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Botley Road Retail Park

Development Brief
September 2022



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DRAFT

Contents

1	Opportunity for Development.....	4
2	Need for a Development Brief.....	5
3	What the Development Brief will do.....	7
4	Vision	8
5	Policy Context	9
6	Site Context and Use	16
7	Access and Movement.....	18
8	Design and Layout	20

Figure Table

Figure 1: Map of the Site	4
Figure 2: Policy Map	6
Figure 3: Botley Road Retail Park	7
Figure 4: Flood Map.....	10
Figure 5: Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme	11
Figure 6: View from St. George's Tower - produced under licence from Vu.City	13
Figure 7: Historic Liberty Boundary.....	14
Figure 8: Constraints Diagram	19
Figure 9: Opportunities Diagram	21
Figure 10: Height Sensitivity Diagram	22

1 Opportunity for Development

- 1.1 Botley Road Retail Park is a large retail park within the western edge of the city boundary. Built from the 1980s, it features many large single storey retail stores with associated parking, belonging to familiar brands in homewares, consumer electronics and DIY. The retail park borders Botley Road to the North, open meadow to the South with small scale residential properties to the East on Earl Street, Lamarsh Road, Brock Grove and opposite on the Botley Road.
- 1.2 The site area is 9.8 ha. Despite being a distinct area of retail uses, the ownership of the retail park is fragmented between different owners holding both freehold and leaseholds on the site.
- 1.3 The site is well connected, a 15-20 minute walk to Oxford Station, on the Oxford Cycle Network, major bus routes in and out of the city centre and is located opposite Seacourt Park and Ride.

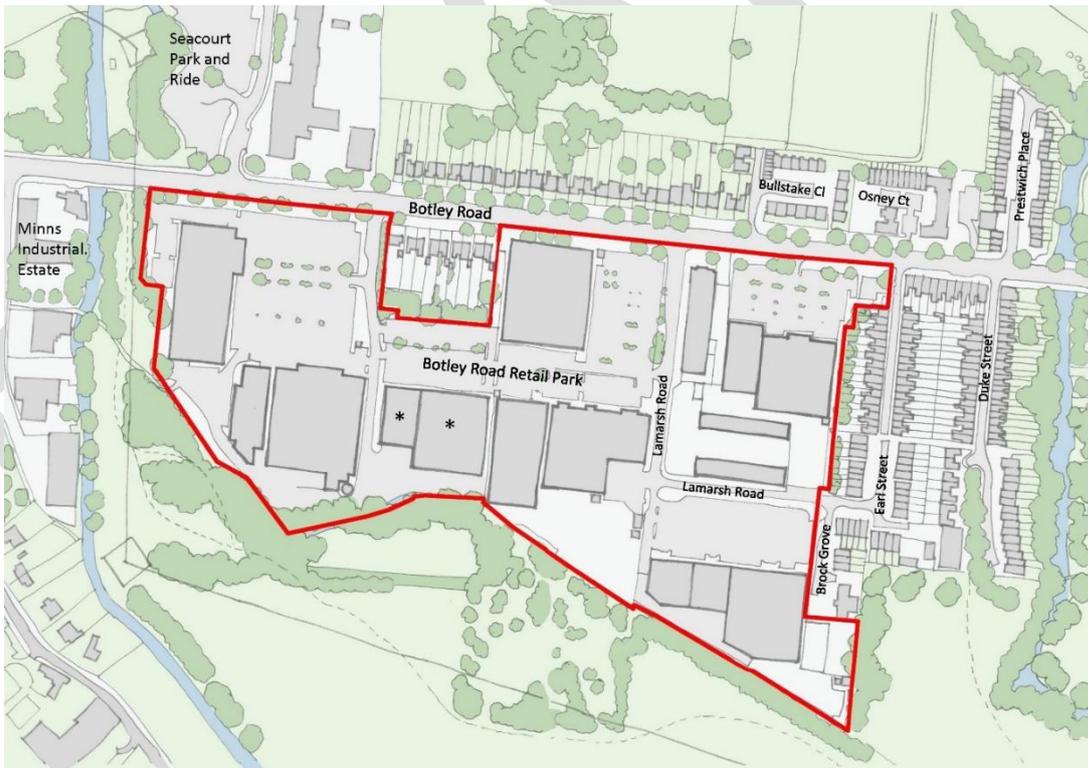


Figure 1: Map of the Site

2 Need for a Development Brief

- 2.1 The retail environment has been changing over recent times and this change has been accelerated by the Covid pandemic. At the Botley retail park there are a number of empty units and, the current use may not continue. Furthermore, there has been landowner interest and a successful planning application for the conversion of two retail units to R&D use. This level of change occurring at the retail park has been exacerbated by the Government making significant changes to the Use Classes Order¹. A single Use Class E Commercial, Business and Service, has been created which removes the need for a change of use application between retail and most employment uses. These retail units can change to employment uses (offices, R & D uses etc), if the buildings do not increase in size or external appearance without the benefit of obtaining planning permission. These incremental changes to the units over time means that the opportunities to enhance the area particularly by improving the public realm and connectivity to and through the site to the existing pedestrian and cycling network would not be available. Development could come forward in an uncoordinated way with complex site constraints dealt with on a piecemeal basis and opportunities to introduce and improve the standard of design and the public realm at this site missed.
- 2.2 The retail park sits outside the West End Spatial Framework and is not allocated, hence there is a lack of guidance on how change should be managed over and above citywide policies. The review of the Oxford Plan 2040 will take several years to be adopted. Hence there is need for some development guidance now for those interested in bringing forward development on this site to ensure any opportunities to enhance the area, despite its constraints, are optimised. In addition, for those developments that do require planning permission opportunities will be sought to seek contributions for public realm enhancements where applicable. Development coming forward on this site needs to consider how it will be undertaken to ensure that it does not preclude or sterilise the wider redevelopment of the retail park and its enhancement.

