephenson.

Evidential value- potential to yield primary evidence

The Urban Archaeological Database records twelve archaeological events in the character area, comparatively few given its size. Stray finds from the area include several fragments of tile, possibly of a Saxon date, were recovered from Osney Lane in the 19th century. The area includes part of the precinct of the medieval Osney Abbey, post-medieval water channels, the former site of the GWR station and Osney Goods shed, also the projected line of the Royalist Civil War defences. It therefore has significant archaeological potential. Built fabric of note includes the nationally important 19th century swing bridge and the early 20th century St Thomas' the Martyr School on Osney Lane which includes a red brick frontage and iron railings of local interest.

Aesthetic value- sensory and intellectual stimulation

The area has limited aesthetic appeal, the principal open spaces comprising derelict spaces and low quality industrial units that detract from the character of the railway. The modern redesigned campus of the Cherwell Valley College has notable areas of green space and tree cover. The iron and wood swing bridge on the Sheepwash Channel is awaiting further renovation and improved presentation and has aesthetic interest for those inspired by the machinery of the railway age. The structure currently remains an overlooked and marginal part of the townscape, glimpsed by passengers arriving into Oxford Station from the adjacent railway bridge.

Communal value- meaning for collective experience and memory

The character area has communal value as a transport hub containing the city railway station and long stay car parks and as a focus of continuing education provided by Oxford Cherwell Valley College. It preserves a number of evocative remnants from the Railway Age.

Version: 18/6/2012

