Oxford Central (City & University) Conservation Area Appraisal

Appendix 1

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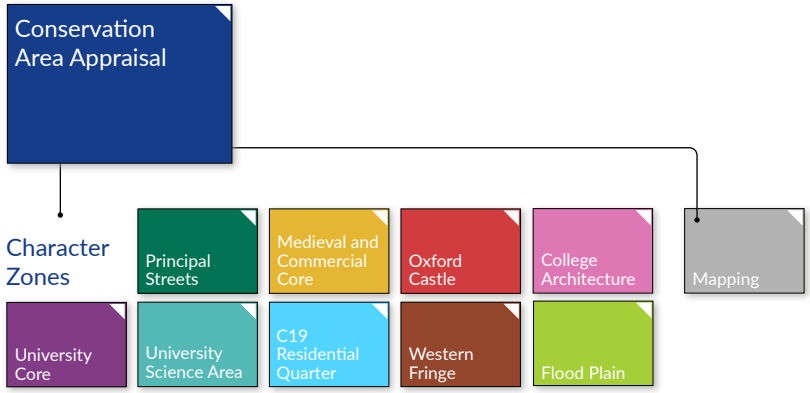
8.3 Further reading 102



Structure of this appraisal
Oxford Central (City & University) Conservation Area

How to use this document

This appraisal comprises a main overview of the significance of the conservation area, management guidance and design advice. This overview has been informed by and extends to include nine Character Zone statements which provide the detailed analysis of the conservation area. The whole appraisal contains a number of maps which provide multiple layers of information about the conservation area.



Electronic Navigation

These simple features enable the user to navigate the appraisal documents in most pdf viewers.

Chapter tabs allow navigation between the different chapters of the appraisal.

Contents | Structure | Foreword | Character | Map

Buttons allow navigation between pages.

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Conservation Area Appraisal

This appraisal describes:

- Significance, the characteristics of the conservation area that make it special and worthy of protection
- Character Zone statements. Detailed analysis of the conservation area, organized into nine different character zones. If a site is close to or on the boundary of a character zone, it may be necessary to consult more than one character zone statement
- Mapping. Dozens of layers illustrate many facets of the Conservation Area, such as heritage designation, landform and geology, history and archaeology.
- The mapping can be accessed in a multi-layered pdf available on the Oxford City Council website
- By overlaying these layers it is possible to study, for example, how geology, topography and medieval fortifications have shaped the city centre
- Management guidance for conserving and enhancing these characteristics
- Design advice for new buildings and alterations to existing ones.

The Statement of Community Engagement is:

- A record of what consultation has been undertaken, what people told us and how the document reflects these comments.

Policy References

- In this CCA, Local Plan policies and related Technical Advice Note references refer to Oxford's Local Plan 2036. When that Local Plan is replaced by subsequent documents, care should be taken to refer to those new policies on equivalent topics.

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Chapter 1

Foreword

Oxford Central (City & University) **Conservation Area**





1.1 Foreword

I am pleased to present this appraisal and management guidance for Oxford's Central Conservation Area.

Oxford is well known throughout the world for its significant contribution to architecture and education. Its special qualities have enabled a vibrant commercial core to interact with homes and institutions within a green landscape setting for centuries, evolving as needed without losing that vital combination of elements which makes it unique.

Vital to the continued economic success and vitality of the city centre are the historic buildings and spaces in which we trade, live, and educate. The growth of the universities, the pressure for housing, and the ever-changing retail market has made it imperative that we support the Local Plan with accurate assessments of our heritage assets. By understanding what qualities we already have, we can build on this to create more accessible public space, reduce the loss of embodied carbon, and identify places where new homes and jobs can be generated.

During the first consultation of the appraisal document we found that there were other areas worthy of inclusion. Part of the city's west end around St Thomas' Church, and the University Science Area have now been included, recognising their importance to the history of the city.

The first part of the appraisal sets out the important details which make Oxford definable, from the small architectural details to the relationships between the buildings of all different ages. It provides an evidence base for the policies and proposals that will impact on the historic core. As we aim to utilise our existing assets and expand the city centre, there are opportunities to maintain the historic environment as central to Oxford's continued achievements as a world-renowned city centre. Improved infrastructure and spaces in the west end will be a welcoming point for many visitors; the identification and recognition of the importance of this area can be a building block for this expansion.

The city centre is a whole entity, but there are recognisably different elements to it which bring balance and richness. At a detailed level, the character zone chapters break the city centre down into character areas, meaning it is easier to find and understand individual streets and places.

The management and design advice aims to help homeowners, occupiers, freeholders, institutions, companies, and developers living and working within the city, all of whom are charged with its maintenance and continued success. It highlights where some alterations could be made and gives a framework for new structures. This can help to save embodied energy through the retention of adaptable buildings, and finding appropriate spaces for new energy-saving structures.

The Conservation Area is not defined solely by its buildings and spaces, but also by its uses and users. It is against the backdrop of landscape and buildings that everyday life occurs. This reinforces the importance of having an up-to-date appraisal to ensure that its special qualities are recognised and made central to the continued development of the city. I feel sure that the document will prove to be an invaluable management tool to all those involved in the on-going preservation and enhancement of the city.

Councillor Louise Upton

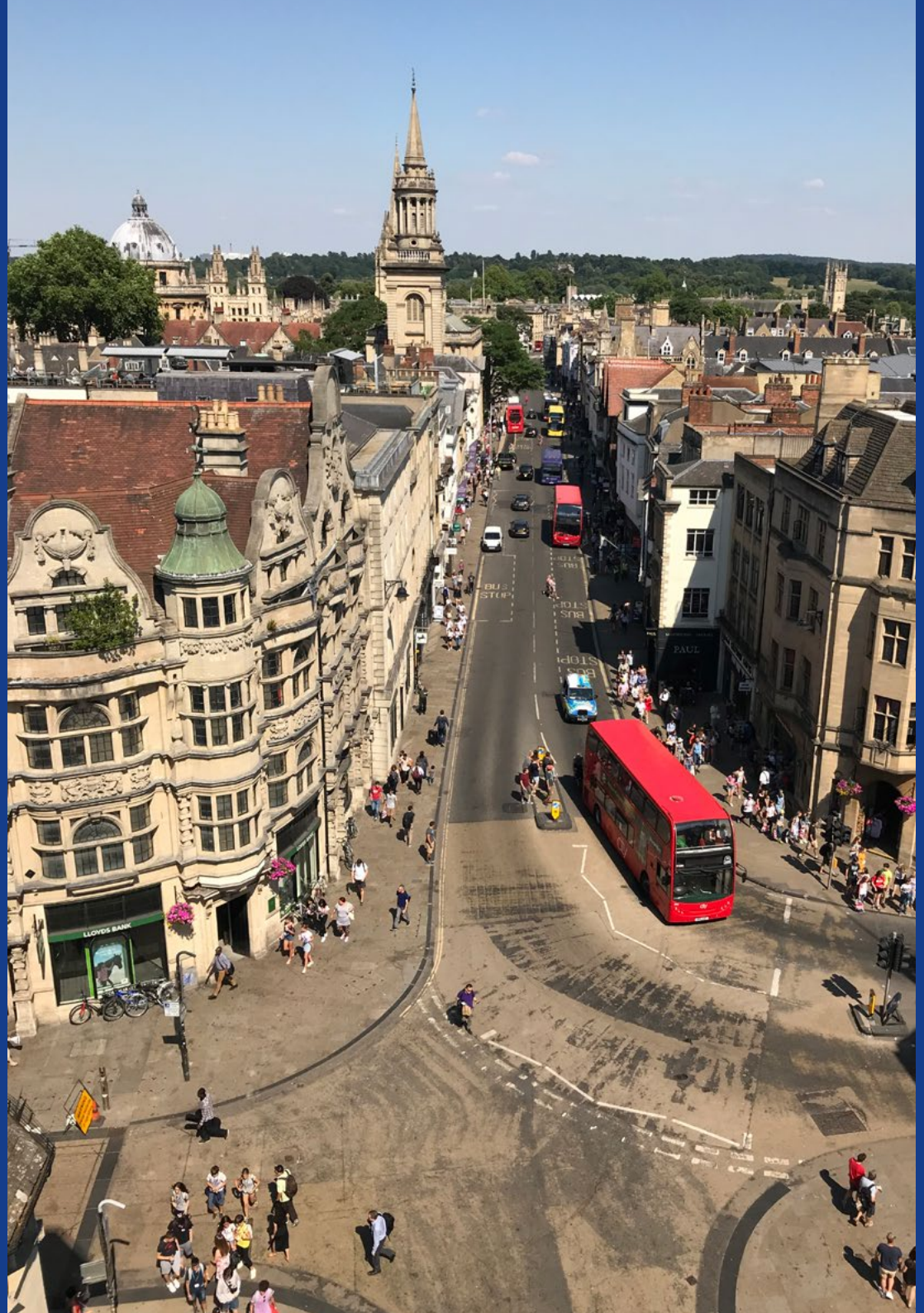
Cabinet Member for Planning and Healthier Communities

Chapter 2

Character Statement

Oxford Central (City & University) **Conservation Area**





2.1 Character statement

Few places in the world can claim so much outstanding architecture and townscape in such a concentrated space as the historic centre of Oxford. One of the masterpieces of European architectural heritage, it is also a major regional commercial centre and one of the most celebrated and loved places in Britain. Its history, its architecture, its townscape and its setting within the landscapes combine harmoniously, and frequently spectacularly, to convey a strong sense of the specific nature of the city.

2.1.1 University and colleges

- The University and its colleges are the principal source of this international significance, and it is their **long-term ownership and functional continuity** that makes the conservation area's townscape so distinctive. Through research, teaching and the arts, they are associated with people and events that have shaped national and world history. This **historical association** is expressed in the distinctive **architectural traditions** that reflect the requirements of higher education since the middle ages. From the 13th century onwards colleges colonised the eastern half of the town with private inward-looking precincts planned around quadrangles of medieval and post-medieval buildings, both within and outside the walled town. These urban forms define much of the conservation area, and within these enclosures Oxford's **medieval archaeology** is preserved to an unusual degree.
- The University and colleges are wealthy and sophisticated and have always employed leading architects. Because of them the conservation area is characterised by **architecture of international importance** worthy of a capital city. An exceptionally and unusually high proportion is pre-Victorian, but the high standard applies to architecture of all periods up to the present day.
- The quality of Oxford's architecture is best illustrated by the magnificent group of University and college buildings and spaces situated between Broad Street and St Mary's Church, which form the visual heart of the conservation area. Pevsner described this as, 'unique in the world.' The evolution and growth of scholarly research, educational practice and architecture is represented by later developments such as the Science Area.



Radcliffe Camera, All Souls College and the Bodleian Library



The Clarendon Building on Broad Street

2.1.2 Historic county town

- Centuries before Oxford became a seat of learning it was a **regional centre of commerce, administration and justice.** This history, these functions and the architecture associated with them, shape the character and appearance of the conservation area as profoundly as the University.
- The largely regular **street layout** of the Saxon burh, founded over a thousand years ago, is well preserved. Together with the line of the 13th century **city walls** and the floodable river valleys this largely determined the plan of the historic centre as it is today. Fronting the streets are narrow Norman tenement plots, some amalgamated to form colleges or later shops, and characterised by buildings built hard up against the pavement.
- Most of the non-educational buildings on these streets were **built for housing or shopping**, and often both. In contrast to the colleges, these buildings historically have active frontages which contribute greatly to the character of these streets.
- **The Castle** creates a contrasting zone to the west, the character of which is derived from its military requirements and subsequently the development of public functions such as law courts, prison, police headquarters, and county and city government, housed in large and often monumental buildings set in back from the street.



County Hall (OCC)

2.1.3 Architectural tradition

- This history has created a distinctive architectural tradition, characterised by:
  - **a limited range of materials**, most famously oolitic limestone, but also timber framing with rendered walls, and brick. Historically these materials were locally sourced, and they express a specific sense of place
  - the highest quality **workmanship,** and careful often enjoyable **detailing**
  - **articulation** of elevations by detailing and deep reveals
  - picturesque and harmonious juxtaposition of buildings and elements
  - narrow building widths
  - an **outstanding roofscape**, perhaps the most famous and architecturally rich in the country, whose animation and delight is formed from a combination of both the deliberate contributions such as towers, turrets, spires, pinnacles, and the functional backdrop of chimneys, parapets and party walls



Oxford's Roofscape from South Park

2.1.4 Landscape and setting

- The setting for this architecture and townscape is formed by water and landscape:
- Water takes the form of t**he rivers and the Oxford Canal.** Oxford exists because of the Thames and Cherwell river crossings, and the convergence of the two rivers shaped the city centre and stimulated commerce.
- The different characters of the Thames, Cherwell and Canal give each of the east, south and west edges of the conservation area a distinctive identity. To the west, Castle Mill Stream and Canal, and later the railway, were the focus of **industry**, leaving a legacy of light industrial buildings and workers housing that illustrates the often-overlooked importance of industry to the development of the city.
- To the east and south, **flood plains of the Cherwell and the Thame**s encircle the city centre, framing views of Oxford's architecture rising above trees and meadows that form one of the most famous images of any town or city in Britain. This has been a landscape of recreation for centuries: for walking, boating and sport. Because of it, the conservation area contains an exceptional amount of green space, but this is unevenly distributed. Elsewhere, the most significant elements are College lawns and gardens, glimpsed from streets but normally closed to the public. The particular ways in which **greenery and buildings combine** are fundamental to the conservation area's unique character.
- **Beyond the conservation area, the surrounding hills contribute powerfully to its character and appearance by their contribution to its world-famous skyline, both as a backcloth to views out, and the origin for views in.** This skyline and its green setting are precious and treasured.



Christchurch Meadow



The Cherwell River

Chapter 3

Conservation Area Map

Oxford Central (City & University) **Conservation Area**





Oxford Central (City & University)
Conservation Area

Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary

Neighbouring conservation areas

Character Zones:

1. Principal Streets
Comprising the principle historic routes into the city, the main shopping streets and its most important public spaces. Because of their historical importance and their significance today for the movement of people and vehicles, the character and challenges of these streets are very different from elsewhere in the Conservation Area.

2. Medieval and Commercial Core
A tight grid of Saxon and Medieval streets is shaped by the former line of the Norman city walls. This has hosted the commercial and retail core of the city since its foundation. Where it has not been colonised by colleges, characteristically long, narrow medieval plots survive, with larger retail redevelopment concentrated in the west.

3. Oxford Castle
Once dominating the western edge of the medieval city, the Castle was the centre of administration and justice for over 800 years. Now opened up to the public and commercial uses, but its defensive plan and historic structures retain a character quite distinct from the rest of the Conservation Area.

4. College Architecture
Educational precincts of many dates, but sharing the defining characteristics of formal planning around a quad, imposing architecture, spacious grounds and isolation from the surrounding city. Forms one of the most important collections of medieval architecture in Europe.

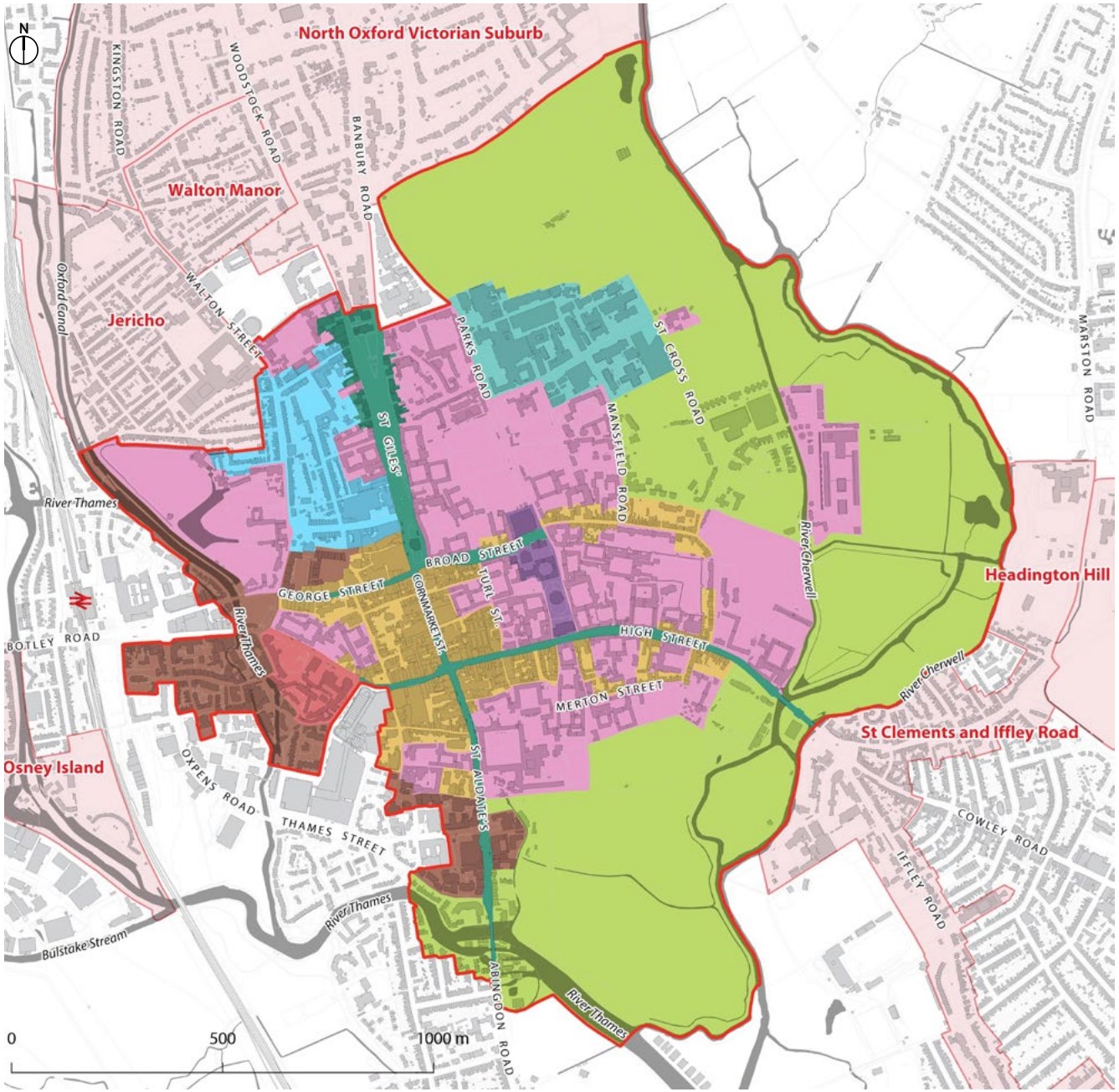
5. University Core
An exceptional architectural and historical sequence – without parallel in the UK – that is the aesthetic heart of the Conservation Area and encapsulates the stature, evolution and global impact of the University of Oxford.

6. Western Fringe
St Thomas was a medieval suburban extension, which can still be traced in the street pattern, that later expanded into a light industrial quarter because of the Castle Mill Stream, the Thames and later the Oxford Canal and railway. Large areas have been redeveloped since 1945.

7. Nineteenth-century Residential Quarter
Suburb of terraced housing developed from the early nineteenth century, including Oxford's only uniform Georgian terraces and its sole residential square.

8. University Science Area
Large, detached institutional buildings laid out on a grid in the 19th and 20th centuries, set back from the street edge. Strongly associated with Oxford's internationally-significant contribution to scientific advancement.

9. Flood Plain
Riverside landscape of historic meadows, parks and sports fields and pockets of development, which still fulfils a vital function in the City's flood defences, provides a clearly defined edge for the city centre, a place for recreation and relaxation and a picturesque foreground for views from east and south.



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Chapter 4

Approach

Oxford Central (City & University) **Conservation Area**





4.1 What is the document?

- This conservation area appraisal has been prepared by Oxford City Council to guide the future management of the Central (City & University) Conservation Area – one of the largest, most important and complex conservation areas in the country.