¹ [Town and Country Planning \(Use Classes\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2020](#)

2.3 This development brief is not a statutory document but will be a material consideration in decision making for this area. It has been produced in a timely manner to provide as much certainty and guidance as possible to landowners and developers during a time of rapid change.²

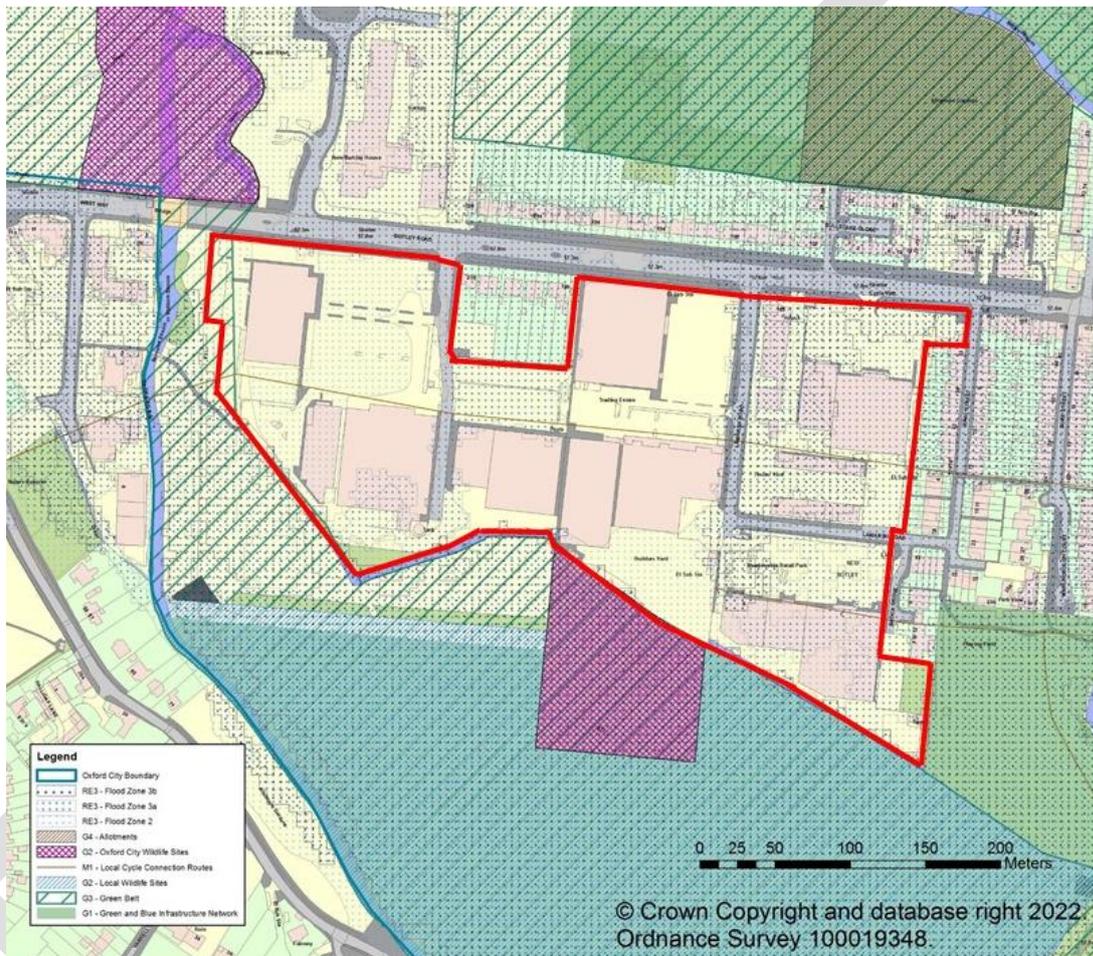


Figure 2: Policy Map

² At time of publication there has been no formal consultation on the brief, however we have sort to engage with interested parties. In addition, the brief is referenced in the Local Plan Preferred Options document development and sites chapter. This document will be subject to a six week public consultation as part of the Regulation 18 Consultation on the Local Plan 2040 which provides an opportunity to comment on the brief. This choice has been made to ensure that this brief is published in a timely manner in order to help and support those seeking to apply for planning permission in this area.

3 What the Development Brief will do

- 3.1 The development brief will feed into the development of the local plan and help the determination of any planning application made on the site now. The intention of a development brief is to provide guidance for whoever develops the site, providing certainty for the public and developers. The brief will help applicants make a successful planning application that can move more smoothly through the planning process because the potential for conflicts and objections is minimised.
- 3.2 The development brief is drafted with an understanding of the surrounding area setting land use and design principles such as landscape, access, parking, building height, scale and views. Engagement of the brief has been undertaken with City Council and Oxfordshire County Council officers and local landowners and developers. In addition, as stated earlier this brief is referenced in the Oxford Local Plan 2040 Preferred Options consultation and so will be available to comment as part of the six week consultation period.



