

To: Cabinet
Date: 29 May 2019
Report of: Acting Head of Planning Services
Title of Report: Extension to Central (City & University) Conservation Area

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To approve the extension of the Central (City & University) Conservation Area
Key decision:	Yes
Cabinet Member:	Planning and Transport
Corporate Priority:	A Vibrant and Sustainable Economy; An Efficient and Effective Council
Policy Framework:	Local Plan 2036
Recommendation: That Cabinet resolves to:	
1. Approve the proposed new conservation area boundary to include all areas proposed on the map at Appendix 2.	

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Maps of proposed inclusion areas
Appendix 2	Map of new conservation area boundary
Appendix 3	Consultation responses (precis)

Introduction and background

1. The conservation area was designated in April 1971 and reviewed on four subsequent occasions, the last being in 1998. Although there is a short overview document, an appraisal was not carried out until the Spring/Summer 2018. This draft appraisal went to public consultation from 3 September – 26 October 2018. Comments received indicated that there were other areas which would be considered worthy of designation if they were appraised as well.
2. The Planning Service originally aimed to appraise these other areas and if necessary amend the boundary in time for the Local Plan submission on 22 March 2019. Following public consultation in February 2019, it became clear that

further consideration of these proposals was required. A precis of the consultation responses can be found at appendix 3. The City Executive Board approved this time for further consideration on 13 March 2019.

3. Conservation Areas must comply with the definition given in s.69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990: *'an area of architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which is it desirable to preserve or enhance'*. Each area recommended below is considered to fulfil that requirement. The designation is not a means of preventing development, but as a means of identifying areas where change should be managed to prevent harm to the existing character. Not every building or structure within a conservation area can be considered to contribute positively to the character, but the inter-relationships between the buildings and their spaces often provide a template for the process of managed change.

Areas proposed for inclusion

4. **St Thomas'**: one of the earliest suburbs outside the city walls (extramural), this area developed along a direct route between Osney Abbey and Oxford Castle. The road was moved in 1769, and St Thomas' Street became a quieter, more residential area with Victorian tenements and terraces. To the north, Park End Street and Hythe Bridge Road attracted light industrial and commercial businesses, including interwar show rooms for the motor industry. The late-Victorian terrace fronting Frideswide Square is well-preserved, and complements the 1902 Cooper's Marmalade Factory to the east.
5. The distinct 'town' character of the area, together with its medieval route and surviving buildings of architectural quality, makes it comparable with the already-included extramural suburb of Holywell. The light industrial and commercial elements of the area make it comparable with the areas identified as the Western Fringe along the Castle Mill Stream, river, and canal. The ambience within the area is that of a distinct and separate place away from the city centre, but incorporating elements of it which connect it back to the buildings on the other side of the river.
6. There are two areas proposed for inclusion: 39-42a Hythe Bridge Street; and two blocks south of Park End Street and Frideswide Square, fronting Park End Street, Frideswide Square, the northern half of Becket Street, Hollybush Row, and nos. 1-5 Osney Lane. The area does not propose to include Rowland Hill Court.
7. Justification: 39-42a Hythe Bridge Street relate mainly to the crossing of the Castle Mill and Wareham Streams, being part of an historic route into the city. Nos 39-42 date from the period of slum clearance in the 1930s, and combine the large openings of Georgian windows with the simple pilasters and capitals of 1930s restrained classicism. They were designed to complement the growing motoring trade which was thriving on the south side of the road. No 42a is from c.1868, with gothic feature and a steeply pitched roof. With the dual purpose of chapel and school, it was built to replace a floating chapel at Fisher Row, and served the boating community on the canal. The buildings have a collective character that illustrates Oxford's built development and close relationship to the nearby waterways, as well as the social connection to renewing and replacing buildings with those which are sympathetic to their surroundings.

8. **University Science Quarter:** buildings connected to the furthering of scientific research were erected around and to the east of the University Museum after its construction in 1860. Formalisation of the study of science at the university was established in the early 20th century, during which time there was greater growth in the construction of purpose-built science buildings. Development has continued with large buildings such as Physical Chemistry (1939-40) and Inorganic Chemistry (1954-60) buildings, the Zoology and Psychology building (1970), and into the present day with Biochemistry (2009) and Physics (2018). The greater majority of Victorian houses on the south side of South Parks Road were removed to facilitate this.
9. Continuous development and reinvention is a key part of the character of the area, with all the buildings being 'of their time' and relevant to their specific science use. This has created an area which is somewhat eclectic in architectural style, but with a homogenous purpose. It reflects the development of the city as a site for world-renowned scientific research, and contains buildings of good architectural quality.

Justification: The area is a physical demonstration of the commitment to scientific research within the city; rather than go outside the city centre, the University chose in the mid-19th century to base its science development around the existing museum, and has continued to grow in that location. Each building is of its time, reflecting its original use, and most have been adapted to reflect the changes in research since that time. New buildings such as the Chemistry Research Laboratory and the Beecroft Building continue this established trend.