4.2 Why has it been prepared?

- The centre of Oxford is one of the most beautiful places in Europe. Residents, workers, students and visitors alike take great pleasure from its architecture, streets and green spaces. They add immeasurably to the quality of life and the economic and cultural vitality of the city.
- For this reason, in 1971 Oxford City Council designated the whole of the central core of the city as a conservation area. It has since been expanded on several occasions, most recently in May 2019.
- By law, the City Council is required to prepare proposals for the 'preservation and enhancement' for each of its conservation areas. To this end, this appraisal:
  - analyses the history and character of the conservation area
  - defines what makes it special (its 'significance')
  - outlines management responsibilities and recommendations for the City Council and other stakeholders
  - provides design guidance for householders and developers
- This information will be used by the Council, planning applicants, and other interested parties to inform and assess proposals for new development and buildings in the conservation area. Planning applications and listed building consent applications must refer to the appraisal when explaining the design concept (see section 8.1).
- Above all, the City Council recognises the city centre is a living, evolving place, not a historic monument. The purpose of the appraisal is to manage change positively, not prevent it. We believe in this way that the appraisal will be a useful, constructive document for householders, businesses, universities and colleges, and everyone else who has an interest in the future of the city centre.

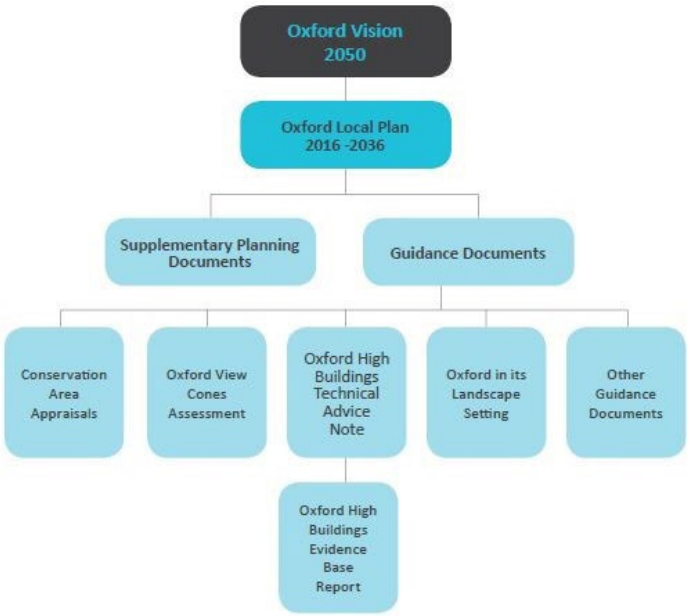
4.3 How does it relate to planning policy and other council documents?

4.3.1 Legislation and national planning policy

- The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act of 1990 defines conservation areas as 'areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.' This appraisal forms a 'material consideration' in all planning and listed building consent applications that could have an impact on the conservation area.
- The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that local planning authorities should recognise that heritage assets including conservation areas are an irreplaceable resource that should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. In determining planning applications, it directs local planning authorities to take account of:
  - the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
  - the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
  - the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.
  - the opportunity for new development within Conservation Areas and within their setting to enhance or better reveal their significance.
  - The fact that not all elements of a Conservation Area will necessarily contribute to its significance. Loss of a building (or other element) which makes a positive contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area should be treated either as substantial harm under paragraph 201 or less than substantial harm under paragraph 202 as appropriate, taking into account the relative significance of the element affected and its contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area as a whole.

4.3.2 Local planning policy

- Local planning policies on heritage assets including views are set out in the Oxford Local Plan.
- This appraisal forms part of the evidence base for the Local Plan.
- For decision making purposes, this appraisal articulates the special interest of the conservation area to inform the process of making rational and consistent planing decisions within it.
- Due to the complexity of Oxford's historic environment, the appraisal interfaces with a number of other guidance and supplementary planning documents. The relationship between the different components of local planning policy and guidance are shown here:
- If you are considering development in the conservation area, you will have to take into consideration these other documents too, for example, the High Buildings Technical Advice Note for taller schemes, the Archaeological Action Plan if it may affect archaeology.



Policy and guidance hierarchy
Oxford Local Plan 2036

4.4 How was the appraisal prepared?

- Although Oxford's architecture and history has been studied extensively for many decades, this is the first assessment of the Central Conservation Area to be undertaken since it was designated in 1971.
- The task was not a straightforward one. A conservation area such as this is an inherently complex place whose special interest is the unique result of a subtle combination of many factors: historical development and change, land ownership and use, architectural styles and materials, topography and landscape, streets and space.
- The underlying methodology followed Historic England advice, adapted to the specific circumstances. Extensive fieldwork was undertaken in 2018 and again in 2023 using a bespoke version of the Oxford Character Assessment Toolkit, supplemented by a review of published material.
- The setting of the wider city and the landscape beyond has been studied to analyse the character and appearance of the conservation area and how this is defined by its relationship to its context (for example, views, skyline, green space).
- Mapping has been used extensively due to the complexity of the Area, created in GIS format so it can be integrated into council planning and other systems, and updated in the future.
- This project was undertaken by Oxford City Council working with Alan Baxter Ltd (ABA).

4.5 Who has been consulted?

- The appraisal must reflect the views of the local community and interested parties to accurately portray the special interest of the conservation area, and set out relevant management and design guidance.
- Three stages of public consultation have been undertaken – in 2018, 2019, and 2022 - and statutory and local stakeholders were invited to roundtable workshops at key stages.
- Full details of this programme, comments made by consultees and how the Council responded to them in finalising the appraisal can be found in the accompanying statement.

4.6 Glossary

- The appraisal must be accessible. To make it easier to understand, the following table includes a list of key terms used throughout the document.
- Many buildings in Oxford are built in the classical or gothic architectural styles. The following pages show key architectural terms associated with these styles in a graphic format to assist in their interpretation.

Active frontage	Ground frontages with openings and views into and out of buildings, in order to encourage human interaction. For example, windows, active doors, shops, restaurants and cafes.
At risk	A historic building, landscape, structure, or archaeology, that is threatened with damage or destruction by neglect, a lack of maintenance or the need for repair.
Building line	The position of buildings relative to the edge of a pavement or road. It might be hard against it, set back, regular or irregular, broken by gaps between buildings, or jump back and forth.
Designation	Legal protection for historic places and buildings, such as listing, conservation areas and scheduled ancient monuments.
Enclosure	The sense in which a street feels contained by buildings, or trees.
Legibility	The ability to navigate through or 'read' the urban environment. Can be increased through means such as good connections between places, signage, and landmarks.
Massing	The arrangement and shape of individual or combined built forms.
Movement	How people and goods move around the city: on foot, by bike, car, bus, train or lorry.
Permeability	The ease with which people can move through an area. Lots of connected streets make a place permeable; private grounds and no-through roads, for example, make it less so.
Public realm	The publicly-accessible space between buildings – streets, squares, paths, parks and gardens – and the elements that make them up, such as pavement, signage, seating and planting.
Roofscape	The 'landscape' of roofs, chimneys, towers, spires etc.
Significance	The special historical, architectural, cultural, archaeological or social interest of a building or place – forming the reasons why it is valued.
Skyline	The outline of built form and land defined against the sky. Sometimes referred to as silhouette or profile.

Tenement plot	The typical building plot of a medieval town, concentrated around the central streets and marketplace. Tenement plots are long and narrow, with a narrow street frontage.
Townscape	The landscape of the city – the interaction of buildings, streets, spaces and topography.
Urban grain	A way to describe the arrangement or pattern of the buildings and streets within the built form. It may be fine or coarse, formal or informal, linear, blocky, planned, structured or unstructured.
Positive contributors	A building, structure or feature which, whilst not listed by the Secretary of State for its national importance, is felt by the council to be of local importance due to its architectural, historical or environmental significance.



Roofscape - All Souls College (OCC)



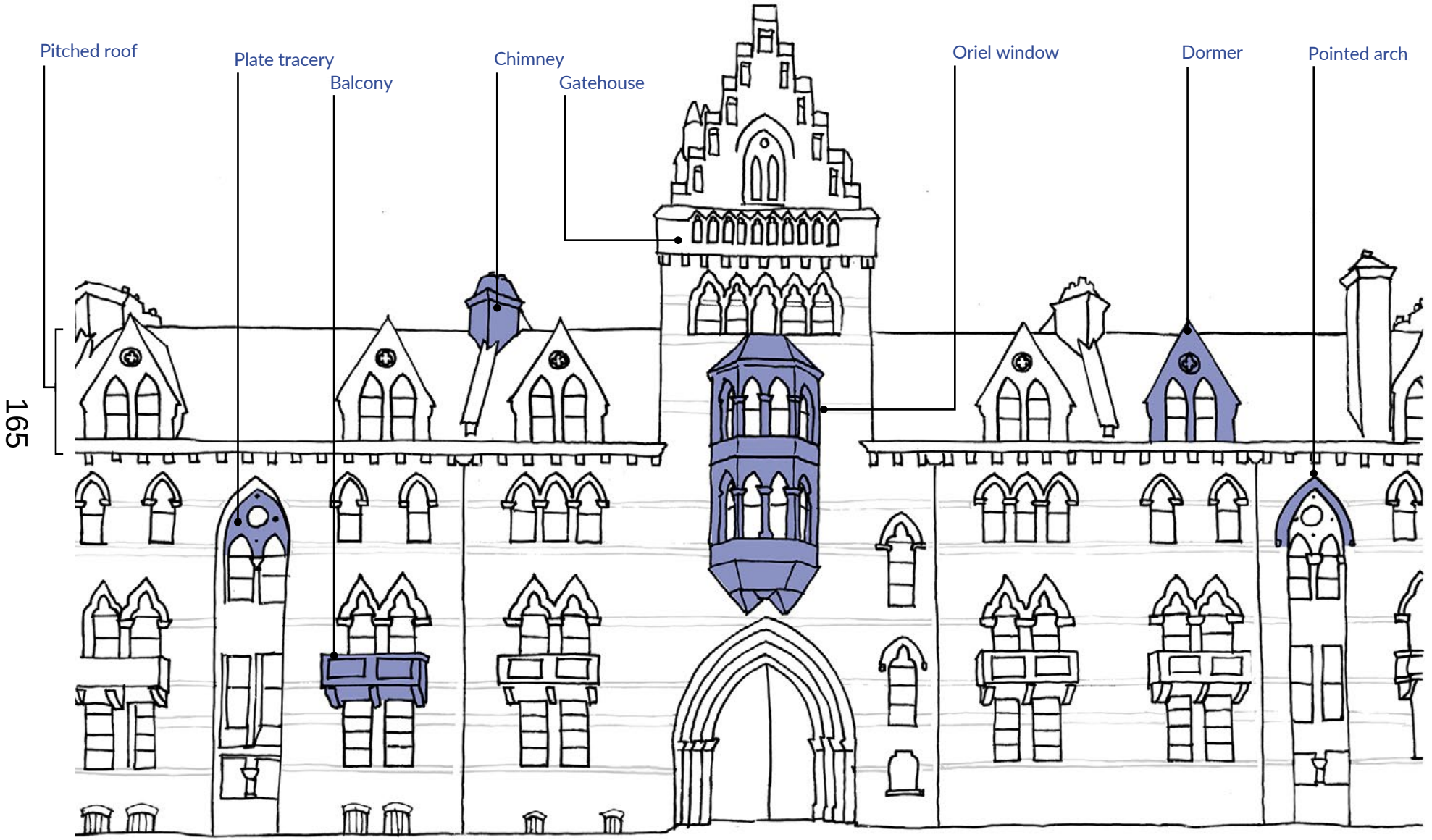
Building line - Consistent building line on Beaumont Street (OCC)



Permeability - Lamb and Flag Passage (OCC)



The Clarendon Building - University of Oxford



The Meadow Building - Christchurch College (OCC)

4.7 Further information

Planning Advice
For information or questions relating to planning in the conservation area, contact Oxford City Council's Planning Department, visit the website at:
https://www.oxford.gov.uk/planning

National Planning Policy Framework
The Government's national policy governing planning, including heritage and conservation areas:
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2

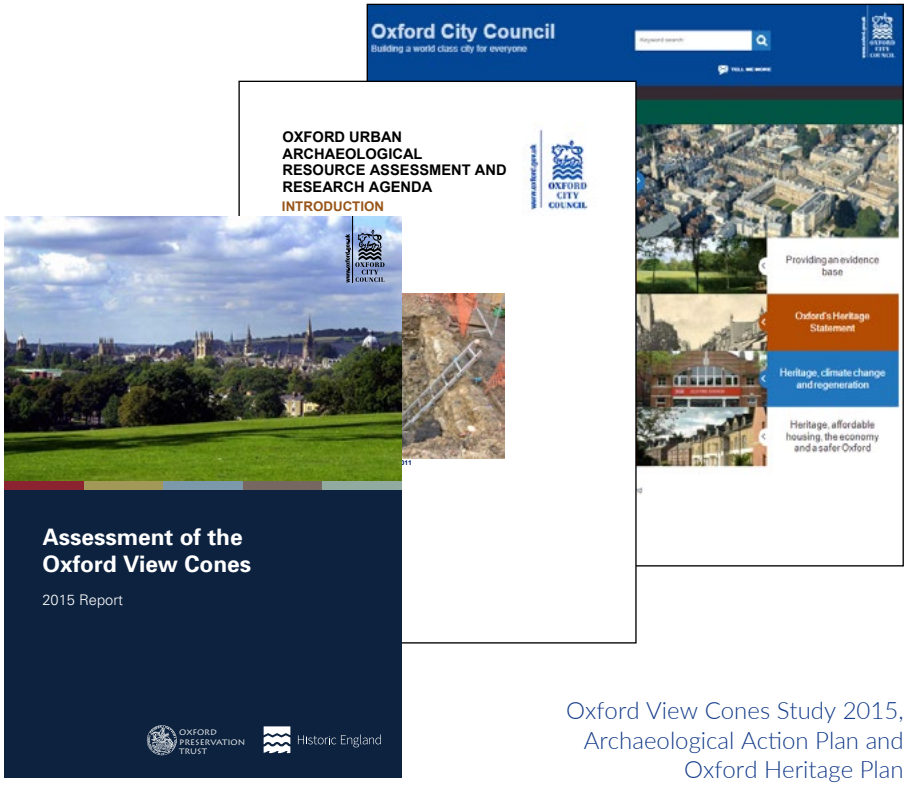
Oxford Archaeological Action Plan 2013-2018
An illustrated history of the urban growth of Oxford as well as archaeological advice to landowners and developers.
https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/download/447/oxford_archaeological_action_plan_2018

Oxford Heritage Plan
The City Council's heritage plan
https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20191/oxford_heritage_plan

Oxford View Cones Study 2015
Oxford View Cones Study provides an understanding of the ten protected view paths in Oxford, which are important heritage assets and fundamental to the city's distinctive character.
https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/1610/oxford_view_cones_study_full_report

Historic England Advice Note 1: Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management (2nd edition)
The principal source of advice and information for the designation and management of conservation areas.
https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/conservation-area-appraisal-designation-management-advice-note-1

Oxford High Buildings Technical Advice Note (TAN)
Informs decisions regarding the growth and intensification of Oxford in a positive and structured way. Includes the four visual tests.
https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/7509/tan_7_high_buildings



Oxford View Cones Study 2015, Archaeological Action Plan and Oxford Heritage Plan

Chapter 5

Understanding

Oxford Central (City & University) **Conservation Area**



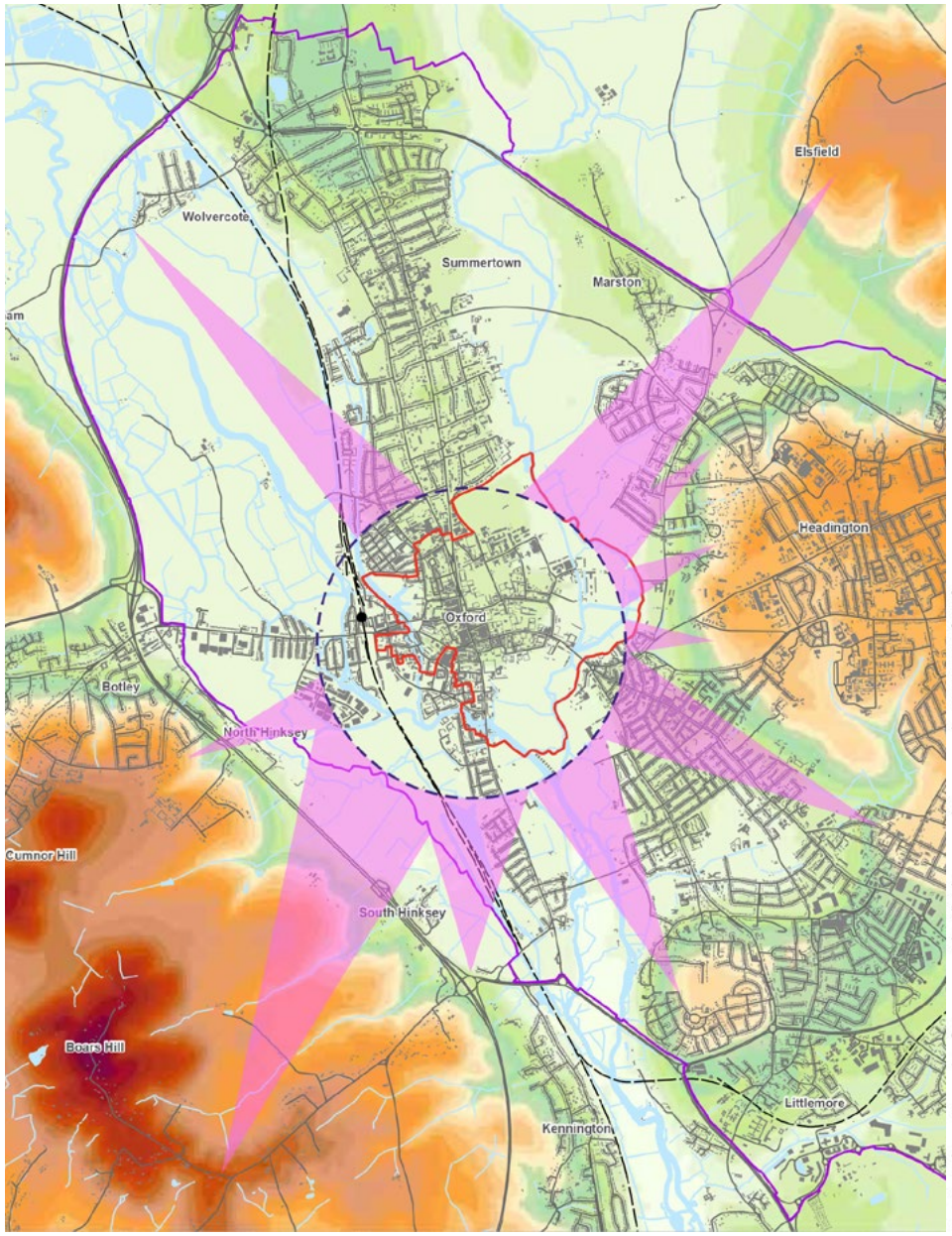


5.1 Overview

- There can be few cities more exhaustively studied or better documented than Oxford. There is no need therefore to retell the history of the city centre here in great detail. Instead, this chapter provides a brief introductory overview of the city's geographic and geological context and its historic development.
- At the end of this chapter there are some suggestions for further reading and other sources of information.

5.2 Geographic position

- Oxford is a city on the upper reaches of the River Thames, located in a broad valley between its source in the Cotswolds and the NE-SW line of hills formed by Cotswolds and North Wessex Downs. The city is located at the convergence of the Thames and its tributary the Cherwell, with higher ground rising to the east and west.
- The River Thames explains the origins of the city, and has sustained its life. The settlement was established here at a crossing point across the Thames floodplain, which is likely to have been used for thousands of years. The river has been the most significant means of communication for most of this time, providing direct transportation to London and settlements along the way. In the late 18th century this was joined by the Oxford Canal, which provided a vital trade link between the Midlands and London.
- Other than by its waterways, the city was isolated from the principal arterial routes of the country until the creation of the M40 in the 1960s. None of the major Roman roads passed through the city (though there are likely to have been more minor ones), and the route selected by Brunel for his Great Western Railway ignored the city in favour of the fastest line between Bristol and London.
- Today, improvements in road and rail communication and relatively easy access to Heathrow airport have all contributed to the growth and prosperity of the city.