Figure 3: Botley Road Retail Park

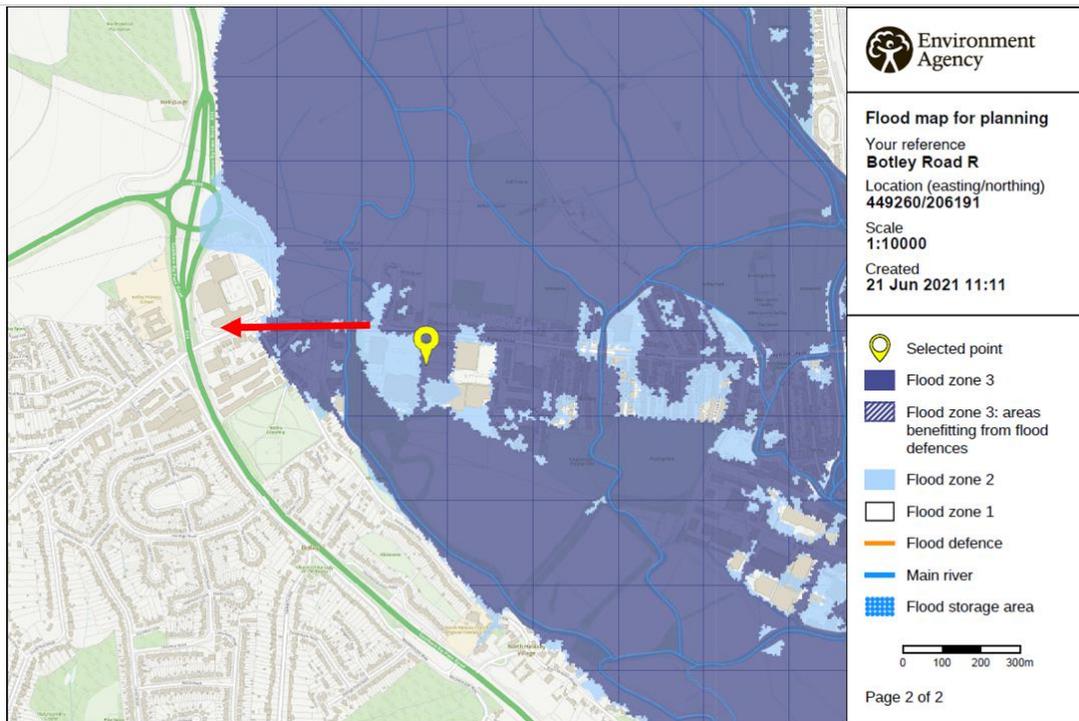
4 Vision

- 4.1 This development brief seeks to establish a vision for the area based on an understanding of the opportunities and constraints of the site, market trends and in line with the council's core priorities, to: Enable an inclusive economy; Deliver more affordable housing; Support thriving communities and pursue a zero carbon Oxford. It is informed by the foundations of the Oxford Economic Strategy which are **enabling a more inclusive economy, becoming a stronger global city and moving towards a zero-carbon economy**, the objectives of which effectively comprise of a 'triple bottom line.'
- 4.2 Key parts of Oxford's economy have prospered in recent years, particularly life sciences, healthcare, higher education, and technology sectors. Their growth has driven a high level of demand for suitable workspaces including offices, laboratories and other research spaces. The requirements are substantial and are not being adequately met by the city's current supply.
- 4.3 **Becoming a stronger global city** - Given the level of unmet demand for Commercial Research and Development Space and specific developer interest, it is expected that this will be the main driver of development on the site. However, there is also an opportunity to satisfy some of the technology sector's demand through previously developed sites such as this.
- 4.4 **Enabling a more inclusive economy** - The site presents opportunities as it could provide accommodation for a range of sectors and uses, such as the creative and digital industries, as well as affordable workspaces for start-ups, co-working spaces, and displaced employment uses from elsewhere or even community uses where feasible. Such diversity could promote an inclusive business environment and could attract a different selection of uses that would avoid duplicating or compromising the offer in areas such as the proposed Global Innovation District in the nearby West End or Oxford North.
- 4.5 **Moving towards a zero-carbon economy** - There is also a good opportunity to integrate features that are compatible with the transition towards zero carbon economy such as reducing car use to and from the site, providing infrastructure for EV charging, maximising the local options for sustainable travel, and integrating green and blue infrastructure within the footprint of the site to provide ecological functions and local amenity. We would welcome the inclusion of a car club at this location in order to provide a realistic alternative to dependence upon the private car.

5 Policy Context

5.1 Flooding - Most of the surrounding area lies within Flood Zones 3a or 3b, which indicates a significant flood risk. Based on the likely redline area, it is estimated that at least 50% of the site area would fall under FZ3a, particularly towards the eastern side of the site and a central section (a section on the eastern side of Lamarsh Road comes within FZ3b). The rest of site lies within FZ 2, with some patches showing low flood risk. The level of flood risk would have significant implications on the type and nature of development that would be permissible on the site, as well as where it can be located. Policy RE3 will not allow for development in FZ3b areas except for water compatible uses, essential infrastructure or where it is on previously developed land and it represents an improvement on the existing situation with regards to flood risk. The following policy criteria will apply to any new development:

- it will not lead to a net increase in the built footprint of the existing building and where possible lead to a decrease; and
- it will not lead to a reduction in flood storage (through the use of flood compensation measures) and where possible increase flood storage; and
- it will not lead to an increased risk of flooding elsewhere; and
- it will not put any future occupants of the development at risk.



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Figure 4: Flood Map of site area and surroundings – red arrow indicates nearest area of low flood risk outside of site boundary

- 5.2 New development will be directed towards areas of low flood risk (FZ1), with sequential and exception tests applied to other areas. Development proposals on this site would at a minimum be required to be accompanied by a site specific flood risk assessment. The suitability of development will be assessed according to the sequential approach and exceptions test as set out in the PPG. Safe Egress to a dry area is defined as ‘Very Low Risk’ on the Environment Agency Maps. Egress to this site is classified as ‘Danger to some’ or danger to most,’ hence, despite the overwhelming need for housing in Oxford, it has not been deemed suitable for residential use.