Architecturally and historically, the area fulfils the designation criteria. It has a clear science-based character, which has changed to suit the needs of the time: the linear buildings of the early/mid-20th century are giving way to larger floor plates to support different machinery required for research. Due to these continuous changes, the area has retained its original science character and appearance, and it is the desire of the Council to see this continue.

10. Management of this area would seek to sustain and reinforce its education and research character by promoting the established high standards of architecture that the university is known for; constraining this by requiring the retention of non-architecturally significant buildings which were no longer fit for scientific research purposes would be contrary to the purpose of designation. For this reason, the management section of the appraisal will contain clear information to distinguish the architecturally significant buildings from those which continue to contribute to the character, but have less to offer to the area's appearance.

Areas considered for inclusion but rejected

11. **Keble Road triangle:** originally the site of several 19th century dwellings with open countryside to the north, the site gained its first university building in the early 20th century. The most striking buildings now on the site were constructed in the 1960s, and are notable in policy terms for being the catalyst for creating height guidelines for future development within the city. Later buildings have continued in university engineering use, and have been designed to be 'of their time' in the same manner as the earlier Jenkin and Denys Wilkinson buildings.
12. The structures here have some architectural merit and historical interest to both the North Oxford Conservation Area to the north, and the Central Conservation

Area to the south. It is a transitional area, containing both town and gown functions and appearances.

13. Justification: While the area does have some buildings of architectural merit, and it is a part of the university's historic development, it lacks a cohesive appearance or character. Without this defined character, the designation requirement of 'preserve and enhance' is not present. Some of the mid-20th century buildings are nearing the end of their lifespan, and it may be that when the area is next reviewed, it has a more clearly visible character that is of comparable value to the remainder of the conservation area. However, until such a character is established, it does not fulfil the designation criteria.
14. **Radcliffe Infirmary Buildings:** Constructed in 1759-67, the handsome Palladian infirmary buildings and associated Chapel of St Luke are listed at Grade II* and Grade II, together with the central courtyard fountain. The buildings are of high historic and architectural interest, which is reflected by their listed status, and they are of comparable quality of appearance as the majority of the existing Central Conservation Area. The remainder of the site is either already protected by being within the North Oxford Conservation Area, or not of comparable worthiness for inclusion.
15. Justification: As the first hospital in Oxford, the infirmary was deliberately sited within fields outside the built-up area of the city centre. This was a common practice with early hospitals, as this was thought to reduce the spread of disease. Historically, therefore, it has little physical relationship to the city, and instead is more closely related to the observatory and North Oxford. The buildings and their courtyard layout fulfil the criteria to be considered worthy of designation, but are more suited to the North Oxford Victorian Suburbs Conservation Area. When the review of that area is undertaken, it is recommended that the buildings are included at that time. Until then, they are protected in planning terms by virtue of their statutory listing.
16. **The Island Site:** part of the St Thomas' area, the Island Site is the roughly triangular area of land between Hythe Bridge Street and Park End Street, containing the former light industrial and commercial buildings of King's Motors and Hartwell's.
17. Justification for recommendation: The quality of the buildings is not considered to be commensurate with the existing conservation area, and this has deteriorated since their construction. The exception is the Royal Oxford Hotel (1935) which has been altered, but still maintains a strong presence over Frideswide Square. Forming the east side of the square, this building is already on the Oxford Heritage Asset Register (OHAR). Historically, the area shows the development of Oxford as a centre for the car industry. As this commercial and light industrial use has since relocated outside the city centre, the physical connections to this past have deteriorated. While there are small elements of it remaining, collectively the area does not have the level of distinctive character or appearance that the Council would strive to preserve. It therefore does not fulfil the designation criteria.

Other implications

18. Consultation and communications: the first part of the Conservation Area appraisal was made available to the public for comment during September and October 2018, during which time suggestions for possible boundary extensions were made. Based on those suggestions, officers have carefully considered both the proposals, and the subsequent responses to the consultation on those proposals. The recommended boundary alterations are therefore the direct result of public consultation triggering further assessment of the area.

Financial implications

19. There are no direct financial implications other than the costs associated with the statutorily required advertising of the designation in the London Gazette and local newspapers, and the wider publicising of the designation in the locality.

Legal issues

20. The Council would be failing in its duty under Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 if it declined to review the existing conservation area and to designate areas where it had determined the area to have special architectural or historic interest.

Equalities impact

21. The inclusion of the proposed areas within the Central (City and University) Conservation Area is not considered to be detrimental or have an impact upon the protected characteristics. An Equalities Impact Assessment is therefore unnecessary for this recommendation.

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Background Papers: None	
1	Oxford Central (City and University) Conservation Area Boundary Review Consultation Report

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