The geographic position of Oxford and the Central Conservation Area (High Buildings TAN)

5.3 Geology and its effects

5.3.1 Location and shape

- The Saxon and Medieval city was laid out on a gravel terrace that forms a dry, south-facing promontory in the cleft above the converging floodplains of the Thames and Cherwell. Despite encroachment to the west, the edge of the terrace still predominantly defines the building line on the southern and eastern sides and gives the city centre its highly distinctive shape. The view below illustrates this, and shows how the line of the medieval walls traced the shape of the terrace.

5.3.2 Building materials

- Oxford's famous oolitic limestone was quarried locally at Headington. Although this source is now exhausted, the warm tones of this stone are a defining characteristic of the conservation area, and one that provides a direct link between the architecture of the city and its locality.



Oxford seen from Christchurch Meadow (OCC)

5.4 Historical overview

5.4.1 Saxon origins

- Oxford began as a Saxon settlement around 900AD at a crossing point on the River Thames, and grew quickly into a defended, walled burh, thriving on trade between the kingdoms of Mercia and Wessex.

5.4.2 Norman growth

- Following the Norman Conquest the settlement grew into one of the most economically successful towns in England and a major trade centre, overlooked by a Norman castle and ringed by major religious houses. The University of Oxford arose in the 12th century and gradually grew into a major force in the city's life. To the west, monasteries and friaries occupied large complexes, emphasising the importance of religion in the life and form of the city.
- The Saxons' rigid street layout and the fixed line of the 13th century defensive walls, together with the floodable river valleys, largely determined the plan of the historic centre as it is today. The gentle curve of the High Street, the great market place of St Giles and the older churches, together with the medieval and post-medieval timber-framed buildings, are powerful reminders of this.



The gentle curve of the High Street

5.5 Timeline of Oxford's development

Timeline adapted from the Oxford Archaeological Action Plan 2013-2018.

Pre-historic	• Monumental earthworks influence later routeways. • Farmsteads and field systems are established.
Roman	• Roman roads and pottery manufacturing compounds.
Saxon	• Religious and trading centre established by a crossing point over the Thames. • Oxford established as a planned defended settlement (or burh) with an orthogonal street grid centred on Carfax.
Norman	• 1066 – the Norman invasion leads to the construction of a motte and bailey castle over the western part of the town. • The 1086 Domesday Survey records large areas of waste ground within the town. • Subsequent growth leads to the division of existing tenements, the creation of new streets and big infrastructure projects like the Grandpont causeway over the floodplain, new religious buildings and hospitals. • Oxford enjoys Royal patronage with the construction of the Royal Beaumont Palace north of the town.
Medieval	• Monastic houses and friaries are attracted to Oxford and establish precincts outside the walled town, some on land reclaimed from the floodplain. • The town wall is rebuilt in the 13th century with bastions and unusual double (concentric) line along the north-east part of the circuit. • Oxford's economy falters in the 14th century with increasing areas of the town recorded as waste. • The 13th and 14th centuries see the growth of academic halls and colleges associated with the University.
Post-medieval	• The Dissolution of the Monasteries leads to the closure of the friaries and abbeys leaving the west and south-western suburbs of Oxford economically disadvantaged. • Oxford becomes a city with a Cathedral established first at the former Osney Abbey Church then at Christ Church. • During the Civil War Oxford is chosen by Charles I as his temporary capital and consequently defensive and siege earthworks are built around the town, clearing part of St Clement's. • In 1644 a major fire destroys many properties between George Street and Queen Street. • The 17th century sees the expansion and rebuilding of the town, with land inside the town wall and the in-filled town ditch newly developed. • The canal reaches Oxford in 1790. • A major clearance of obstructions was undertaken by the 1771 Paving Commission including the demolition of remaining gates. New drains were laid and an indoor market replaced the historic street market.
Modern	• The railway arrives in Oxford in 1844. • The 19th century sees the reform and expansion of the University and its colleges and the rapid expansion of the suburbs to cater for wealthy trades people, academics and those in domestic service. • In the early 20th century the development of the Morris Motors and Pressed Steel plants transformed east Oxford. • After the First World War the city authorities reluctantly engage in slum clearance and a programme of council house building which continued until the 1980s. • Between 1938-1966 the outer ring road is completed. Major plans for inner ring road and city redevelopment were subsequently abandoned. • Between 1957-1974 a major project was undertaken to replace decayed stonework on historic buildings. • In the 1960s and early 1970s the 19th century suburb in St Ebbe's was demolished and the original Westgate shopping Centre was constructed.
21st century	• The late 20th-early 21st century has seen the expansion and renewal of College and University facilities. • The restoration and redevelopment of the Oxford Castle site into leisure, residential and retail was completed in 2006. • The redevelopment of the Westgate Centre and the construction of the Clarendon Shopping Centre.

5.5.1 University and colleges

- As the University expanded in the later Middle Ages it colonised the eastern half of the town with halls and later walled quadrangular colleges, occupying plots abandoned after the Black Death had reduced the town's population by perhaps a third.
- Colleges continued to expand in number, size, and status, as the Dissolution put an end to the religious houses. Generously supported by benefactors, they became wealthy landowners able to employ the finest masons, builders, and - later - architects.
- The growth of the University's central institutions is well illustrated by the magnificent group of buildings situated between Broad Street and St Mary's Church. This group grew out of the organisational focus provided by the University Schools and began with the addition of the 14th century Convocation House and Library on the north side of St Mary's Church, followed in the 15th century with the building of the Divinity School and Duke Humfrey's Library. This nucleus expanded in the 17th century with the construction of the Schools' Quadrangle, Convocation House and Sheldonian Theatre. With the later addition of the Old Clarendon Building and Radcliffe Camera, this formed the exceptional architectural and historic sequence that is the aesthetic heart of the conservation area.
- Subsequent University development reflected its growing importance as a focus of scientific research and discovery, together with its role in promoting the study of the humanities - resulting in buildings such as Holywell Music Room, The Ashmolean, The Taylorian Institute, Science Museum and the Natural History Museum. Other institutions trained civil servants to work across a growing empire, and yet further facilities related to its role in pioneering development in the medical sciences, such as the Radcliffe Infirmary.

5.5.2 Canal and railway

- Whilst the University was evolving and expanding, changes and growth to Oxford in the 19th and 20th were also stimulated, first by the arrival of the Oxford Canal, and then the railway. By substantially improving communications, these developments fuelled industrial and commercial expansion to the west of the centre, and the erection of terraced housing for their workforces.
- Slum clearances in the 1930s between the river and railway station resulted in housing and other buildings that complemented the growing motor industry in the area.

5.5.3 Contemporary Oxford

- Oxford was fortunate to survive the Second World War unscathed, and to escape the worst of post-war town planning that followed. Today it is an expanding and world-class educational and research centre, a vibrant and prosperous regional hub, and one of the most visited tourist destinations in the country.

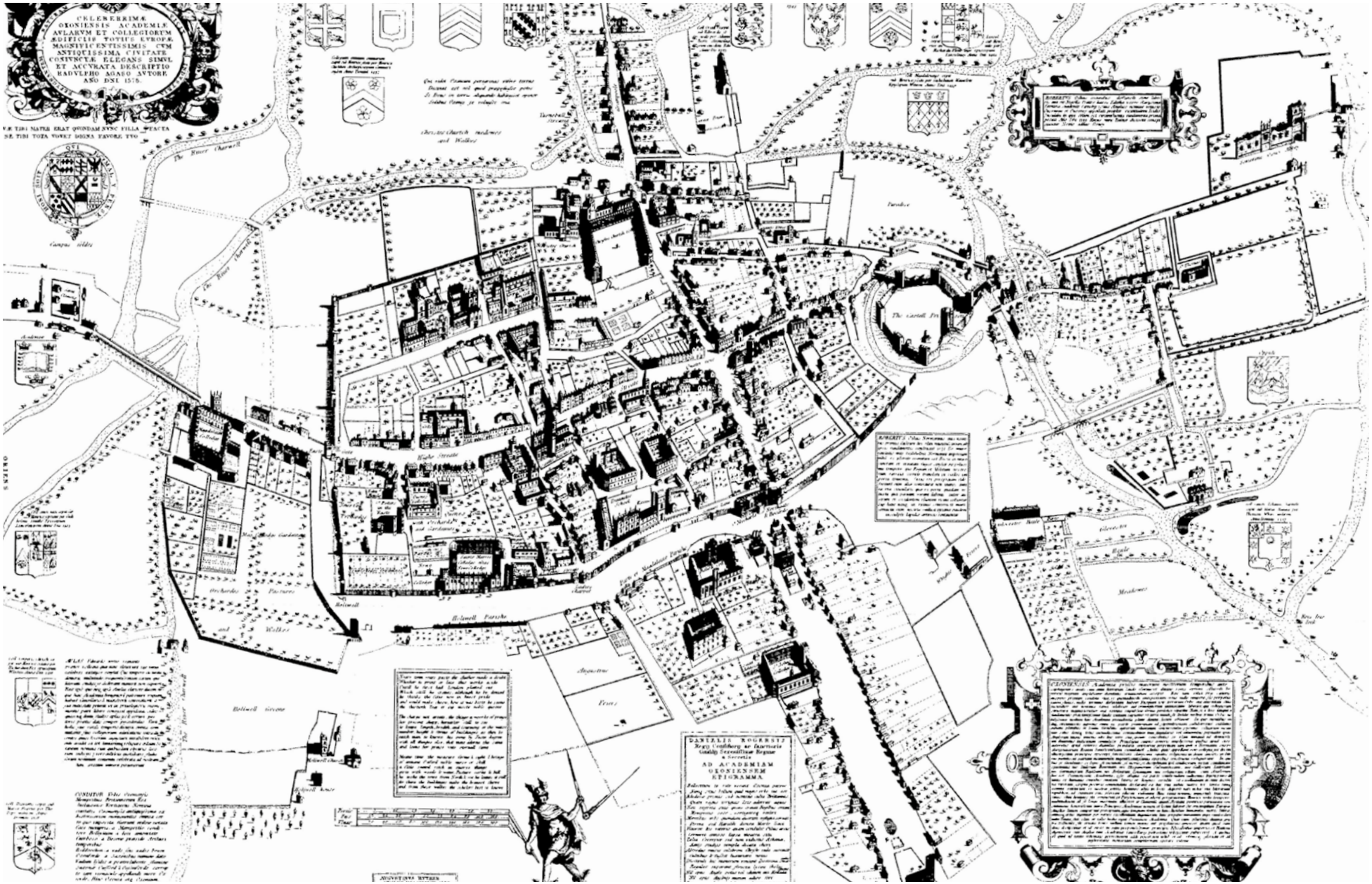
5.6 Designations

- The conservation area has a high concentration of designated heritage assets including those of the highest grading. The following sets out the percentage of each grading compared to the national average.

Scheduled Monuments	4	
Listed Buildings of which:	819	(entries on the list; some of these encompass multiple buildings)
- Grade I	190	(23% against a national average of 2.5%)
- Grade II*	64	(8% against a national average of 5.5%)
- Grade II	565	(69% against a national average of 92%)

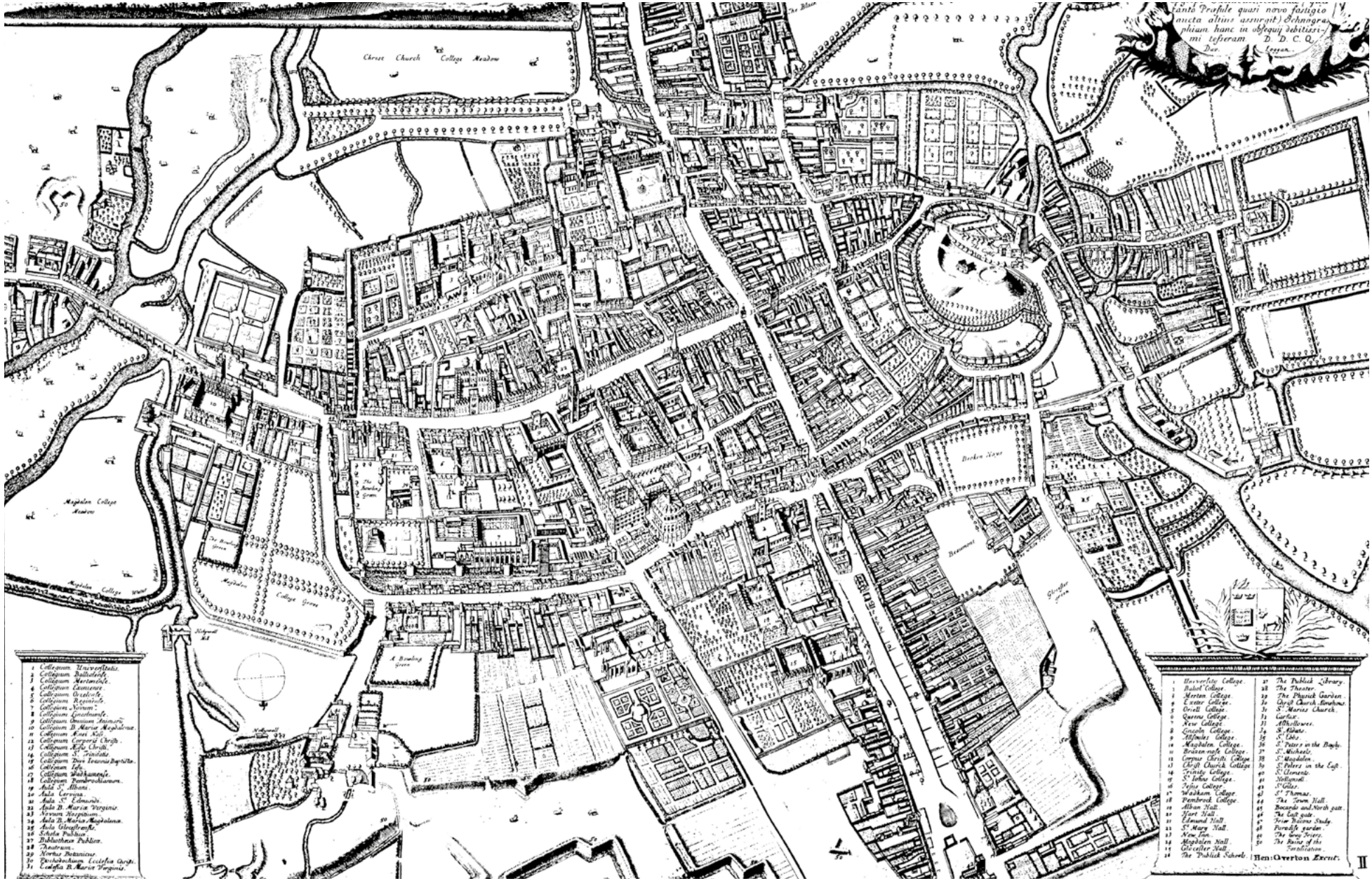
5.8 A history of Oxford in maps

- Oxford is exceptionally rich in historic maps. Here are four of the best, showing what has changed, and what has stayed the same.
- These and other maps can be found at the Oxfordshire History Centre.

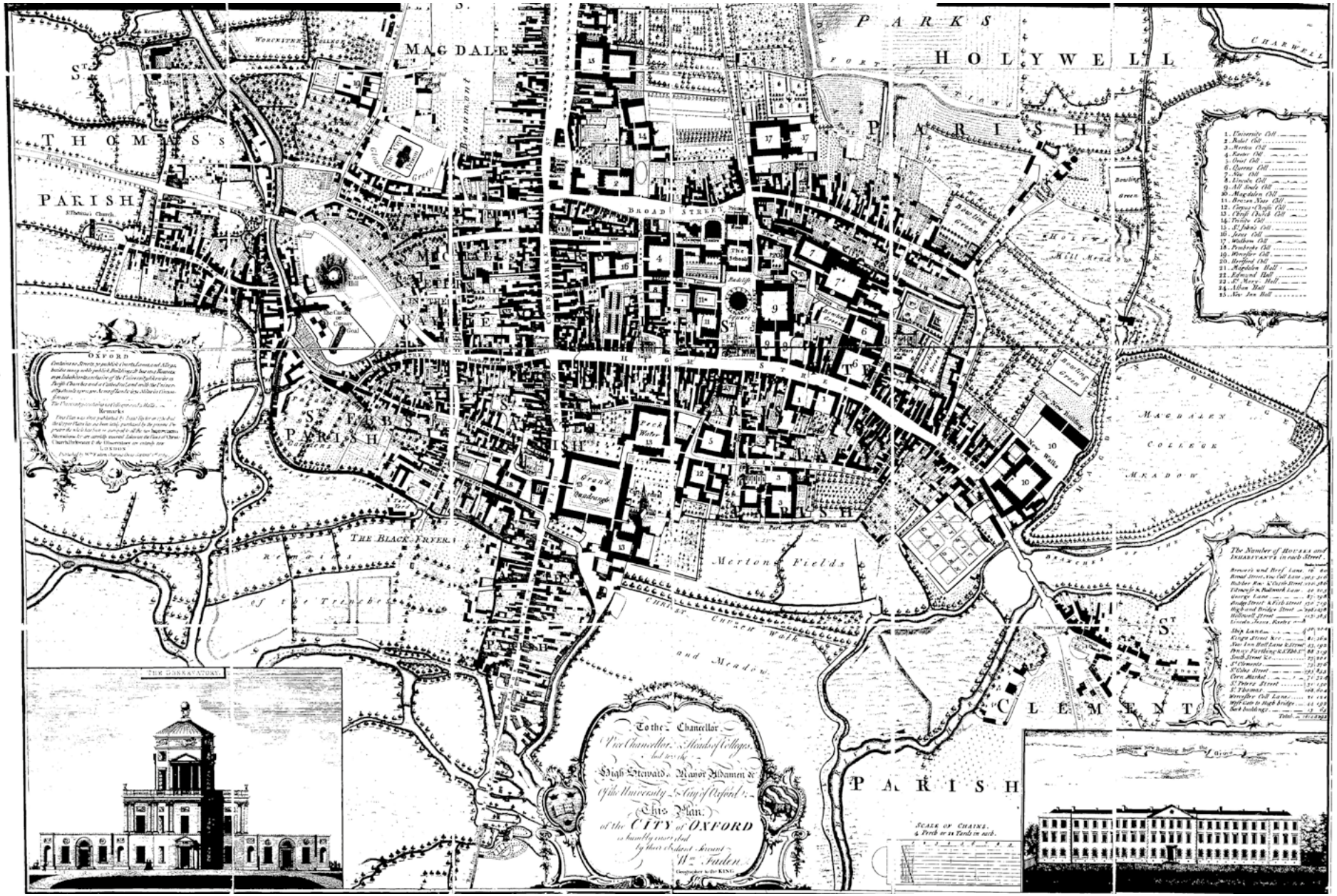


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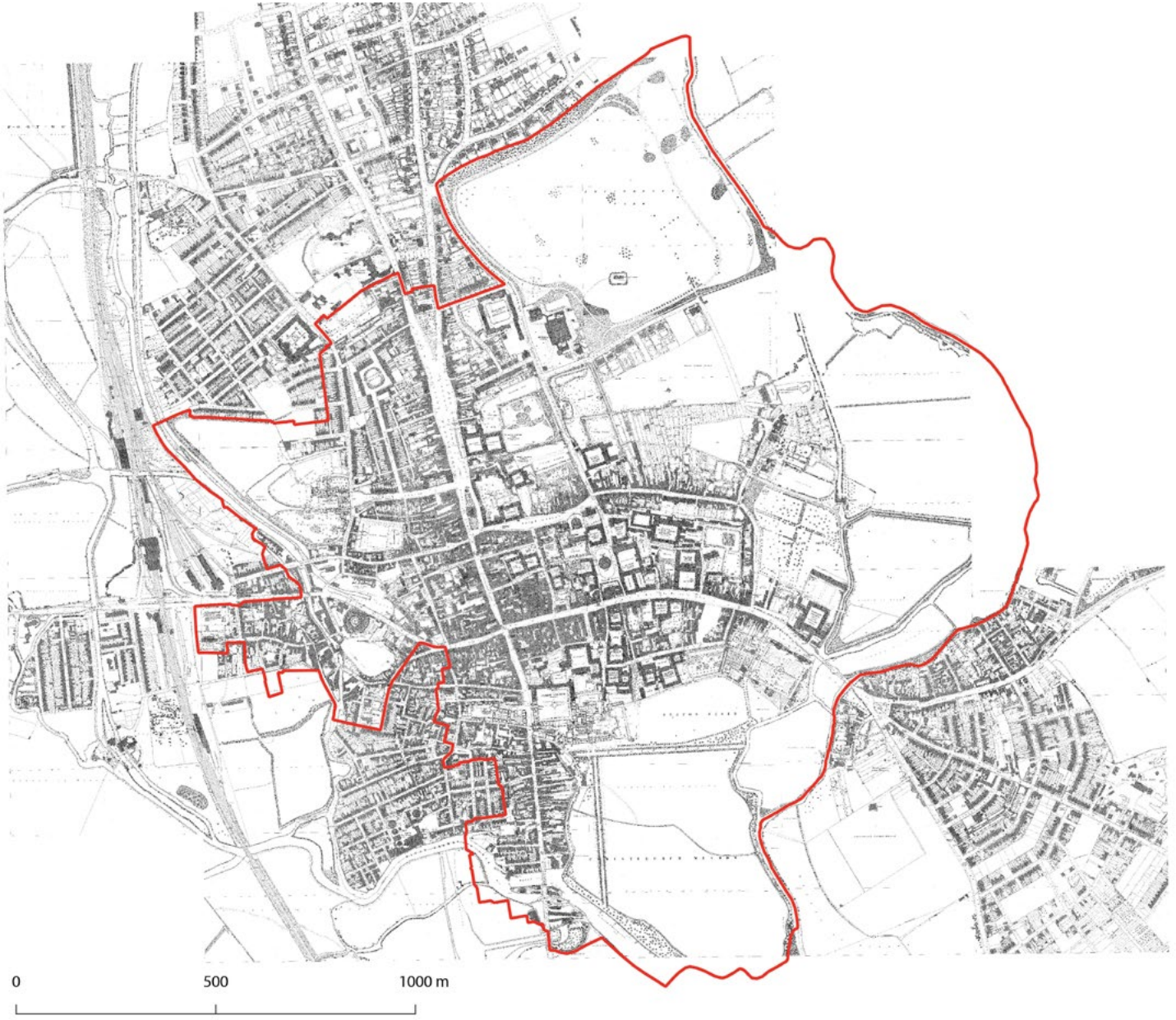
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1675 Loggan