- 5.3 We consider that the site could be developed in accordance with local and national policy and in any event some of the site falls within Flood Zone 1. However, we emphasise that engagement with the EA would be sought for any development that comes forward on this site where development in the flood plain would be proposed. The height of buildings will be a consideration if the development involves raising the floors to provide void storage for flood water.
- 5.4 OFAS - The forthcoming Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme is planned to pass directly to the west of the site protecting settlements on Botley Road, however it is noted that this is meant to protect existing settlements only (not facilitate new developments) and the timeline for implementation is currently for completion in 2029. Furthermore, unlike the nearby Osney Mead, there is no single institutional landowner who could manage the evacuation of the site and accommodate residents elsewhere if the site was flooded.

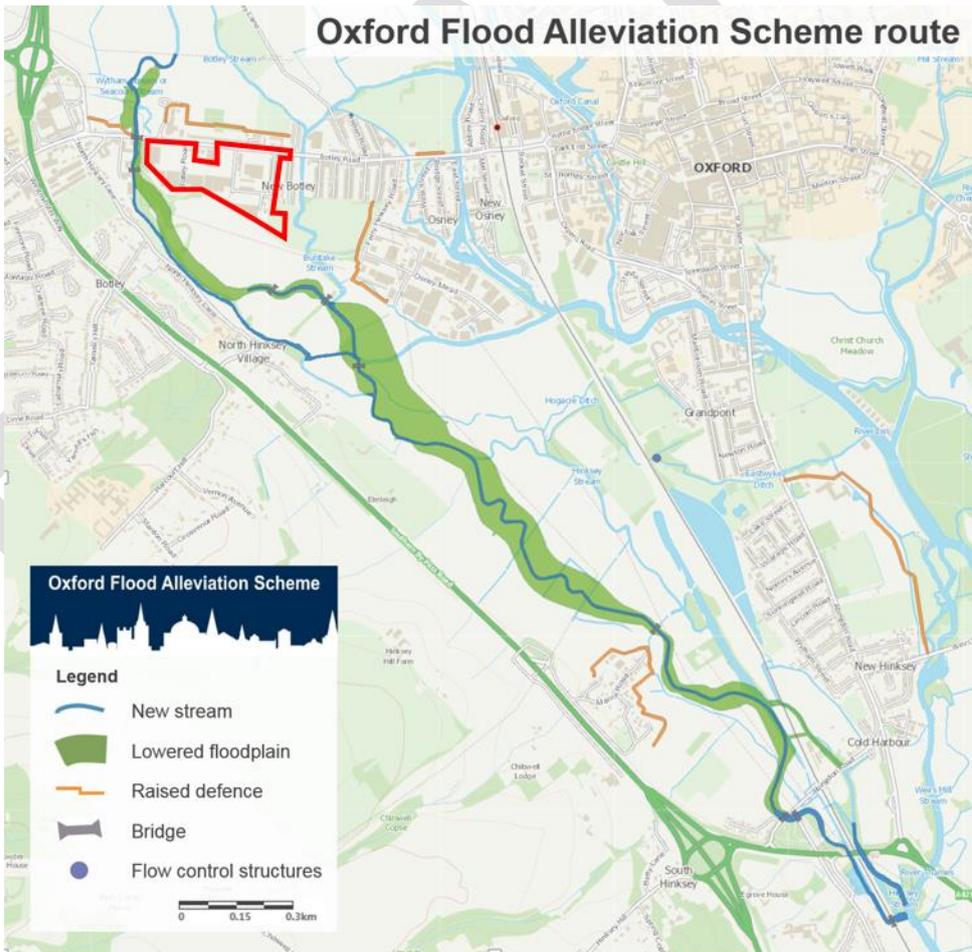


Figure 5: Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme

- 5.5 Land Use – Oxford adopts a sequential approach, consistent with that of the NPPF and set out in Policy V1, in assessing the suitability of the location of town centre uses, with the aim of ensuring that development takes place in the most appropriate site to meet identified needs. Oxford’s hierarchy of centres will be used to direct ‘town centre uses’ to the most appropriate location with regard to their scale, function and character. While priority will normally be given for centres higher on the hierarchy, the approach entails flexibility and will take into consideration broader factors such as the suitability of the proposed use, viability and the availability of appropriate locations. It should be noted that this by itself does not constitute a guarantee for approval of a development scheme.
- 5.6 The site is currently classed as an “edge of centre” location as defined by the NPPF. It is on a direct route to the city centre at a distance of about 1.6km (equivalent to about 15 to 20 minutes walking), with existing cycle routes along Botley Road – including a cycle route that goes through the site - although there is scope for this to be improved and better connected to the main road. The site benefits from several direct bus routes into the city centre. There is close proximity to Oxford Station, which is also serviced by the same bus routes. The site is close to a Strategic Road Network route (A34) and is almost directly opposite the Seacourt Park and Ride. Because of the range of options for local and regional connectivity, including sustainable travel modes it is considered that the site is highly accessible for the purposes of this sequential test.
- 5.7 The developer interest on this site has thus far centred on the provision of R & D and lab floorspace, and reflects the growth in this sector and the central part that Oxford plays with its unique attributes. In general terms there is scope for the expansion of R & D and lab space within the city, to that end there are a number of site allocations in the city centre, including strategic sites such as Osney Mead, Oxpens and others in the West End of the city, where R & D and related activities are expected to form the cornerstone of development that would come forward in the next few years. There are however physical and policy constraints to the degree to which such uses can expand within the centre, including protected green and blue spaces, conservation areas, as well as simple unavailability of land. The subject site with its present parameters and good level of accessibility and connectivity to the city centre provides an opportunity to add to the capacity to accommodate this demand in the context of stated constraints.

- 5.8 In promoting proposals, developers should consider desirability of providing a diverse land use offer that could go beyond replicating or even competing with developments that are expected to come through in the West End and other central sites. The site offers an opportunity to develop complementary uses and activities, as well as to help cater for the demand for floorspace in other key economic sectors as identified in the draft Economic strategy. In placemaking terms, there is an opportunity to create a location with its own unique character and offer that has the potential to be wholly distinct from other quarters in the city.
- 5.9 This Design Brief includes a narrative about making some appropriate suggestions regarding the type of employment opportunities that could be located here. Uses that would complement existing employment proposals coming forward elsewhere in the city, particularly those close by in the West End and at Osney Mead would be welcomed.
- 5.10 Green and Blue Infrastructure –The site does not have any ecological designations, although it directly adjoins the green belt to the west and rear boundaries) and a local wildlife site (Field west of Osney Mead) at its rear boundary).



Figure 6: View from St. George's Tower - produced under licence from Vu.City

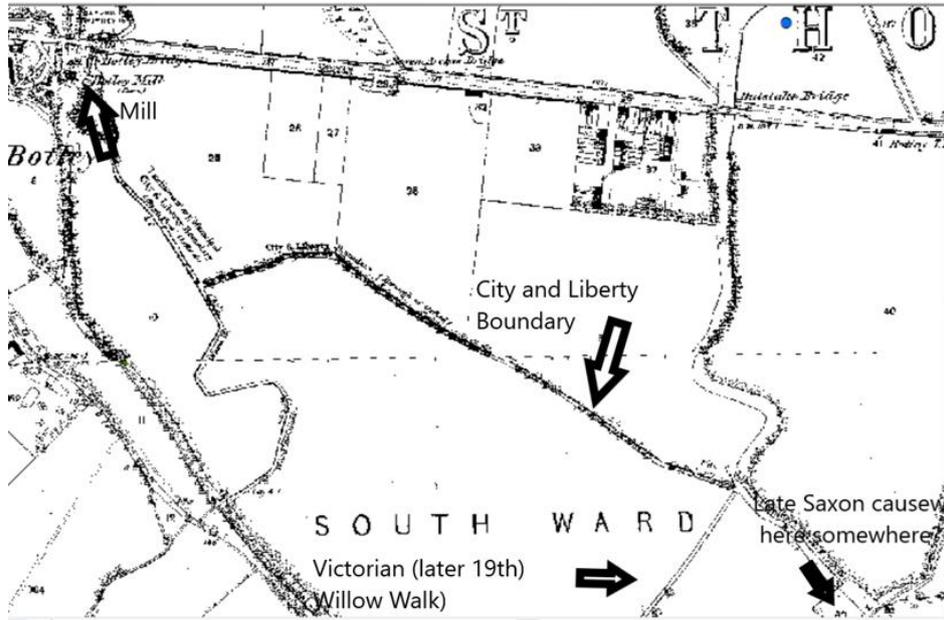


Figure 7: Historic Liberty Boundary

- 5.11 Urban Design and Heritage - The urban environment is considered poor quality as it is dominated by cars and hard surfacing. No listed buildings are onsite, but proposals should not detract from the nearby Osney Town Conservation Area. The fields to the south form an important part of the historic landscape setting for the city and the site is adjacent to the historic City and Liberty Boundary.
- 5.12 Building Heights - The High Buildings Technical Advice Note (TAN) sets out the following key heritage considerations, namely; 'The setting of Oxford Castle (Scheduled Monument), The historic character of adjoining Conservation Area (Osney Town), Visual competition to city centre skyline in views from Headington Hill Allotments and South Park, Visual competition and change of character in elevated views to west from city centre.'
- 5.13 Views out of the city which should be tested include; View from Castle Mound, View from St. George's Tower, view from St. Michaels Tower, view from the Sheldonian Cupola, view from St. Mary the Virgin, View from Carfax Tower. Further views which may be impacted by proposals include the Crescent Hill and Rose Hill Viewcones, the view from Hinksey Meadow, views from Binsey Lane and the Road to Hinksey Heights Golf Course. Dynamic views of the site should be tested along the Botley Road including from Osney Bridge, St. Frideswide's Church, Botley Road junction with Binsey Lane, Botley Road junction with Prestwich Place and the Westway.
- 5.14 Parking – The Oxford Local Plan 2036 and Policy M3 specifically seeks a reduction and overall downward pressure on car parking across the city. This is a site which currently attracts too many car journeys, however it is in a good location for people to reach the site by means other than the private car which includes walking and cycling. There are regular bus services along the Botley Road and , and the site lies within a 15 minute walk from Oxford railway station The Seacourt Park and Ride lies opposite the site where people could park if they could not reach the site by any other means. There is an aspiration for low parking or no parking, given the alternative travel options available. There is also the opportunity to incorporate electric charging points into the design. There is a potential for including corporate car clubs to reduce individual parking and opportunities to separate service vehicles from other road users should be taken Encouraging the reduction in parking is a priority in Oxford where land is so scarce and traffic congestion and air pollution have a detrimental impact upon the quality of the environment.