MAGDALEN
PARKS
HOLYWELL
PARISH
THOMAS
PARISH
ST
PARISH
PARISH
CLEMENTS
Merton Fields
MAGDALEN COLLEGE MEADOW
THE BLACK FRYERS
OXFORD
To the Chancellor
Vice Chancellor
Heads of Colleges
High Steward
Mayor Aldermen &c
of the University
City of Oxford
This Plan
of the CITY of OXFORD
is humbly inscribed
by their Obedient Servant
Wm Faden
SCALE OF CHAINS
4 Perch or 22 Yards in each

1789 Faden



1876 1st Edition OS

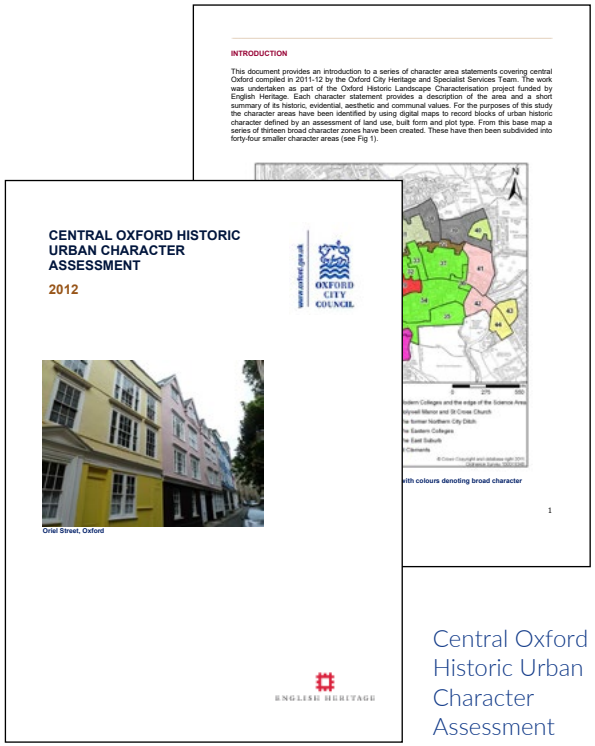
5.9 Further reading

Oxford has long been the subject of academic study and historical research, there is a rich library of further reading to draw on. The most useful texts and websites are listed here. Many contain references to further sources:

- Buildings of England: Oxfordshire, Nikolaus Pevsner and Jennifer Sherwood, 1974.
- Oxford, an Architectural Guide, Geoffrey Tyack, 1998
- Oxford Heritage Walks, a series four of illustrated guides by Malcolm Graham, recently republished by the Oxford Preservation Trust. https://www.oxfordpreservation.org.uk/
- Central Oxford Historic Urban Characterization Assessment, Oxford City Council. https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20200/archaeology/739/historic_urban_character_area_statements_for_oxfords_historic_core
- Oxford History website: http://www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/
- Oxford's Working Past – walking tours of Victorian and Edwardian industrial buildings, Liz Woolley, 2013.

These membership organisations promote interest in the history and future of Oxford and its heritage, and many organise events:

- Oxford Civic Society: https://www.oxcivicsoc.org.uk/
- Oxford Preservation Trust: https://www.oxfordpreservation.org.uk/
- Oxfordshire Architectural and Historical Society: https://oahs.org.uk/



Central Oxford Historic Urban Character Assessment

Chapter 6

Significance

Oxford Central (City & University) **Conservation Area**



(Image: OCC)

6.1 Assessment of significance

- The character statement set out in chapter 2.0 summarises those values and qualities that make the conservation area worthy of its designation. This chapter provides a more detailed examination of what makes the conservation area significant. It does so thematically, with the majority of those themes falling under three broad topics: uses and history; architecture and townscape; and landscape and setting.

6.1.1 Theme 1: Contrasts and complexity

- Oxford city centre is a place of harmonious contrast. So, whilst some historic urban places are significant because they are uniform and regular, the character and appearance of this conservation area is distinctive and exceptional because of the complementary combination of many things: commerce and education; monumental college architecture and modest houses; limestone ashlar and painted render; green swathes and dense streets; spires and rooftops; tranquil river banks and streets heaving with humanity; busy shopping areas and quiet back streets; administration and retail.
- Where these factors make a positive contribution to the conservation area they convey a strong sense of the specific nature of Oxford – its history, the landscape, time-honoured materials and the city's architectural traditions.

6.2 Use and history

- Oxford Central Conservation Area is of international historical and architectural significance because of the University of Oxford, but before it was home to a university, the town was a regionally important civic and commercial centre, and these functions have also profoundly shaped the character and appearance of the conservation area. The full name of the Conservation Area – Central (City and University) – makes clear the importance of both town and gown in the decision to designate it.



Commerce and education along Turl Street

6.2.1 Theme 2: University

- The University of Oxford and its colleges and permanent private halls make the centre of Oxford distinctively different from other regional towns and cities. By association with the University's long and distinguished history of education and research, scientific advancement, the arts and humanities, and the influence of the institutions on the development of the nation as a whole, the conservation area is a place of international historic importance. The buildings and spaces of the conservation area provide an opportunity to make a tangible connection with this history and these achievements.
- Furthermore, the longstanding traditions, the wealth of the institutions, and the specific needs of education and research have generated architecture of the highest historic importance, unique types of buildings and planning (see theme 13), preserved a significantly high number of medieval buildings and extent of archaeology (see theme 12), and created distinctive patterns of activity.

6.2.2 Theme 3: association with historic figures

- The city has been home to many notable figures who have made a significant impact on science, art and literature, religion, politics and many other walks of life. These associations are a major component of the historical interest of the conservation area and are frequently linked to specific buildings and sites.
- The wealth and ambition of Oxford University and its colleges has also meant that some of the country's most celebrated architects have been employed in the city, from William Wynford, Sir Christopher Wren and Nicholas Hawksmoor, to G. T. Andrews, and Powell and Moya.
- Individual works by these architects contribute greatly to the historic and architectural special interest of the conservation area, but it is also unusual and therefore significant to see the works of leading architects from so many historical periods in one location.



'The iconic Radcliffe Camera in Radcliffe Square, which forms part of the University's Bodleian Library



The Sir William Dunn School of Pathology where Penicillin was developed as a viable drug for the treatment of bacterial infection (OCC)

6.2.3 Theme 4: fame and celebration

- Oxford has been the subject of and setting for countless works of art and literature, and it is significant that the townscape, landscape, architecture, culture and sense of place celebrated in these works remains recognizable because of the unusual degree of preservation and continuity in the conservation area.
- The city's associations, exceptional architecture and landscapes draws up to 8 million visitors a year from across the globe. This is a source of economic prosperity, cultural richness, and vibrancy, but the sheer number of visitors on the central streets is also a threat to the quality of experience and sense of place and risks unbalancing the functional use of the centre.



Christchurch Blue Boar Quad by Powell and Moya (OCC)



The Martyrs Memorial on St. Giles (OCC)

6.2.4 Theme 5: religion

- Oxford is home to a wealth of religious institutions and buildings. What is not always understood today is that the University and its earlier colleges were established to prepare people for a life in the church; and in addition to the many college chapels situated in the conservation area there is a cathedral, non-conformist chapels, Catholic churches, a Quaker meeting house, and several Christian 'permanent private halls' of the University. This is a concentration of places of worship that is exceptional in post- Reformation Britain, and embodies a physical link to the significant contribution of Oxford priests and theologians to the history of faith in the UK.
- Many of the city's religious buildings are also prominent elements in the townscape of the conservation area, most famously in their contribution to the celebrated skyline of the city (see theme 21), but also as focal points of streets and spaces. Examples of the latter include the Wesley Memorial church on New Inn Hall Street, St Michael at the North Gate, the Church of Saint Mary Magdalen at the south end of St Giles', and the University Church of St Mary's.
- Oxford was also, like York, Norwich and London, one of the few towns in medieval England with multiple parish churches. This legacy is in itself significant, although some of these churches have been demolished (St Peter le Bailey, St Martin's, Carfax) and others converted to other uses (All Saints, St Peter in the East).
- Faith in the middle ages had one further significant impact on the development and townscape of the conservation area: wealthy abbeys and other such 'religious houses' once occupied an enormous area, mostly in a crescent west of the walled town. After they were closed in the Reformation, the footprint left by these complexes shaped subsequent development and street layouts, and left traces as grand as Christ Church Cathedral and as modest as isolated sections of wall. Where traces of these medieval institutions survive within the conservation area they make an important contribution to its significance.



The University Church of St. Mary The Virgin, a landmark building both at street level and as part of the city skyline. (OCC)



The Wesleyan Memorial Church forms a focal point along St. Michael's Street (OCC)

6.2.5 Theme 6: continuity of land ownership

- Long-term institutional ownership is a distinctive aspect of the conservation area that has helped to shape its appearance and its character in a number of ways:
- Continuity of ownership and function has preserved an exceptionally high proportion of pre-1800 buildings.
- Long-term commitment of colleges and the University has resulted in the employment of architects of national and international standing in many cases.
- College ownership is not limited to their own precincts: most of the city centre is owned by a small number of colleges and trusts, resulting in a high degree of continuity and a long-term interest in the appearance and function of commercial and residential areas.

6.2.6 Theme 7: a service economy

- In the 1851 census more than a quarter of the city's employed population were recorded as being engaged in domestic service and allied occupations, such as inn servants or washerwomen, compared with an average for England and Wales of 13 per cent. This disparity can be explained by the presence of the University and colleges who were major employers in the city and whose staff and students also provided custom for independent businesses.
- The architectural expression of this service culture includes the large number of inns and pubs in the city, particularly those without coaching facilities, and the fragmentary survival of simple brick workers' housing from the later 19th and early 20th century. These capture the flavour of Victorian Oxford but are vulnerable to change. The closure of a number of historic pubs in recent years also threatens the legibility of this important aspect of the city's history.



19th century worker housing on Worcester Place (OCC)



The Royal Blenheim Public House on St. Ebbe's Street (OCC)

6.2.7 Theme 8: commerce and retail

- Oxford was established at a Thames crossing point on the boundary between two Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and likely developed an early role as a trading centre. Retail and commerce have influenced the character and architecture of the central streets ever since. Developments in shopping and commercial life are reflected in the evolution of shop design, from narrow frontages of small family businesses to large Victorian premises with expansive glass frontages, department stores, and modern shopping centres created by combining several historic plots. Where historic shopfronts survive within the conservation area these make an important positive contribution to its character and appearance, particularly where they form part of a group. Conversely, the amalgamation of historic plots to create larger units threatens the survival of the city's historically significant medieval tenement plots (theme 20).
- Until the late-18th century the city's markets retained their medieval patterns, with certain trades based in certain streets such as in Fish Street (St Aldates) and Butcher Row (Queen Street and formerly High Street). However, following the 1771 Oxford Mileways Act – passed to de-clutter the main city roads and improve them for traffic movements – many moved into the newly built Covered Market, located between High Street and Jesus College Lane (now Market Street). Designated in its own right as a Grade II listed building, the Covered Market is significant as one of the oldest continually operating markets in the country. It is a distinctive architectural element of the conservation area, and connects and has influenced buildings on the streets to both the north and south.



Oxfam on Turl Street, where corporate branding has been adapted to successfully compliment the historic shopfront (OCC)



Commerce and retail - Packing Room at Frank Cooper's Marmalade Factory c. 1905 (Oxford's Working Past p.11)

- Industry is not often associated with the centre of the city, but it has been an element of the city's economy since its foundation. Castle Mill Stream and the Thames were traditionally the focus of this activity (as a source of power, a raw material, and a means of transportation), with the completion of the Oxford Canal in 1790 and the arrival of the Great Western Railway's midlands line in the mid-19th century accelerating the development of industries to the west of the city. Large parts of this area have since been redeveloped, with further change imminent (see the West End and Osney Mead SPD (2022)) However, where they have survived, buildings, infrastructure and fragments of this industrial past – such as the Lion Brewery, Cooper's Marmalade Factory, and the Former Cantay Depository, are historically important and contribute strongly to the specific character of the western edge of the conservation area.



Cooper's Marmalade Factory (1902-3) by Herbert Quinton on Park End Street (OCC)



The Old Lion Brewery gates on St. Thomas' Street

6.2.8 Theme 9: civic administration

- Oxford has been a regional centre of administration and justice for over a thousand years and the facilities that have been built to discharge these functions - the Castle, and subsequently law courts, police headquarters, county and city government offices - help to make the character and appearance of the south and west of the conservation area distinct from other parts.
- Like educational facilities, these are large buildings occupying large plots. They are in a range of architectural styles though a significant number, reflecting the expansion and reforming ethos of public services since the War, are Modernist post-war structures. What differentiates them from the colleges is their relationship to the street: the main elevations face the public (with the exception of the Castle), and they are sometimes set back from it.



County Hall (1841), by John Plowman, inspired by the adjacent Norman castle (OCC)



The Register Office at the junction between Tidmarsh Lane and New Road



Oxford Police Station (1936) by H.F. Hurcombe, the City Estates surveyor, faces onto St. Aldates.

6.2.9 Theme 10: defence

- Like many settlements of the Saxon and Norman periods, Oxford was built as a fortified city. This is significant both historically and because the outline of the medieval fortification still does much to define the centre of the city. There is a high level of survival of the city's medieval wall, and the outline of this fortification can be traced in streets such as Bulwark Lane, Broad Street and Holywell Street.
- Oxford had one of the most extensive and complete systems of Civil War fortifications. Although only traces of this are still visible (for example at Rhodes House), the buried archaeology of earthworks and structures and their operation and inhabitation are of national importance. See map opposite.

6.2.10 Theme 11: living

- The city centre has been an inhabited place since its foundation. That people live in the conservation area is therefore fundamental to its character, but the balance of this has changed. Today, the remaining residents are concentrated overwhelmingly in its western areas; they are easily outnumbered by the students of the University, living across the conservation area but not for long and only for part of the year.
- As the student population has grown, and continues to grow, accommodation for them has expanded into historically residential streets, causing a change of character in places such as Pembroke Street and Beaumont Street. For example, access for students is normally to the rear, meaning historic front doors are locked unused, and the amount of activity in the street reduced.
- Residents and students are two of the distinct communities that coexist but there can be limited interaction between them along with workers, shoppers and tourists in the centre of Oxford, partly due to the collegiate nature of the university with each college having it's own accommodation and on site social facilities.

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Defence - The City Wall at the history faculty (OCC)



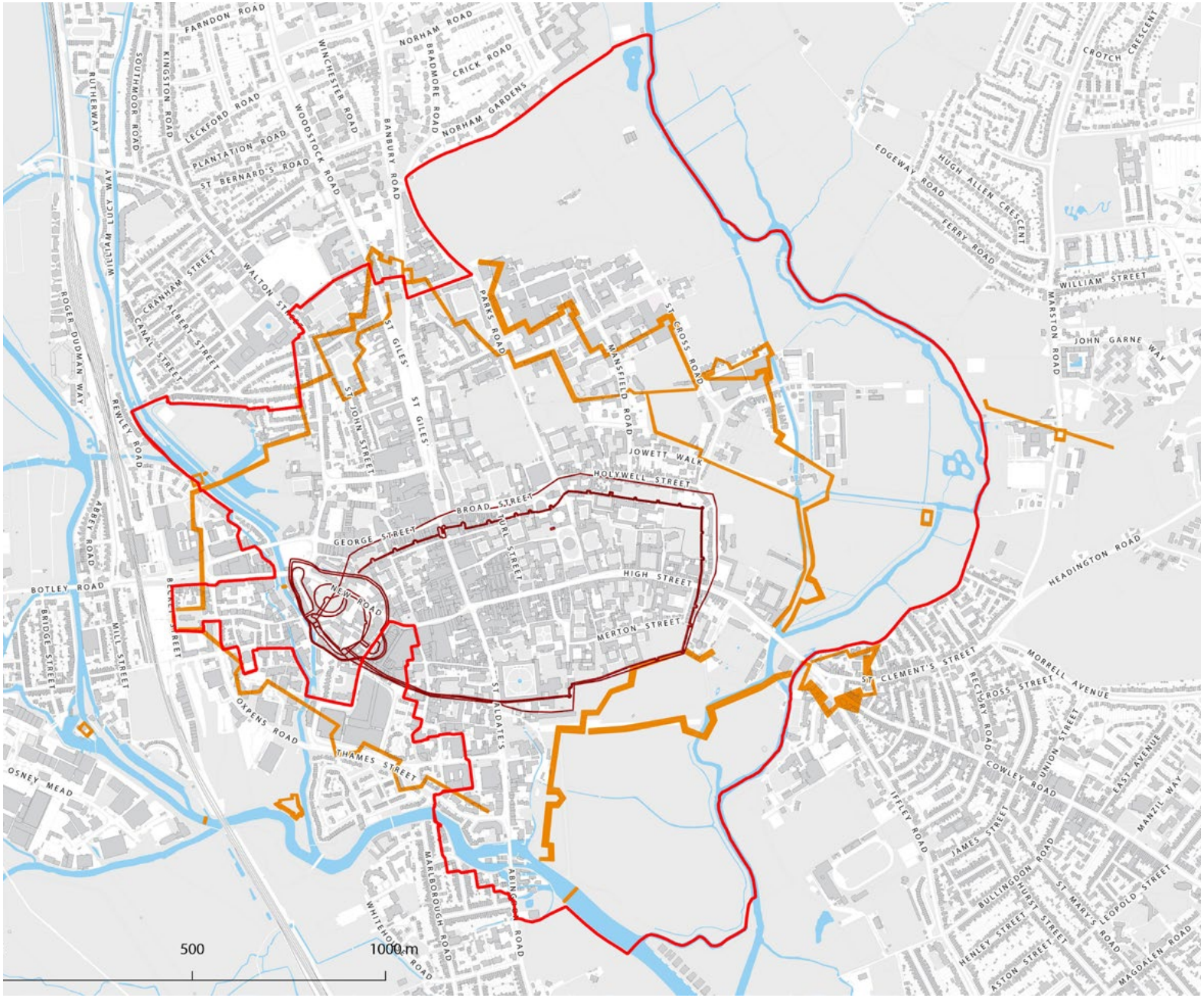
Living - Townhouses in office and student use (OCC)

FORTIFICATIONS

OXFORD (CITY AND UNIVERSITY) CONSERVATION AREA

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area
- Medieval defences
- Civil War defences



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6.2.11 Theme 12: archaeology

- Much of the history and evidence for past uses of the city centre, and the lives of those who lived there, exists in archaeology both below and above ground. This includes evidence for all phases of human activity since the last Ice Age. Because of its quality and extent, this is of national importance (see the Oxford Archaeological Action Plan 2013-2018 for more detail. The potential of this archaeology is all the greater for the quality of medieval documentary archives.
- In particular, the continuity of the colleges ensures an exceptional survival of evidence of the Saxon and medieval towns beneath the quadrangles and gardens, much greater than is normal in town and city centres.
- Above ground, details and fragments in places and buildings - materials, fittings, street surfaces, place names and historical associations – form evidence of past lives and events that contributes to the conservation area's unique sense of place. However, often unnoticed or unacknowledged, they are also vulnerable to damage or replacement, perhaps without an understanding of their significance.



Quadrangles, such as this one at Brasenose College, are one of the most distinctive aspects of the Conservation Area's townscape.



The walls of Pembroke College along Brewer Street - an example of where high boundary walls abut narrow medieval streets, creating a strong sense of enclosure.

6.3 Architecture and townscape

- The distinctive limestone buildings of the University and its colleges, and the medieval street layout are perhaps the most visually recognisable parts of Oxford's townscape. However, the architectural and townscape significance of the conservation area can only be understood in combination with all the other buildings and streets that make up the centre of the city.

6.3.1 Theme 13: colleges and quadrangles

- The University's colleges contribute more to the exceptional architecture and world famous townscape of central Oxford than any other single factor. In no small part, this is due to their sheer extent, with 34 of the colleges located within the conservation area, occupying approximately half of its developed area. However, it is also the result of the long-term commitment they have to their estates, and the unusual degree of continuity in the way they function, which has resulted in a highly distinctive urban form and- for the most part - architecture of outstanding quality.
- The University's colleges began as academic communities that provided space and quiet for students to prepare for entry into the church profession. Whilst the users and subjects they study have changed over time, the use of the college as private accommodation and study space has remained. The result of this is that the college's buildings remain in their original use to an unusual degree, and an exceptionally high proportion of pre-1800 buildings have been preserved.
- The traditional college design is a series of private precincts planned around quadrangles and enclosed within a defensive perimeter. The principal components were a chapel, communal dining hall, library, and study/sleeping rooms, with a gatehouse to ensure that the outside world did not disturb the peace that the academic community enjoyed. The different ways in which these elements are laid out around one or more quadrangles is what gives the colleges their individual character; however, this distinctive urban form, which was influenced by monastic architecture and first emerged fully formed in at New College in the late-14th century, has continued to serve as a model for collegiate architecture down to recent times, and characterises large parts of the conservation area.



All Souls College seen from Catte Street (OCC)



Keble College seen from Parks Road (OCC)

- The defensive perimeter creates a very distinctive streetscape in parts of the conservation area, characterised by few doors and high walls, but enlivened by intricate use of architectural detail and glimpses of college gardens. Functional, yet sometimes inactive, streetscape is emblematic of the city.
- The accumulated wealth and long-term commitment of the colleges has frequently enabled them to employ the best architects and craftsmen to create imposing and sometimes ostentatious buildings of the highest architectural quality. This has continued as the colleges have expanded, with the new structures often reflecting their time of construction. The sheer quantity of exceptional buildings spread across the conservation area's 34 colleges is a key contributor to its architectural and townscape significance.
- The influence of the colleges on the character and appearance of the city has not been wholly positive however. In recent decades, the rapid expansion of student numbers has been accommodated in a wider range of ways, such as new buildings within existing precincts, colonisation of houses and shops adjoining precincts, and pavilion blocks around the perimeter of playing fields. In some instances this has had an adverse effect on the character of these places, for example where precious green space has been built over, or where, buildings that historically addressed the street have been altered so that the primary entrance is to the rear, thereby significantly reducing the sense of activity to and from. In some cases, the original layout of the building is altered so that original windows and doors become blocked or no longer serve habitable rooms.



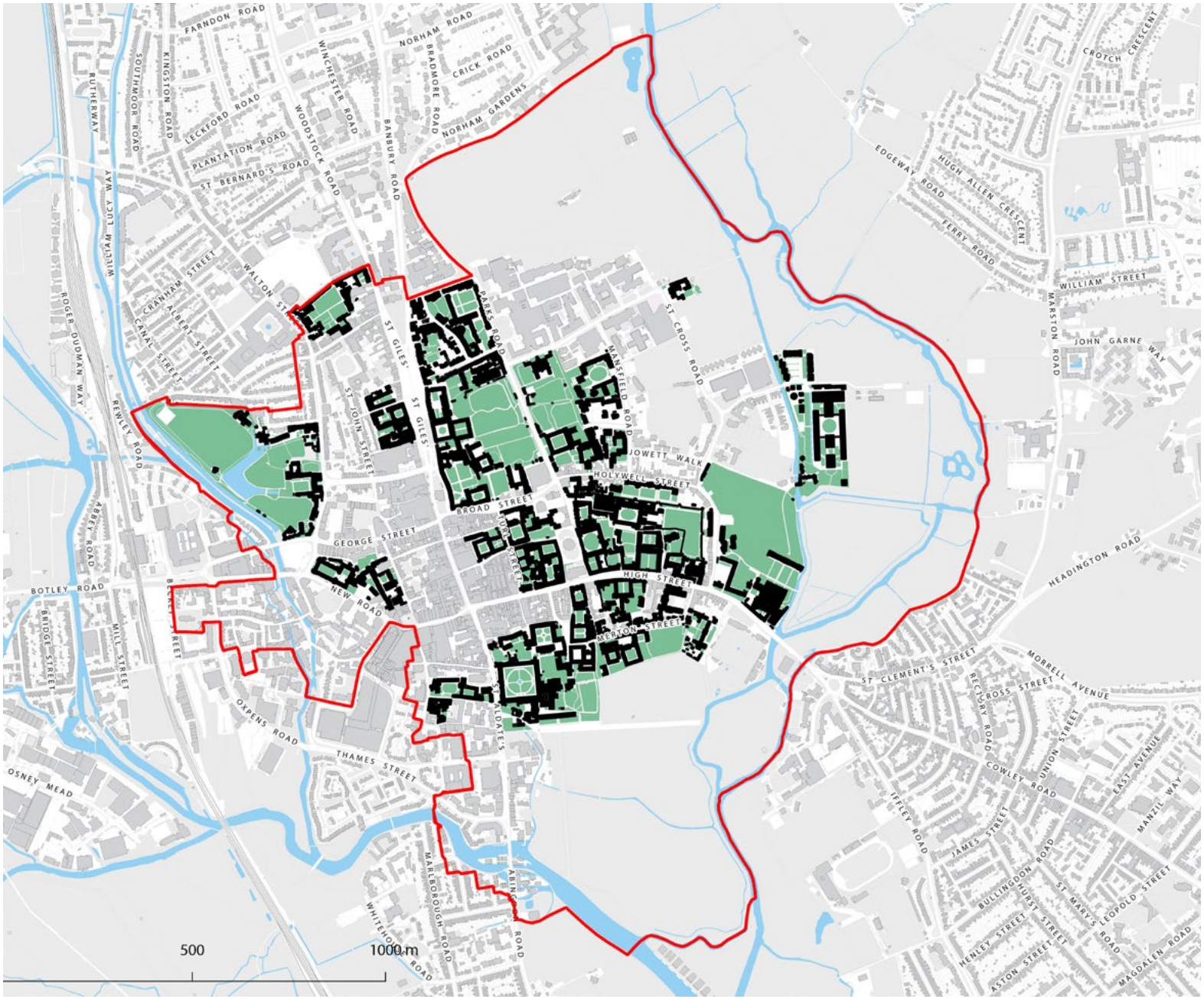
Original windows no longer serve habitable rooms (OCC)

COLLEGE CHARACTER

OXFORD (CITY AND UNIVERSITY) CONSERVATION AREA

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area
- College open space
- College buildings



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6.3.2 Theme 14: materials

- The overall quality and detailing of materials and the workmanship with which they have been employed is exceptional and contributes strongly to the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- A number of materials are strongly associated with the historic core of the city and do much to define its appearance:
  - Limestone: Wheatley and Headington Limestone were the locally quarried stones used to face many of the college, University and public buildings in the middle ages and following centuries. Since the eighteenth century other limestones have largely replaced Headington because of the rate at which it wears and because the quarries were exhausted, but because they are of a similar appearance they integrate successfully into the townscape of the conservation area.
  - Timber frames and painted render: Before the eighteenth century, modest buildings such as lodgings, houses and shops were normally built of oak frames. Large numbers survive and all such survivors are significant by virtue of their national rarity. Today, they are frequently rendered and colourfully painted, helping to create highly picturesque streetscapes such as Holywell Street. Although the use of many colours is a relatively modern development, it is generally agreed that it has successfully become part of the widely recognised and enjoyed image of the city.
  - Brick: From the eighteenth century, red brick was commonly used for domestic and commercial buildings. For this reason, its appearance is concentrated in the western fringe and those commercial streets such as George Street that were redeveloped. When it was used by a college, for the construction of William Butterfield's Keble College, it was a considered a shocking introduction, though it is now considered a triumph of the Gothic Revival. Nevertheless, the use of brick remains unusual in historic college precincts.
  - At first, bricks were locally fired with a warm red hue; from the nineteenth century it was machine made and joined by pale biscuit and yellow bricks that could be economically imported by rail and canal. In the later twentieth century a hard brown brick emerged across the country as a favoured material. Its tone and machined texture have not proved a success in the Oxford townscape.



Materials - Limestone of Corpus Christi College and Merton College



Materials - Stone and painted render in Holywell Street

6.3.3 Theme 15: architectural details

- The abundancy and quality of architectural detail is one of the defining characteristics of the conservation area and animates many buildings and streets. These details are not random and rarely solely decorative. They form part of a 'language' or pattern of building elements that reflect function and the evolution of architectural style. For example fine stone carving, stained glass windows, pargeting and decorative ironwork. This is well documented in Geoffrey Tyack's Oxford, an architectural guide.
- Recurring details add to the town's richness. Details vary from one character zone to another, depending on prevailing building type and age, and they are therefore important to reinforcing the unique characteristics of different parts of the conservation area. The character zones describe these local variations.

6.3.4 Theme 16: architectural style

- The 'Oxford tradition' is frequently used to describe the gothic style that many associate with the city's buildings and consider to be the 'correct' style for the city. Certainly the gothic style predominates in the city centre, particularly for college, university, and nineteenth century civic buildings, and does much to define its character.
- However, whilst Oxford has many buildings in the Gothic style, it is also home to many outstanding examples of Classical buildings, such as the work of Nicholas Hawksmoor and James Gibbs, and more recently to much Modernist architecture (see theme 17). When it comes to the international significance of the Conservation Area, it is the abundance of high-calibre architecture, and factors such as function, planning, materials, detailing, roofscape, and the relationship of buildings to the street, all of which are the subject of their own significance themes, that matter more than style.



Architectural details - Carving on the dormer of Magdalen College



Architectural details - Polychromatic brick of Keble College

6.3.5 Theme 17: post-war architecture

- Very few modern buildings were constructed in the city during the first half of the twentieth century, and as a result there is little evidence of the style directly influenced by French and German High Modernism.
- However, Oxford city centre is rich in post-war architecture, containing an exceptionally high concentration of listed post-war buildings. These designations are heavily weighted towards the colleges, reflecting the marked difference in quality between buildings commissioned by the colleges and those built by public bodies and for commercial and retail use.
- Many aspects of Modern Architecture and planning are at odds with the historic characteristics of Oxford's urban form and its architectural traditions. The best examples of post-war architecture respond positively to this context, rather than ignoring it. For example, Arne Jacobsen's St Catherine's College, was built with a low height that ensured it does not intrude into the views of the city centre from the Eastern Hills. The RIBA award winning music room at Corpus Christi College, built into a bastion of the medieval town wall, is another interesting example. Here, a high-quality architectural intervention has enabled an important heritage asset to be reused, which will contribute to its future conservation and enjoyment.



Architectural style - The Meadow Building, an example of the Oxford tradition (OCC)



Architectural style - The Clore Music Room at Corpus Christi (OCC)



Architectural style - The Sultan Nazrin Shah Centre, a successful modern building

6.3.6 Theme 18: street layout: Saxon burh, medieval changes and later town planning

- The largely regular street layout of the Saxon burh, founded over a thousand years ago, survives to a remarkable degree as the core of the conservation area (see Saxon and Medieval Street map). This historical continuity and resonance is of fundamental historical interest.
- Subsequent centuries have also made their mark, leaving important examples of later forms of urban growth and re-development that illustrate the evolution of the core and the expansion of the city over time. This includes medieval streets such as Longwall Street, Holywell Street, and Broad Street; as well as eighteenth and nineteenth century examples of development inspired by formal Renaissance concepts of town planning, such as Radcliffe Square and St John's Street.



Street Layout - Historic granite setts along the Norman route of Bulwarks Lane



Street Layout - Radcliffe Square



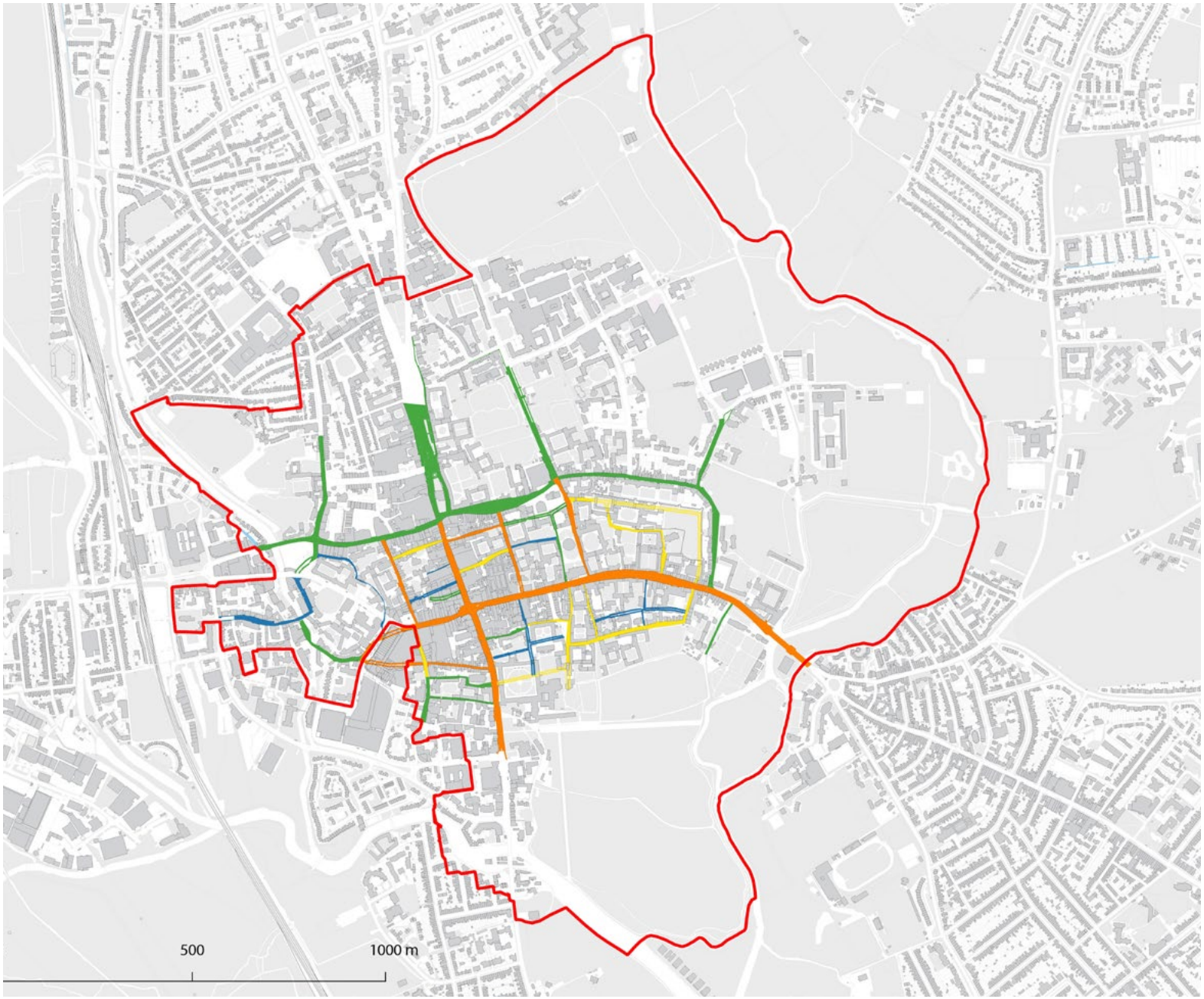
Street Layout - St. John's Street (OCC)

SAXON AND MEDIEVAL STREETS

OXFORD (CITY AND UNIVERSITY) CONSERVATION AREA

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area
- Medieval evidence
- Norman evidence
- Saxon evidence
- Saxon-medieval



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6.3.7 Theme 19: public space

- A legacy of the Saxon burh layout is the shortage of planned public spaces within what was the walled city. Those places that have been created and those streets that have taken on the function of public spaces are therefore of great importance to the history and life of the city:
  - Radcliffe Square: created within the Saxon burh in the eighteenth century to make a site for the Radcliffe Camera. The square is internationally significant and famous because of the quality and planning of the architecture. It has no comparison in Britain.
  - Broad Street: its shape derived from the town ditch from which it was created. It has many of the characteristics of a major public space: its origins as a medieval market place, its broad dimensions, the public architecture and the tradition of public assembly and demonstration. Temporary projects such as the City Council's, 'Broad Meadow,' and the County Council's, 'Broad Street Project,' have introduced pedestrianisation, seating and planting to areas of Broad Street to improve the public realm and encourage use.
  - St Giles': whose distinctive funnelling form and impressive scale reflect its origins as a medieval suburb outside the town walls, which has been the site for St Giles' Fair and before that markets since the middle ages.
  - Gloucester Green, Oxford Castle, and Bonn Square: recent public spaces, all purposefully created by opening up previously closed places.
  - Cornmarket Street and Queens' Street: focal points of activity effectively made into public space by restricting vehicles
- Increased traffic over the last century has harmed the character of Broad Street and St Giles', by its appearance, the space it occupies, the noise it generates, and the impact of pollution and vibration on historic buildings. By contrast, the more recent restriction of vehicles into streets such as Cornmarket Street has done much to enhance their character and make it easier to appreciate their architecture.



Public Space - Broad Street looking towards the Sheldonian Theatre



Public Space - St Giles Fair looking North (Oxford Today)

6.3.8 Theme 20: medieval plots

- Narrow Norman tenement plots survive in many streets in the historic core, where they have not been amalgamated to form colleges and large retail buildings.
- This survival is of national historical importance as evidence of the planning and life of a medieval town. It has a profound impact on the character and appearance of the centre of the conservation area: the building line hard up against the pavement, narrow frontages and roofs that form animated streetscapes, 'backlands' of yards, gardens extensions and outhouses. Taken together, these form highly aesthetic and historically resonant counterpoint to monumental college precincts (see Oxford Archaeological Action Plan 2013-2018, p.14, for more details).
- The survival of these tenement plots is fragile if there is pressure to merge plots and demolish boundary walls.