A reduction in parking provision on site and the number of vehicular access points on Botley Road is envisaged. Any changes to access and egress points must consider the pedestrian and cycle flow along the Botley Road and be carefully managed to minimise disruption for pedestrian and cycle users along the Botley Road. Opportunities should be taken with any redevelopment of the site to locate, covered, well designed bicycle parking which is conveniently positioned as close to building entrances as possible. Any new cycle infrastructure should be designed in accordance with the DFT LTN1/20 cycle infrastructure design guidance and the Oxfordshire street design guidance³

6 Site Context and Use

- 6.1 The primary use on the site is single storey retail sheds with associated parking. The retail sheds are served by large areas of hard surfaced car park which are shared between the various units. Towards the back of the site there are building suppliers yards and service yards for the retail units. These yards largely obscure views out to the landscape.
- 6.2 To the North of the site is the Botley Road featuring large lime trees which create a green entry to the city. Two storey semi-detached houses are opposite the retail park for most of its length. Three to four storey flats oppose the retail park at its North Eastern corner and a three storey car dealership opposes the retail park to the North-West. Seacourt Park and Ride wraps around the dealership.
- 6.3 To the East of the site is Earl Street, a residential street consisting of historic terraced properties of two storeys with the occasional third storey extension at the back. Trees in the back gardens provide some visual buffering of the retail park. More recent development at the end of the street is three storeys continuing through to Brock Grove.
- 6.4 To the West of the Site is the Seacourt Nature Park with mature trees providing screening and distance to commercial buildings on the Minns Industrial Estate - just over the city boundary.

³ chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/roads-and-transport-policies-and-plans/DesignGuidePublication.pdf

6.5 Green fields adjoin the site along the southern boundary which used to form the liberty boundary to the city, with ditches and trees screening the activities of the retail park. There are two areas of Tree Preservation Order along this boundary. The site directly adjoins the Green Belt (to its west and rear boundaries) and a local wildlife site (Field north of Osney Mead) at its rear boundary. Footpaths along the southern boundary of the site link to Seacourt Nature Park, Oatlands playing fields and Osney Mead Industrial Estate via Willow Walk which is a network of paths going as far as North Hinksey Village.

Key objectives – in relation to Site Context and Use

- Achieve a more efficient use of the land than the retail park (Policy RE2).
- Select uses and built form appropriate to flood zone (Policy RE3).
- Reduce hard surfacing, improving landscaping and biodiversity onsite (Policy M3, DH1 and G1).
- Reinforce the avenue of Lime Trees on Botley Road and glimpses of the landscape beyond (A Character Assessment of Oxford in its Landscape Setting, 2002).
- Respect the amenity of neighbouring residential properties including privacy, overlooking and light spillage (Policy H14).
- Test proposed massing in views set out in this document (Policy DH2).
- Respect the setting of the Osney Town Conservation area (Policy DH3).

7 Access and Movement

- 7.1 **Vehicles** - access the site from Botley Road via three access points with right turn lanes. There is a fourth vehicle access point via Lamarsh Road, which allows access to the lower half of Earl Street and Brock Grove which would otherwise be cut off by bollards on Earl Street.
- 7.2 **Cyclists** - can access the site via the cycle path on Botley Road which links to Oxford Station and the city centre. However, once inside the site, cyclists no longer have a separated path, sharing the roads with cars and HGVs. A local plan cycle path goes East-West through the middle of the site in front of the retail units linking to Botley, Osney and through Willow Walk, Osney Mead Industrial Estate and North Hinksey Village (West Oxford Cycle Route).
- 7.3 **Pedestrians** can access the site via the pavement on Botley Road or Lamarsh Road or via the Seacourt Nature Park. Footpaths and zebra crossings allow pedestrians to cross the car parks within the site.
- 7.4 **Buses** – The site is well served with buses, with four stops adjacent on Botley Road (Lamarsh Road stop and Seacourt Park and Ride stop). No buses travel into the site. The site is opposite Seacourt Park and Ride where the 400 Park and Ride bus takes passengers towards the city centre.⁴

Key objectives in relation to Access and Movement

- Prioritise pedestrians, cyclists and public transport over cars and servicing (Policy M1).
- Reduce the area of car parking (Policy M1, M2, M3).
- Provide charging points to support low emission vehicles (Policy M4).
- Reinforce Cycle Path through middle of site (Policy M1).
- Reduce access points from Botley Road to improve traffic flow (Policy M1).

⁴ Buses correct at the time of writing.