Medieval Plots - The High Street


Medieval Plots - Holywell Street

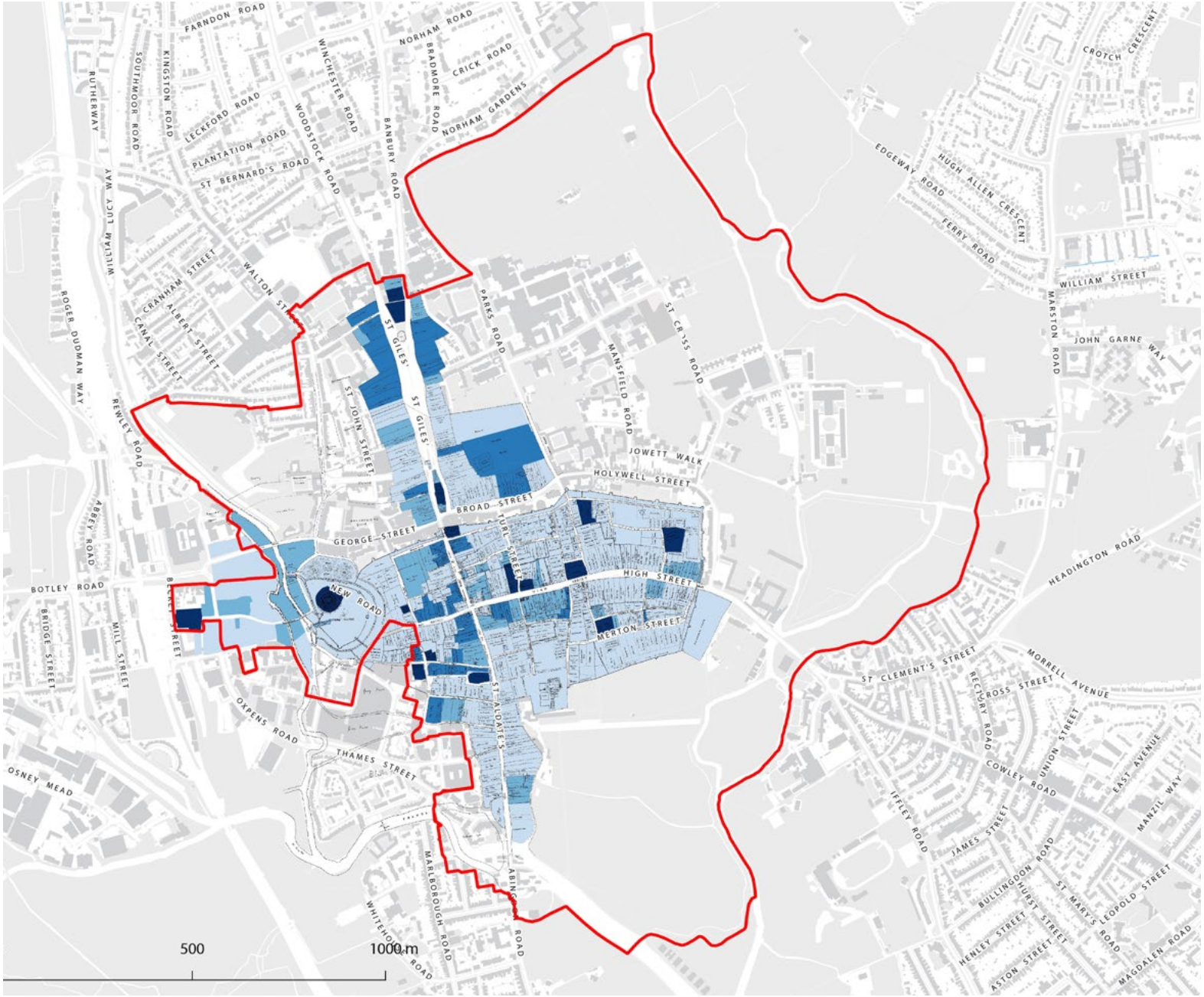

Medieval Plots - St. Giles west side

MEDIEVAL PLOT BOUNDARIES

OXFORD (CITY AND UNIVERSITY) CONSERVATION AREA

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area
- High
- Medium
- Low
- Nil



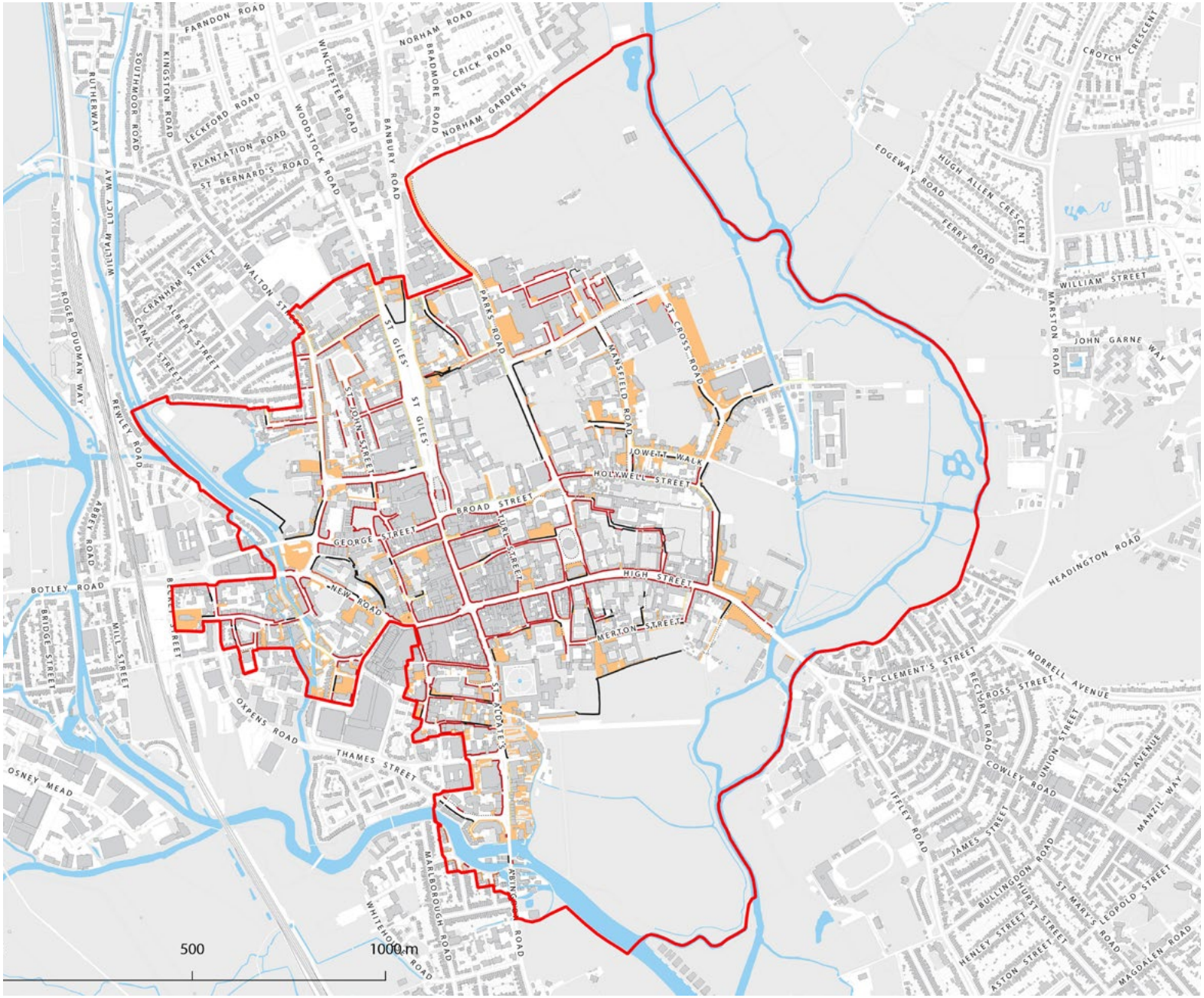
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BUILDING LINES AND GAPS

OXFORD (CITY AND UNIVERSITY) CONSERVATION AREA

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area
- Back of the pavement
- Set back (up to 3m)
- Set back (3m +)
- Mixed
- Broken
- Railings
- Wall



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6.3.9 Theme 21: roofscape, skyline and landmarks

- The roofscape and skyline of the conservation area is perhaps the most animated, joyful and architecturally rich roofscape in the country. It is unquestionably the most famous. It is also fragile, and easily eroded by inappropriate or ill-considered development both inside and outside the conservation area. In recognition of this, as early as 1962 the City Council adopted View Cones and a High Buildings Area to manage and protect it.
- What makes the roofscape and skyline of the conservation area special is a harmonious combination of the vertical accents created by the famous landmarks, many designed to have a brilliant architectural effect on the skyline, and the rich backcloth of historic roofs, whose pitches, parapets, pinnacles, turrets and chimney stacks create a vibrant and picturesque texture. In longer views, the green spaces and higher ground form an attractive foreground or background (see theme 22).
- In this, the following factors are of special importance:
  - the complementary palette of materials.,
  - the narrow roofs whether houses or colleges (because pre-Victorian builders were limited by the use of timber).
  - the gentle range of building heights (mostly two – four storeys).
  - the combination of horizontal elements (e.g. parapets and ridge lines) and vertical elements (especially chimney stacks and pinnacles). The effect and rhythm of the vertical elements is particularly important
  - subtle variations in the building heights of different streets, which are important in distinguishing the different historical and townscape character of different parts of the conservation area. For example, residential streets are two-three storeys, whereas the primary commercial streets are four and sometimes five storeys.
- These factors cause harm to the significance of the roofscape:
  - Post-war development where roofs consist of large flat planes, modulated on a large scale or not all, and are without vertical accent or detail.
  - Roof plant, extract flues, etc., associated with modern heating and ventilation systems, roof terrace paraphernalia such as parasols because of their non-historical form, their location, prominence, number and colour.



Roofscape - Radcliffe Camera, Bodleian Library, All Souls



Roofscape - View from Christchurch Meadow

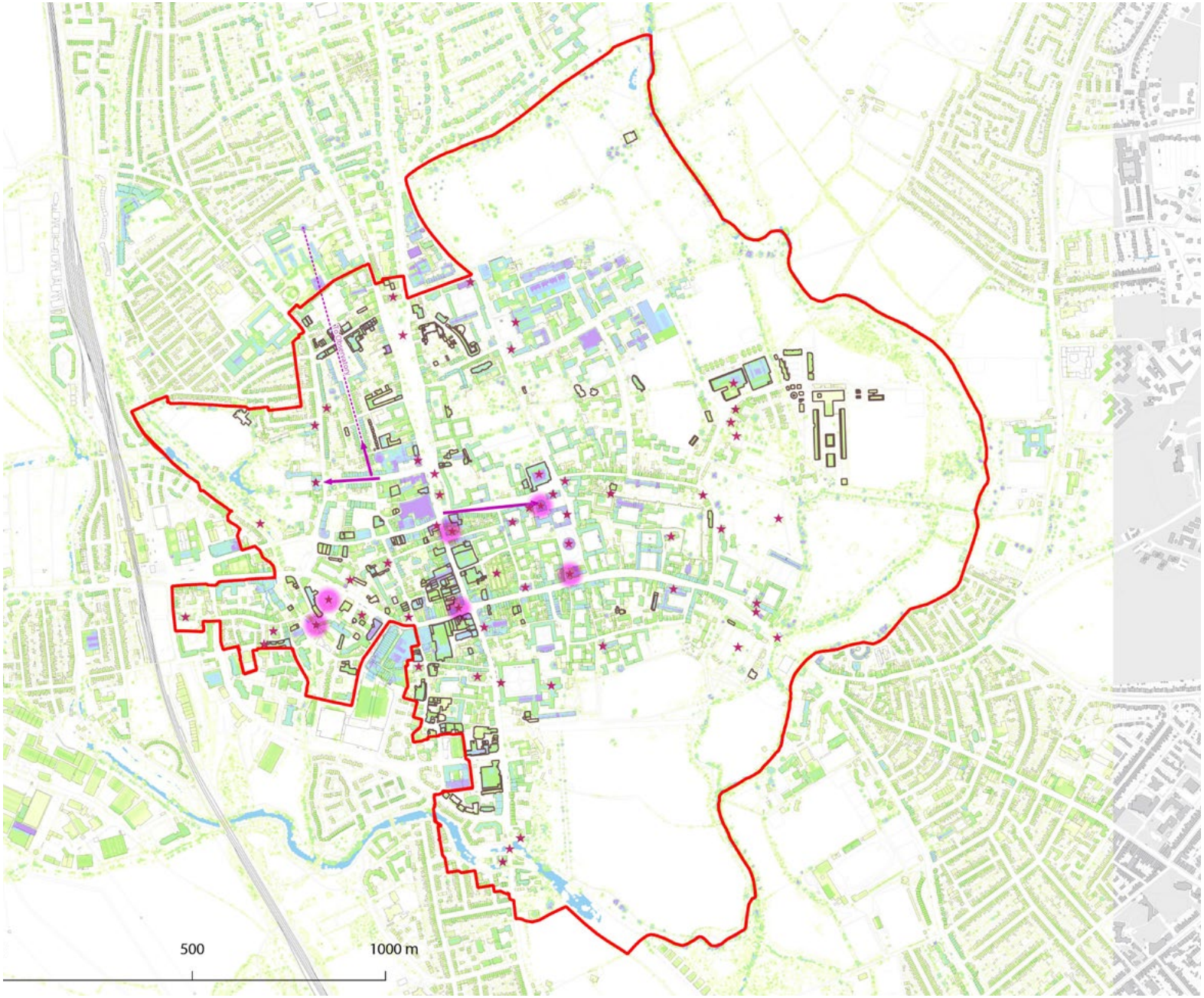
ROOFSCAPE

OXFORD (CITY AND UNIVERSITY) CONSERVATION AREA

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area
- 0m
- 5m
- 10m
- 15m
- 20m
- Flat roofs
- Elevated panorama
- View end point
- Visible from
- Landmarks

NB. The Beecroft, Biochemistry and LAMB buildings have been updated from available planning information.



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6.3.10 Theme 22: views

- Significant and enjoyable views are exceptionally widespread in the conservation area, so much so that it is not possible here to identify all of the views that contribute to the experience and enjoyment of the city centre.
- It is useful, however, to identity types of views and the characteristics of them that contribute to their significance
  - **Unfolding views:** most famously, the curving topography of High Street creates a continuous sequence of unfolding views of streetscape and landmarks such as All Saints Church and the University Church. This is one of the finest and most thrilling townscape experiences in Europe.
  - **Glimpsed views:** of landmarks, for example, from Broad Street southwards down Turl Street to the spire of All Saints Church, or the Radcliffe Camera from the High Street; charming glimpses down alleys and side streets and into colleges, especially along the High Street.
  - **Vistas to focal points:** for example, Tom Tower is the focal point of the north-south axis of Oxford, clearly visible for the length of Cornmarket Street and St Aldates.



Views - The Radcliffe Observatory from Walton Street



Views - Cornmarket looking towards Tom Tower from St. Michael's Tower

- **Designed views:** there are few designed views in public areas, but they include the Observatory views along Beaumont and Walton Streets, views of The Clarendon Building and the Sheldonian Theatre created by demolishing houses in the middle of Broad Street, and the panorama from the motte of the Castle (for surveillance and defence). There are many designed views within the formal gardens of the colleges. Though these are not always accessible to the public, they do form part of the contribution that the colleges make to the significance of the conservation area and they are experienced and often appreciated by the college members and visitors.
- **Public viewing panoramas:** from which the viewer can experience and appreciate the historical form and architectural character of central Oxford, and its relationship to its landscape setting. Seven have been identified: Carfax Tower (Church of St Martin), the Saxon tower of St Michael at the North Gate, St George's Tower, the Castle Motte, the University Church (of St Mary the Virgin), the cupola of the Sheldonian Theatre, and (just outside the conservation area but with views over it) the rooftop café terrace of the Westgate Centre. Of these, only the Sheldonian and Westgate Centre were views designed for enjoyment and pleasure.
- **Views across the flood plain:** to the city centre are amongst the most famous in the city, in particular, the view across Christ Church Meadows. These views illustrate the original siting of the city on dry ground adjacent to a river crossing. Because the historic core is otherwise so dense, these views are the only ground level panoramas in the conservation area.
- **Views from and along the rivers:** both from river crossings and from boats and punts are highly significant because of the historical importance of the rivers to the foundation of the city and for movement and trade, and because of the way topography and landscape can be understood, experienced, and above all enjoyed.
- **Views out of the conservation area:** on the eastern edge are screened by a band of mature trees along the Cherwell. This screening provides a strong sense of seclusion: from a distance, east Oxford is entirely hidden by trees and vegetation, so that water meadows feel remarkably rural despite being surrounded by the city.



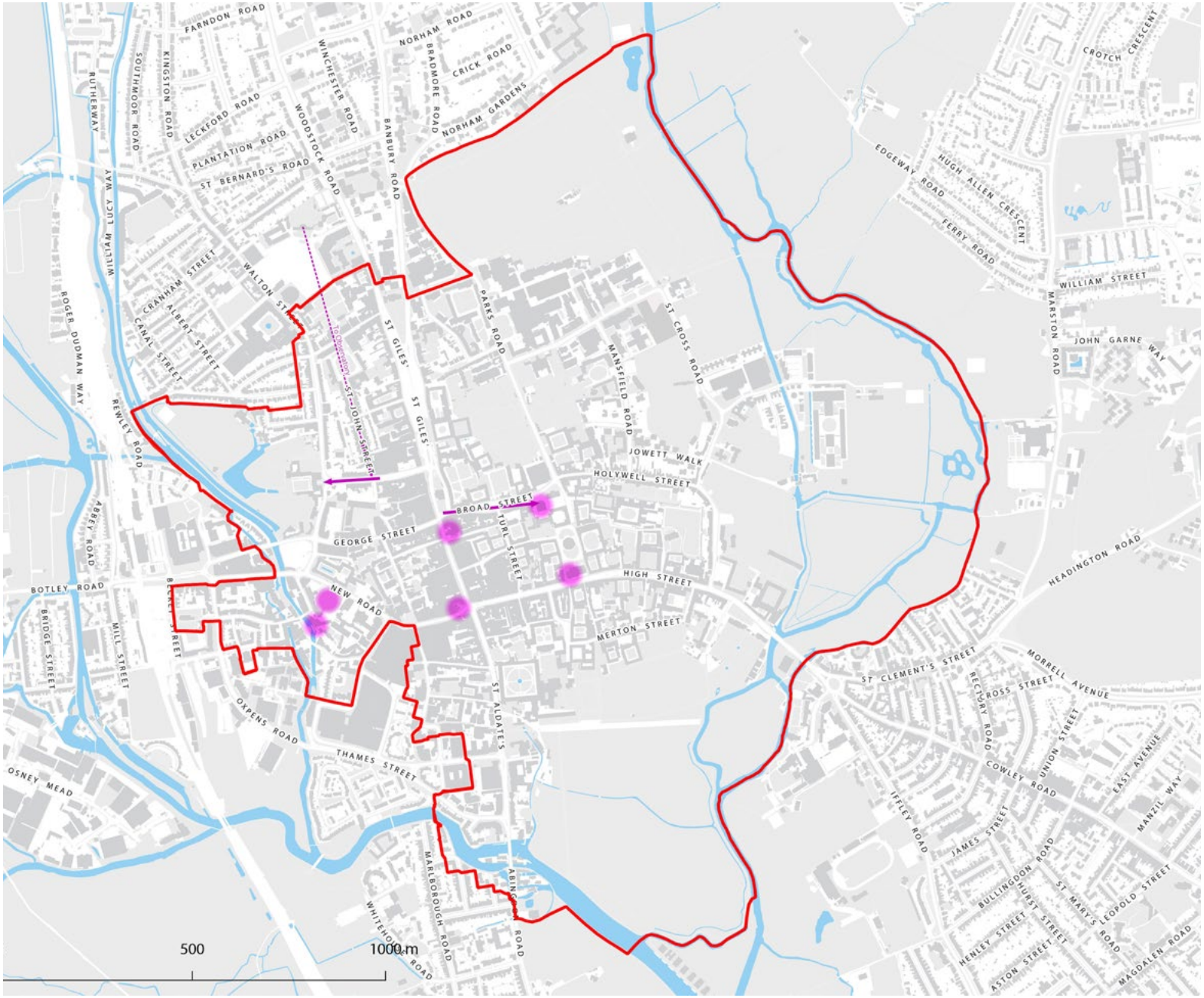
Views -Nuffield College from Bulwarks Lane

VIEWS

OXFORD (CITY AND UNIVERSITY) CONSERVATION AREA

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area
- Elevated panorama
- View end point
- Visible from



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6.4 Landscape and setting

- Landscape – in the form of geography, topography, waterways and parks and gardens – makes a contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area which is as significant as the buildings and streets:

6.4.1 Theme 23: topography and geology

- The location and shape of the historic core is defined by the topography and geology of the Thames valley.
- The Saxon burh was set out on the gravel terraces above the water meadows, in the peninsular between the River Thames and the River Cherwell.
- Today, the extent of development is still strongly defined by these terraces. Overlaying geology and street plans show that very few buildings have been built on the flood plain (with the notable exceptions of St Catherine's College and the former industrial zone along the Castle Mill Stream).
- The famed setting of the city centre, and views of it, is formed by the low hills rising up on either side of the river valley, which creates a gentle bowl (see theme 27).



Topology and geology - The green setting of Oxford - seen from the Church of St. Michael



Views - Gently rising hills frame Oxford - seen from Carfax Tower

GEOLOGY
OXFORD (CITY AND UNIVERSITY) CONSERVATION AREA

Key

Oxford Central Conservation Area

River gravels

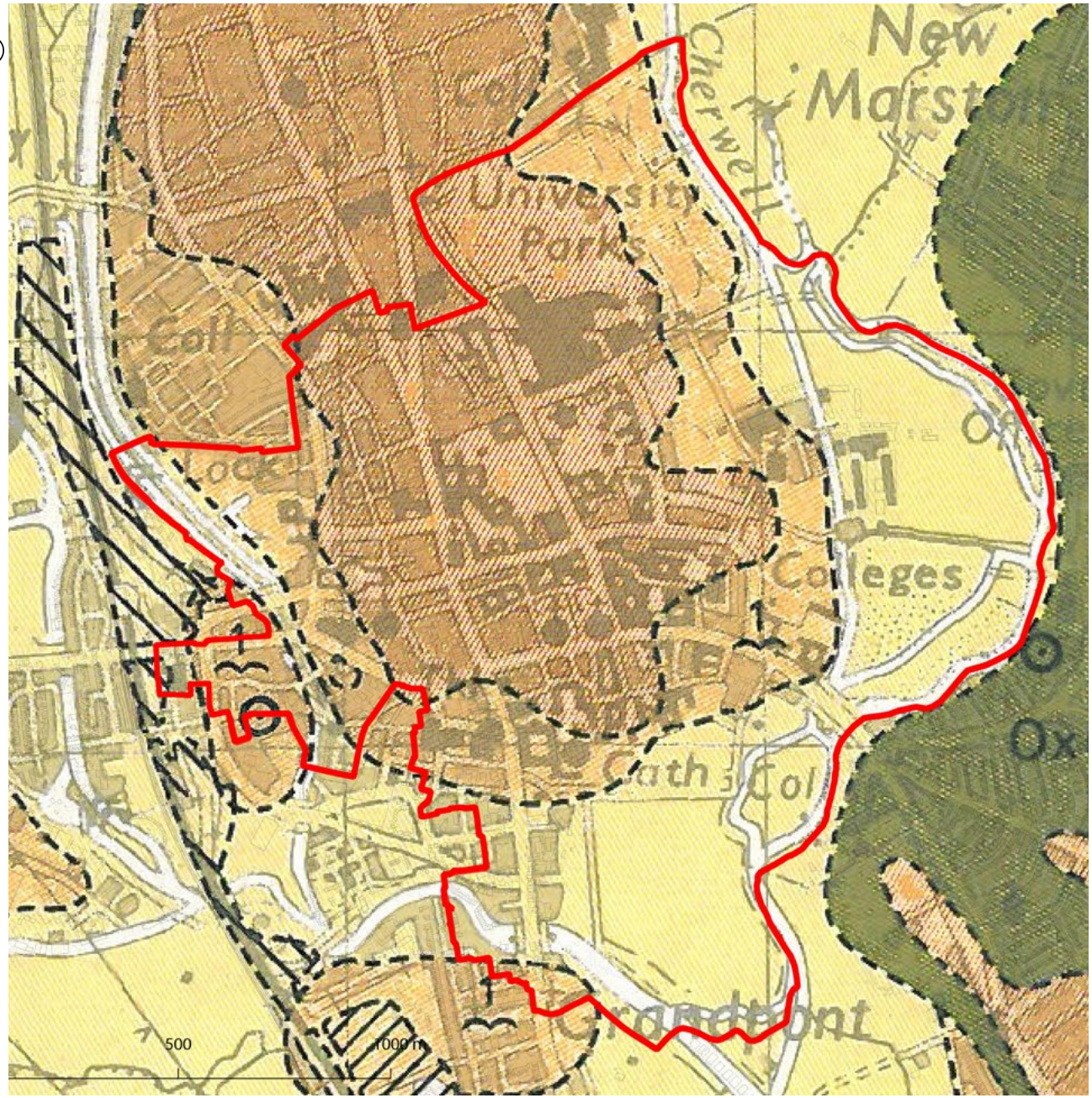
- Alluvium
- 1st (Flood Plain) terrace deposits
- 2nd (Summertown-Radley) terrace deposits
- 3rd (Wolvercote) terrace deposits
- 4th (Hanborough) terrace deposits

Other ground types

- Silt (0 to 15m)
- Clay 90 to 22m)
- Oxford Clay (90 to 100m)

Geological symbols

- Inclined strata, dip in degrees
- Geological boundary, drift
- Geological boundary, solid
- Fault at surface crossmark indicated downthrow side. Broken lines denote uncertainty
- Selected boreholes
- Pit or mine shaft, abandoned
- Adit or mine mouth, abandoned, showing direction of entry
- Area within which mineral has been worked. The colour is indicative of the deposit extracted
- Made ground. The colour is indicative of the underlying deposit



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TOPOGRAPHY

OXFORD (CITY AND UNIVERSITY) CONSERVATION AREA

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area
- 50 m AOD
- 55 m AOD
- 60 m AOD
- 65 m AOD
- 70 m AOD



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6.4.2 Theme 24: waterways

- Oxford exists because of the River Thames and the River Cherwell: it was founded as a crossing point across the Thames, at the confluence of the two rivers. These rivers have sustained Oxford's economy and been its playground. Together with the Oxford Canal they stimulated the industrial and commercial life of the city as a means of communication and source of power.
- The different characters of the Thames, the Cherwell and the Castle Mill Stream and Canal give each of the east, south and west edges of the conservation area a distinctive identity (see the Character Zone Assessments for further detail).
- The history of boating is a particularly distinctive feature of the rivers that is indelibly linked to the world-wide image of the city and the conservation area. Before their use as pleasure craft, punts were working boats for fishing and transporting goods, closely associated with the boat people of Fisher Row in the western fringe of the Area. Nevertheless, they have been used as pleasure crafts since at least the 1880s and there is a special importance to experiencing the conservation area from the quiet rivers of the Cherwell and Thames as they pass through the tranquil green spaces of the flood plain.
- Although the boathouses lie just outside the conservation area, they form an important part of its setting, as competitive rowing provides another focus of activity intimately linked with the image of the University and city, that extends to the riverside within it.
- River bathing also has a long history in Oxford with specialised locations such as Parsons' Pleasure used since the 16th century. Much of the infrastructure that was built at these locations during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has since been lost; nonetheless these places retain a great deal of historic interest and often considerable communal value too.



Waterways - The Isis by Folly Bridge



Waterways - Punting on the River Thames by the Botanic Gardens

6.4.3 Theme 25: green space

- At first glance the centre of Oxford may appear to have a relatively small amount of green space, due to its unequal geographic distribution, and a lack of public access. However, more than 40% of the conservation area is designated as Green Belt (mostly to the south and eastern edges), and there are numerous sports field, churchyards, and the lawns and gardens of the college precincts spread throughout the city. This green space is important, as the combination of greenery and buildings – both designed and accidental – is fundamental to the unique character and townscape of the conservation area.
- The flood plains of the Cherwell and the Thames encircle the city centre, serving as a rustic counterpoint to its architectural splendours and a cherished public resource of great historical and artistic interest.
- The lawns and gardens of the conservation area's 34 colleges are often spaces of exceptional quality, providing an attractive setting for the college's buildings, and often of historical and design significance in and of themselves. Of the 15 Registered Parks and Gardens within, or partly within, the conservation area, 13 of these comprise college grounds, five of which are registered in the highest Grade II* and I categories. This significance is not diminished by the fact that the gardens are private and access is limited, although it does mean that public appreciation is restricted.
- What can be readily appreciated by the public, however, are the frequent glimpses of the college's gardens in the city streets, as overhanging trees and planting, and in views through gates and over walls. These contributes are of great importance to the streetscape, which is otherwise largely devoid of greenery.
- A high portion of the green space in the conservation area is used for recreation, either as public parks, or college and University sports fields. The largest of all, The University Parks combines both of these in a purpose designed Victorian landscape of national significance. The design and use of green space for organised sport is historically significant both because of its contribution to the culture of the University and because of the influence in popularising and codifying games across the world.
- Much smaller in size and number are churchyards, but these too are significant as relics of the medieval city, for their memorials, and as the setting of historic buildings to which the public have access.



Green space - Oxford canal



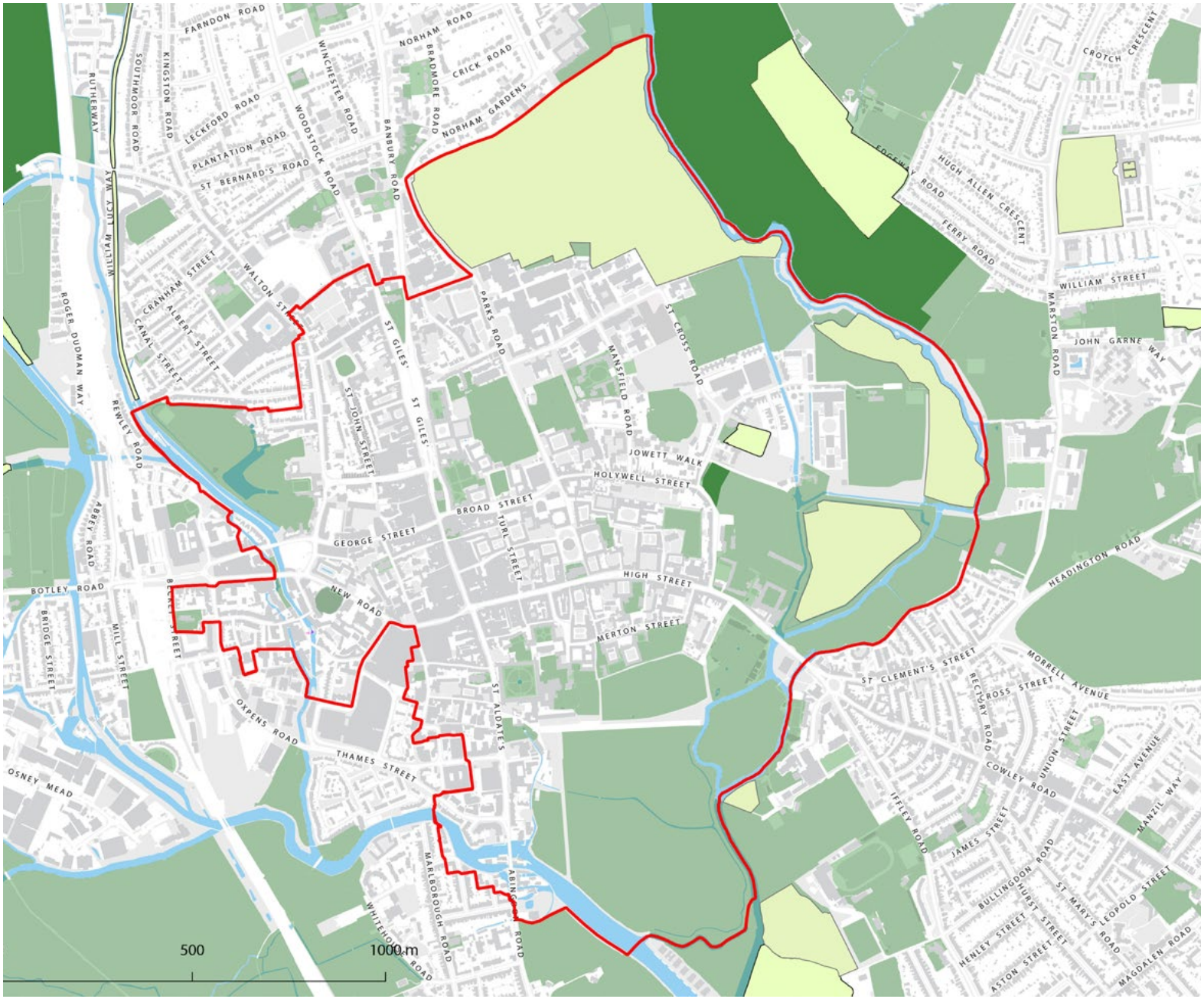
Green space - St. Giles' churchyard

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

OXFORD (CITY AND UNIVERSITY) CONSERVATION AREA

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area
- Protected Green Infrastructure
- Local Ecological Designations
- Site of special scientific interest



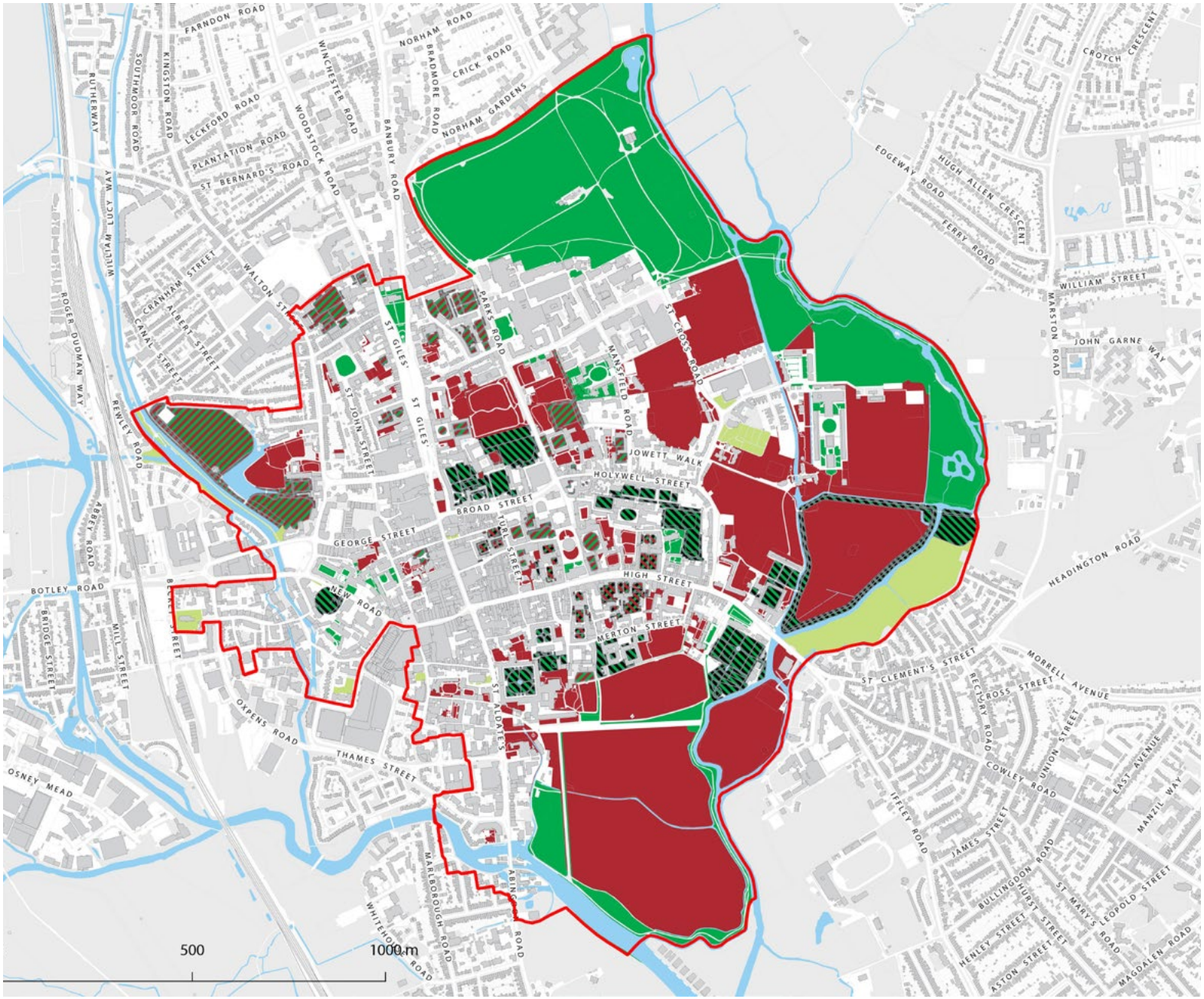
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PUBLIC ACCESS TO GREEN SPACES

OXFORD (CITY AND UNIVERSITY) CONSERVATION AREA

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area
- Public with access
- Private with access
- Limited access
- Paid access
- Limited paid access
- No access
- Not inspected



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- Green space carries the most significant ecological value in the conservation area. Through the range of flora and fauna this contributes directly to both the Area's character and appearance. The concentration of Snakes Head Fritillary in the Magdalen Meadows is, for example, the legacy of an historic land management regime that has allowed these plants to survive and flourish where they have otherwise been lost elsewhere in the Thames Valley. As a result of this historical management, they contribute to the meadows' draw for tourism.

6.4.4 Theme 26: tranquillity and sound

- For a city centre, the proportion of the conservation area that is quiet and shielded from traffic is striking.
- Tranquillity and sanctuary are intrinsic aspects of the character of much of the publicly accessible green space, the river and canalside walks, and the colleges. In the case of the colleges, silence is an intentional part of their design and function, in order to foster learning and research. Against this backdrop, the colleges create a distinctive and beautiful soundscape of bells, clock chimes and the muffled music of organs and choirs which can be enjoyed in the streets beyond.
- A total or substantial absence of traffic also contributes strongly to the character and appearance of many significant and historic streets, such as Holywell Street, St Thomas Street and New College Lane.
- This tranquillity is cherished by the people who live, work, study and visit in the city, but it is vulnerable to developments both within and outside the conservation area.



Tranquillity and sound - Grove walk by Corpus Christi College



Tranquillity and sound - Lower Fisher Row by the Castle Mill Stream

6.4.5 Theme 27: setting of the conservation area

- From surrounding hills, the views of Oxford's dreaming spires rising above the trees and meadows form one of the most famous images of any town or city in Britain. The aesthetic, historic, and communal value of these views is exceptionally important and forms part of the core interest of the conservation area. This is analysed in depth in the Oxford View Cones Study and also in the Oxford High Buildings Technical Advice Note.
- The setting of the conservation area is important for preserving its skyline and roofscape, and for preserving high-level views out from the centre of the city to the surrounding hills that are fundamental to understanding the key role geology and topography have played in the development of the city (theme 23). It has different characteristics on different sides, reflecting the underlying landscape and the impact that this, and roads, railways and canals, have had on the development of the city's suburbs:
- **To the north:** the contrasting late-Georgian and Victorian suburbs of Jericho and Walton Manor (dense streets of terraced workers cottages) and North Oxford (affluent detached villas) are all conservation areas that were built to house people working in the city centre, and still do. Through them pass the arterial streets – Banbury Road and Woodstock Road – whose names indicate they are some of the most ancient routes to connect the city with the county of which it was the administrative centre. The experience of the approach along these broad, tree-lined routes culminates in the great arrival moment at St Giles, heralded by the substantial buildings of the former Radcliffe Infirmary and the University laboratories.
- **To the east:** largely hidden by the tree line of the Cherwell valley is St Clements' suburb, also a designated conservation area, first developed as a commercial area beyond the bridge over the Cherwell on the historic main road from Oxford to London, and formerly including inns that would have served the stagecoach trade. The area was rebuilt after its demolition during the Civil Wars. The 'Plain' provides an important gateway to the city centre with views to Magdalen Tower over Magdalen Bridge.
- Beyond, lie the compact mostly Victorian terraced streets branching off the Iffley and Cowley Roads, rising up gently towards Cowley. Further round to the north is Headington, rising up towards South Park and Headington Hill. These are the eastern heights that form the largely green back drop to views out from the conservation area.