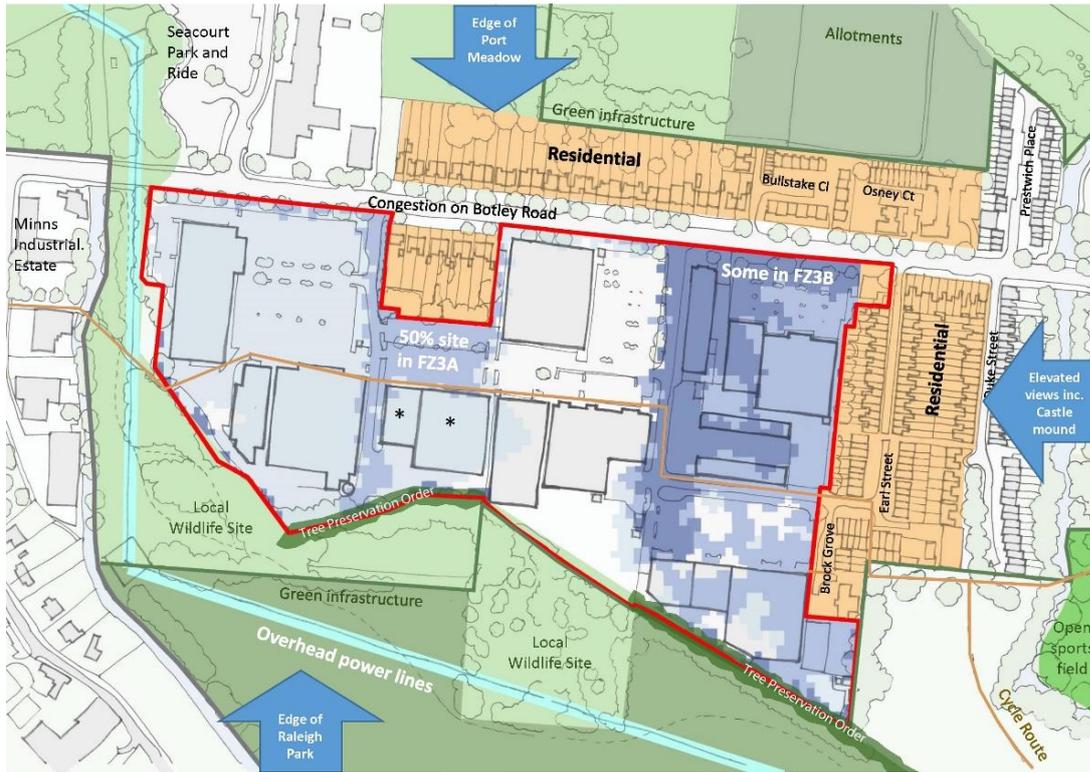


Figure 8: Constraints Diagram

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8 Design and Layout

- 8.1 This section translates the local plan design objectives of high quality design that creates or enhances local distinctiveness (Policy DH1). All applications on this site would be expected to be supported by a constraints and opportunities plan and supporting text and/or visuals to explain the design rationale, which should cover the relevant checklist points set out in design appendix 6.1. As a result of the analysis in this brief, the following principles are proposed to guide the design.
- 8.2 **A landscape led approach** – The current site is dominated by parking and hard landscaping which does not create a high quality setting. Reinforcing the tree line along Botley Road will emphasise the green entry to the city and creating green fingers through the site will link it visually to the landscape beyond. Green fingers will create room for SuDs and pocket parks and improve the quality of spaces around the buildings. This will make the best use of the site's edge of centre location and help integrate it into the landscape beyond, including Seacourt Nature Park.
- 8.3 **Improved access for cyclists and pedestrians through the site** – Dedicated footpaths and cycle ways will reduce the need for pedestrians to cross car parks and service routes and should be designed with reference to the County's Street Design Guidance.⁵ Opportunities to increase permeability through the site for pedestrians and cyclists should be incorporated into the development.
- 8.4 **A confident building line** – The current retail sheds sit a long way back from the Botley Road to accommodate parking. Bringing the buildings closer to the road and introducing public space in front of them will increase active frontage, give the development a presence on the Botley Road and improve the entry sequence for cyclists and pedestrians.
- 8.5 **Plot sizes to meet local demand** – A variety of plot sizes will facilitate different types of business including start-ups and larger occupiers positioned in response to site constraints and opportunities.
- 8.6 **Height that respects local sensitivities** – The site is bordered to the east and in the centre by residential houses which must be treated sensitively to avoid overlooking or overbearing from new development. Massing should be tested in views set out in this brief and must not detract from the Osney Town Conservation Area. The roofscape should contribute to the rich and varied roofscape of Oxford and avoid long uninterrupted expanses at height.

⁵ [Oxfordshire Street Design Guide](#)

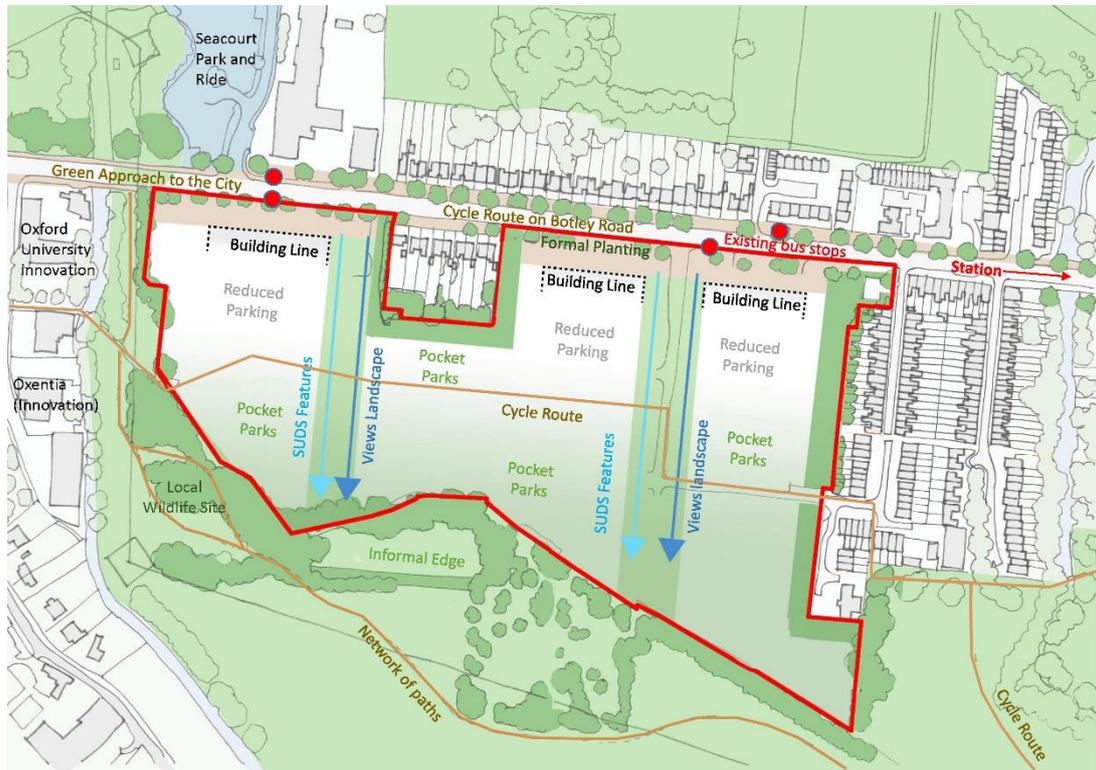


Figure 9: Opportunities Diagram – subject to appropriate design, land use and EA agreement

- 8.7 Using the views stated in 5.11 and 5.12, Urban Design and Conservation Officers have conducted an initial assessment of the site on Vu.City against Policies DH1 High Quality Design and Placemaking, DH2 Views and Building Heights and DH3 Designated Heritage assets. Based upon a floorplane of 58.03m AOD (above ordnance datum) ⁶ and considering the need for flexibility on floor-to-floor heights, the site has been divided into three areas where the following AODs would likely be acceptable. This should inform further rigorous testing and analysis to support individual development proposals that may come forward.
- **Formal Edge** - Up to a maximum AOD of 75.33 m which would allow for four storey office or laboratory buildings (inclusive of plant). Where blocks adjoin sensitive residential uses, a 25m margin⁷ would help avoid an overbearing relationship to neighbouring properties or direct overlooking, with windows directed away from residential gardens. Blocks

⁶ Ground Floor Plane determined by flood levels: 1% AEP (+35% increase in flows) +300mm.

⁷ Precedent: Old Road Campus B3 Plot 19/01225/RES.

should step down to respect the setting of the neighbouring Seacourt Stream and Nature Park.

- **Middle** – Up to a maximum AOD of 71.23 m would allow for three storey office or laboratory buildings (inclusive of plant). Where blocks adjoin sensitive residential uses, a 25m margin would help avoid an overbearing relationship or direct overlooking. Overbearing and overlooking should also be avoided through block orientation and façade design, directing views away from adjoining gardens.
- **Landscape Edge** – Up to a maximum AOD of 69.33 m would allow for flexible two storey, ‘techbox’ style accommodation or affordable co-workspaces which could potentially be divided among multiple occupiers. Blocks should be located away from the sensitive landscape edge to preserve the landscape setting and help integrate proposals into it. The centre of this zone (south of central residential), potentially looking over a pocket park, could act as a hub for the site and incorporate community uses.

This should be read in conjunction with the constraints and opportunities and EA flood maps to understand site potential.

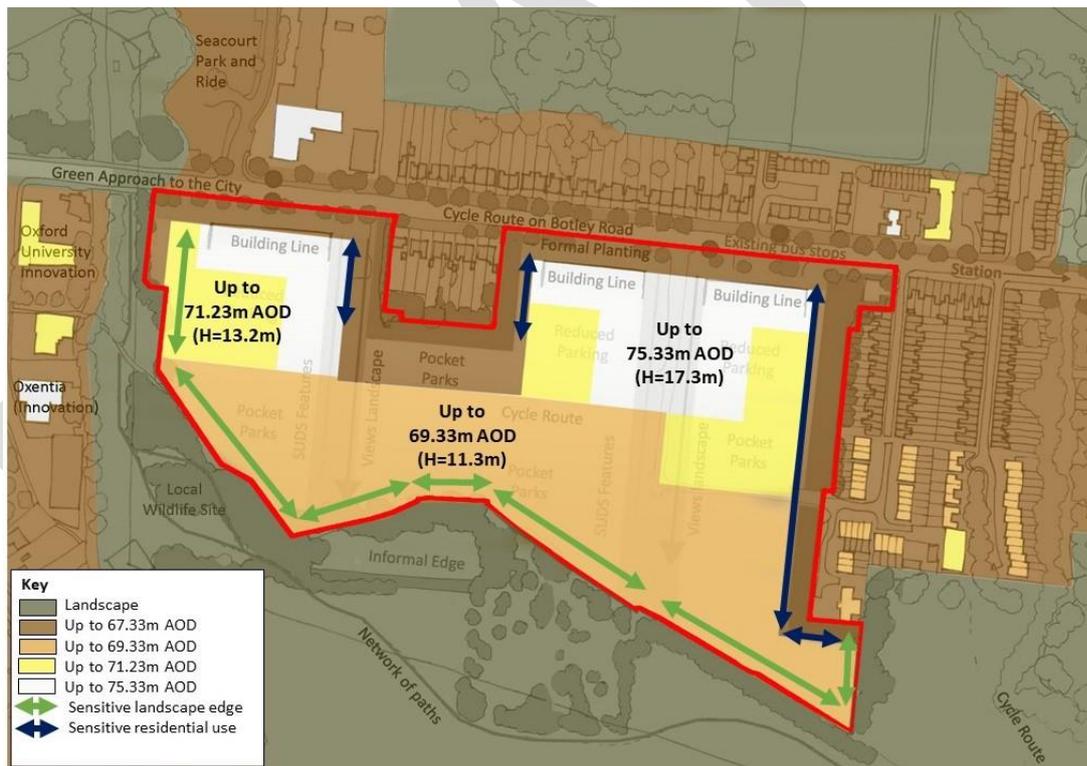


Figure 10: Height Sensitivity Diagram

NB. Outside the site boundary shows which categories existing building AOD falls into when measured at the maximum height or ridgeline, using Vu.City. Within the site boundary shows heights that would likely be acceptable on the retail park with arrows showing concerns that may further affect height, block orientation or façade design. H=Height assumptions based on a Ground Floor level of 58.03m AOD.