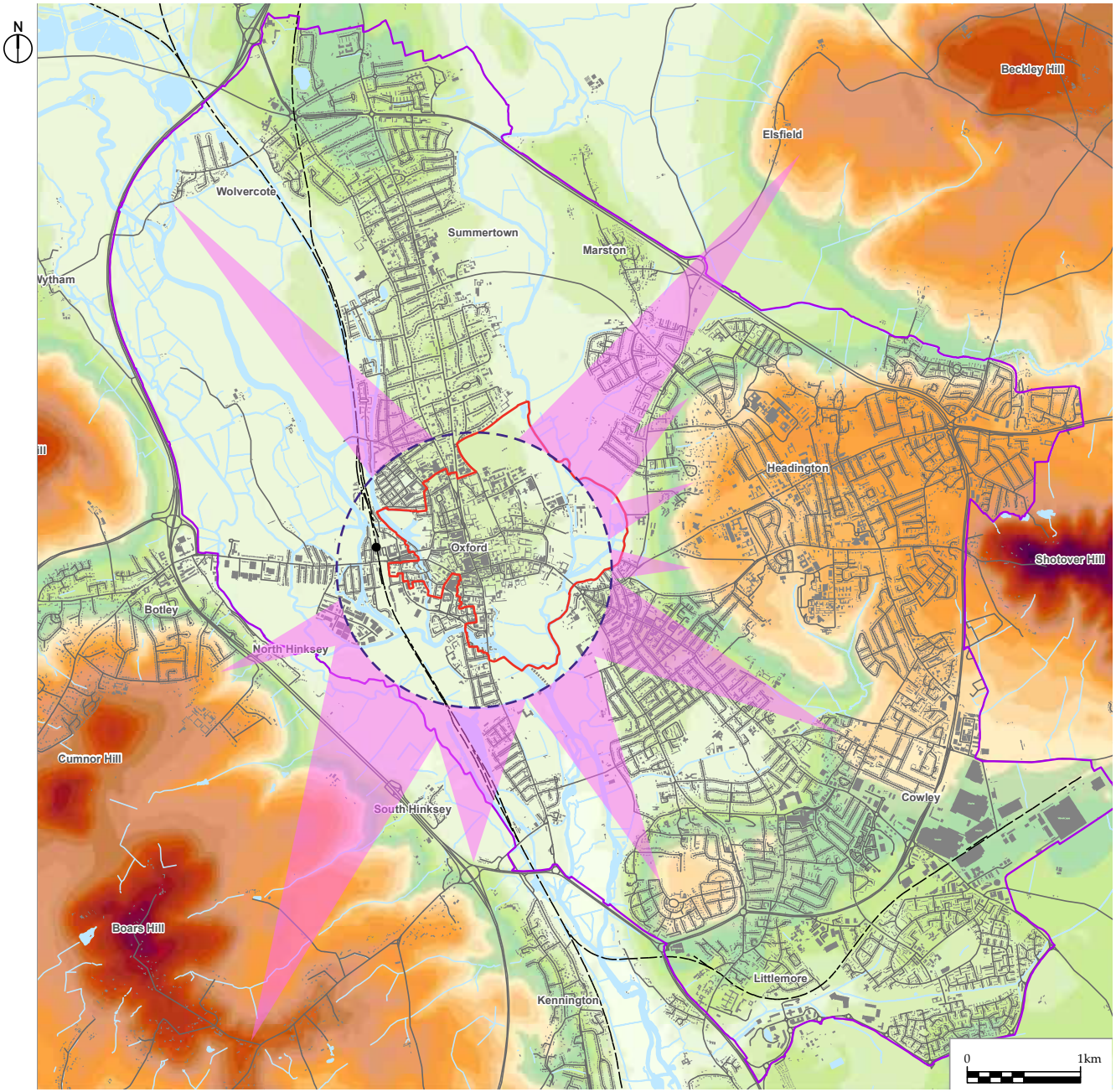
setting of the conservation area - View west from Magdalen bridge, a historic approach

GEOGRAPHY

OXFORD (CITY AND UNIVERSITY) CONSERVATION AREA

Key

- Oxford city boundary
- >170 m AOD
- 165-170 m AOD
- 160-165 m AOD
- 155-160 m AOD
- 150-155 m AOD
- 145-150 m AOD
- 140-145 m AOD
- 135-140 m AOD
- 130-135 m AOD
- 125-130 m AOD
- 120-125 m AOD
- 115-120 m AOD
- 110-115 m AOD
- 105-110 m AOD
- 100-105 m AOD
- 95-100 m AOD
- 90-95 m AOD
- 85-90 m AOD
- 80-85 m AOD
- 75-80 m AOD
- 70-75 m AOD
- 65-70 m AOD
- 60-65 m AOD
- 55-60 m AOD
- <55 m AOD



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- **To the south:** a sliver of Victorian and Edwardian development in Hinksey, in the flat floodplain beside the Thames and along the railway line to Didcot.
- **To the south-east:** The dense Victorian and Edwardian suburbs of East Oxford sprawl out to encapsulate medieval villages, and are then further surrounded by post-war housing and the city's car manufacturing industry. Beyond this, the southern hills and Chiltern Hills beyond contain the city. The story of Oxford's history and it's, 'base and brickish skirt,' is illustrated in this view.
- **To the west and south west:** Osney Island, industrial, commercial and residential development spurred by the arrival of the railway in the 1840s, on land owned in the middle ages by Osney Abbey. The opening of the canal and later development of railway stations on land around Frideswide Square made the western area an important point of arrival on the edge of the city. The route into the city centre became a significant approach in ways it had not previously been, though the buildings reflect more of the industrial and commercial life connected to rail, river and canal.
- Beyond the railway and the flood plain of the Thames, including the archaeologically and ecologically significant Port Meadow, the landscape rises to Botley and Boars Hill, with the famed view over the city that inspired the poet Matthew Arnold to first write of Oxford's 'dreaming spires'.

Chapter 7

Management Guidance

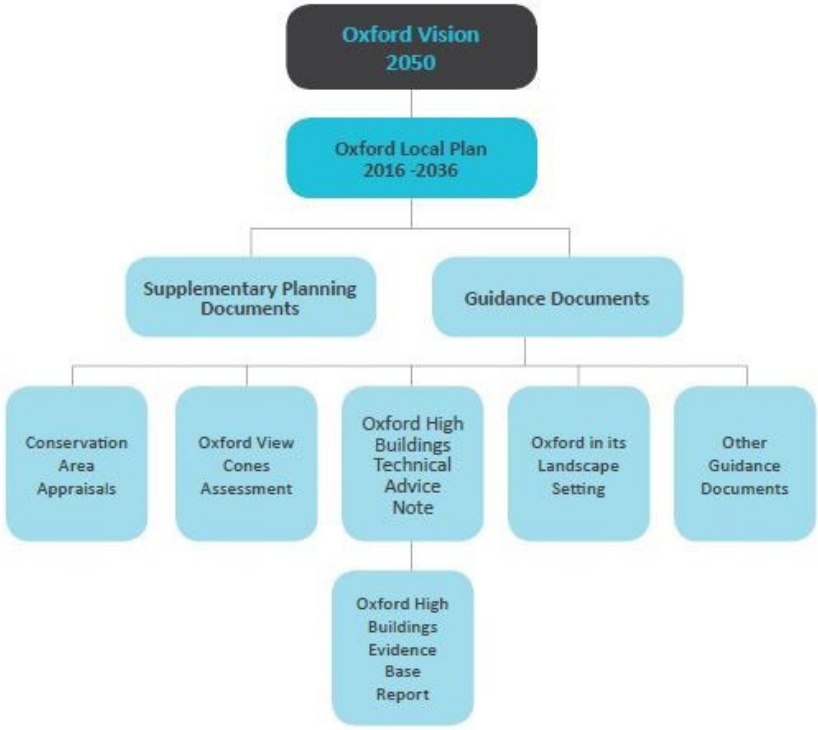
Oxford Central (City & University) **Conservation Area**





7.1 Management guidance

- Conservation Area Appraisals are required to include a management plan or guidance to aid the process of managed change for residents, institutions, developers, and other stakeholders. The management plan is based on an understanding of the issues and opportunities that exist within the conservation area and how to address them and take action. These issues and opportunities have been identified through street-level analysis, public consultation, and the Character Zone Assessments contained in Chapters 9 of this Conservation Area Appraisal.
- The guidance is presented under a series of headings where the principal issues are identified with recommendations to address them. Whilst many of these recommendations are actionable by Oxford City Council, including through the development management process, the City Council is only one of several key stakeholders who have a responsibility to preserve the special character and appearance of the conservation area, and therefore other recommended actions will rely on the collaboration of other parties. It is nonetheless important to set out the City Council's aspirations as, once adopted, this will serve as a key tool for communicating what are considered to be steps required to address the issues identified to fellow stakeholders.
- The small number of landowners with long-term commitment and an interest in the vitality and quality of the city centre means the city centre is unusually well-placed to respond to these challenges and opportunities.
- The Management Guidance and Design Advice forms part of the main Central (City & University) Conservation Area Appraisal and this document sits underneath the Local Plan, as shown below. These documents are a material consideration in determining planning applications. It is expected that any proposals for development within the conservation area will have taken the Management Guidance and Design Advice into account and shaped the proposal around their requirements.
- The principles within the Management Guidance and Design Advice should be considered in relation to the specific needs and special interests of the different character areas.



Policy and guidance hierarchy
Oxford Local Plan 2036

7.2 Effects of designation

- In order to protect the special environment, stricter controls exist within conservation areas, restricting the kinds of alterations that may be carried out without specific planning permission. These are not intended as a hindrance to change, but as positive management to safeguard the character of the area as a whole. There are greater restrictions relating to extensions and alterations, new buildings, cladding, satellite dishes and flues. There is also greater control over demolition and works to trees and adverts.
- Up to date information about what works require planning permission in a conservation area can be found online at: www.planningportal.co.uk.

7.3 Streets, public spaces and green and blue space

- The particular character and strength of the Conservation Area is the inheritance of the Saxon and medieval street form and layout. The streets of the commercial part of the central area can now be heavily congested with large numbers of people and vehicles reflecting the popularity of the city and the policy and practice in public realm design.
- The Conservation Area has a number of contributory green spaces, the majority of which are owned and managed privately with limited public access. Blue spaces (The Rivers Thames and Cherwell and the Canal), often less visually and physically accessible, have played and continue to play an important role in the history and development of the City.



Cornmarket - busy with pedestrians and buses at the crossroads (OCC)



Blue Boar Street - narrow medieval street (OCC)

Key issues

- Shortage of public space putting pressure on the main streets: summer tourists increase this pressure, reaching pedestrian saturation.
- Accessibility constraints for pedestrians because of the narrow and congested pavements and busy streets with vehicles.
- Large amounts of street furniture and clutter: advertising boards, undocked bikes and scooters, bins, traffic signs and signals.
- Climate change response measures such as EV charging points – the number, design and location are all important considerations within the conservation area.
- The wide number of stakeholders/actors that have responsibility for the public realm
- Damage to historic surfaces which can be disturbed during infrastructure works, such as access to underground services and the replacement with inferior materials such as tarmac.
- Shortage of public resting areas.
- Shortage of publicly accessible green space and limited physical and visual access to blue space.
- Inconsistent design, materials, quality and maintenance of street materials and furniture.
- Low numbers of street trees in some areas.

Recommendations

- Prioritise a series of renewals to enhance the appearance of streets, including systematic de-cluttering and introduction of appropriate high-quality, robust surfacing materials.
- Work with the County Council to produce a schedule of materials and detailing handbook for works that disturb existing surfaces.
- Greater emphasis on the coordination and management of the public realm and streetscene.
- Increase pedestrianised public space through key stakeholder collaboration by converting, better utilising and re-imagining key areas such as Broad Street and St Giles
- Support the increased pedestrianisation of streets where these are recommended by transport and place making strategies.



Magdalen Street - summer tourists increase the pressure on public space



Merton Street - inconsistent materials used for repair of historic streets (OCC)

- Work with landowners and other stakeholders to assess the amount and health of the conservation areas's tree cover and future plans for tree replacement.
- Identify opportunities to plant new trees that are appropriate to and enhance the specific character and appearance of individual streets and spaces.
- Support strategies for shared space with pedestrians and then cyclists having priority over motor vehicles.
- Identify opportunities to increase public access to existing private green space with coordinated and publicised opening hours.
- Identify and make the most of opportunities to link up networks of public spaces, particularly green spaces and green corridors and secondary streets.
- Increase the visibility and understanding of the waterways through interpretation of the historic environment
- Take opportunities for major new development to improve pedestrian and cycle connectivity and incorporate public open space, street trees, and soft landscaping.
- Publish guidance on the design of streets and public spaces using coordinated approaches to lighting, high-quality materials, furniture and designs having regard to the characteristics of the relevant character areas.
- Keep up to date an advertising and shopfront guide, including a targeted enforcement strategy and the reduction of street clutter.
- Encourage management plans for Registered Parks and Gardens within the CCCA that prioritise the maintenance of green space, encourage public access and enjoyment, are sensitive to preservation of the settings of adjacent historic buildings and significant views from within and without and preserve historically significant layouts and planting regimes, ensuring planting and management that sustains the significance of below ground archaeological assets.
- Ensure existing historic surfaces that are of both architectural interest and historical significance are retained in situ or relaid should infrastructure works cause disturbance to them.
- Identify all historic surfaces within the conservation area and record these on a map to be shared with all stakeholders who undertake works within the highway.



Broad Meadow - open space, street trees and soft landscaping (OCC)



University Parks - Registered Park with Keble College in the background (OCC)

7.4 Transport

- The negative impact of traffic, particularly buses and coaches, is widely acknowledged as one of the most significant threats to the character and appearance of the conservation area. Its appearance and noise affects the ability to enjoy the space and its pollution and vibration is accelerating the physical deterioration of historic buildings and landscapes. The impact of traffic is not uniform, and is greatest on the main streets where vehicles and pedestrians are using the same space, such as Carfax, Beaumont Street, St Aldates and the top of the High Street. Parking and the lack of appropriate cycle storage can exacerbate the impacts.

Key Issues

- Volume of traffic within the centre has visual, noise, and vibration impacts on historic buildings and settings
- The size and frequency of buses and large coaches have a significant negative impact by adding to congestion, visually intruding through inappropriate parking, such as on St Giles and depositing increased levels of pollution on the city's historic buildings
- Parking can conflict with the use and experience of public spaces in the city centre such as Broad Street and St. Giles.
- Lack of coordinated cycle storage
- The increase in number and movement of delivery vehicles generated by the virtual economy
- Future requirement for electric vehicle charging points

Recommendations

- Reduce the volume of traffic within the historic core by supporting the Zero Emission Zone and other strategies.
- Encourage the sustainable development of sites currently overly occupied by parking to create or include areas of public realm.
- Identify appropriate locations for tourist coach drop-off points, and parking locations outside the historic core.
- Implement a coordinated approach to cable-laying and charge point design for electric vehicle charging that takes into account buried archaeology and visual appearance.
- Adopt a coordinated approach to bicycle parking provision and design.
- Support the exploration of other solutions for the final mile of deliveries within the historic core to reduce congestion and emissions within the conservation area.



Traffic on St. Aldates

7.5 Uses

- The distinctive mix of uses in central Oxford, particularly the University and colleges, is fundamental to its unique appearance and sense of place. However, the continued growth of these institutions, together with changes in retail behaviour and central planning regulations threaten to unbalance this distinctive and historic mix of uses, and careful management will be required to ensure the continued vitality and quality of the city centre.
- Retail patterns and behaviours have been changing in recent years with a growth in online shopping creating a challenging environment for high street retailers that has been exacerbated by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. One result of this has been an increase in short-term, low-quality tenants occupying retail units, particularly on Cornmarket Street. The majority of these retailers cater solely to mass tourism, rather than meeting local and regional needs, and often seek to introduce unsympathetic signage and shopfronts.
- The challenging retail environment, together with recent changes to the Use Class Order (the introduction of Class E) and permitted development rights, has also led to an increase in retail premises being converted to alternative uses, particularly by Colleges. This has resulted in pressure to alter historic retail frontages, and the loss of active frontages in the historic commercial core, which is of detriment to the character, appearance and significance of the conservation area. This is a particular issue where Colleges seek to introduce rear entrances to the buildings to connect them directly to their precincts, replacing the street-facing entrances as the primary points of access/egress.
- The expansion of student accommodation into historically private residential streets, such as has occurred on Pembroke Street and Beaumont Street, is also recognised as having an adverse effect on the character of these places.

Key issues:

- Decrease in private residential accommodation and non-educational accommodation.
- The reduction of the amount of retail in historically retail-based streets such as the High Street and Cornmarket Street, which has led to pressure to alter historic retail frontages, and often results in the loss of active frontages, which threatens the vibrancy of the city's historic commercial core.
- Unbalanced retail provision within the city centre, with increasing provision for mass tourism but fewer retailers catering for local and regional needs.
- Unsympathetic and unauthorised shopfronts and signage, which detract from the character and appearance of some of the city's oldest and most historically and architecturally significant streets.

Recommendations

- Adopt a retail strategy that seeks to retain retail within historic retail buildings and streets.
- Adopt a Covered Market masterplan as part of the revitalisation of historic retail areas.
- Adopt a Shopfront and Advertising Guide as part of the City Centre Strategy to improve the quality and appearance of retail areas, including consideration of an Area of Special Control of Advertisements.
- Increased provision for enforcement action against authorised alterations to shopfronts and signage.
- Work with stakeholders to sustain and reinstate ground floor activity where this historically existed to reduce inactive frontages, and explore opportunities to reuse upper floors to maximise retail, office, and residential uses.
- Support continued residential uses in historically residential streets.

7.6 Setting and views

- More so than most conservation areas, the setting of Oxford's Central (City and University) Conservation Area contributes to its character, appearance and significance. The internationally renowned skyline is a centuries-old product of the relationship between the architecture of the city centre and its strong relationship to the landscape surroundings which form part of its setting. This setting is commonly thought of in terms of the green hills rising up around the city and the suburbs that lead out to the hills. Equally, there are distinct variations in the character of the conservation area's setting from one side to another.
- The importance and vulnerability of the setting of the city centre has long been recognised, culminating in the adoption of strategic View Cones and the 'Carfax Rule' in 1962. More recently, the City Council published the Oxford High Buildings Technical Advice Note to enable it to shape and assess development outside and inside the city centre in ways that would not harm the significance of the historic environment, including the Central Conservation Area.
- The Technical Advice Note contains a robust methodology, clear design guidance and detailed recommendations on acceptable building heights in the different parts of the city where development could be accommodated without harming the significance of the skyline. The effective implementation of the Technical Advice Note will be one of the most important tools for the management of the Conservation Area.
- The setting of the conservation area and views in, out and across it must be a key consideration of new development proposals. In managing the impact of development outside the Conservation Area, consideration should be given to the immediate setting as much as the wider city and landscape. Development on sites adjacent or close to the boundary of the Conservation Area could affect its significance. For example, they could harm the character and appearance of the historic approaches from the south, north and west.



The green setting forms a backdrop to listed buildings in high level views (OCC)

Key issues:

- Tall buildings or features within the centre obscuring/competing with the dreaming spires.
- Tall buildings skylining.
- Tall buildings resulting in a change of character of a view. Flat roofs detracting from the 'spikiness' and animation that characterises the famed Oxford skyline.
- The challenge is to support growth whilst still maintaining the ability to appreciate Oxford's green setting.

Recommendations

- Planning proposals which may affect the setting, skyline, or roofscape of the conservation area should demonstrate application of the methodology and guidance within the Oxford High Buildings Technical Advice Note.
- 3D models of planning proposals should also be viewed within the City Council's Vu.City 3D model of Oxford to assist with the assessment of impact on views and setting.

7.7 Archaeology

- There is a wealth of evidence of past human activity lying beneath the streets and buildings of the conservation area, particularly with reference to the Civil War. The conservation area's archaeology is integral to its special interest and inseparable from its history. Much is of national importance, including for example, evidence of the Saxon and Norman town, the medieval defences and some of the most significant civil war fortifications in the country
- Not all of this is Scheduled, but its significance is no less for this. In the Local Plan and the Archaeological Action Plan, the city has well-established policies and guidance for managing this archaeology, which benefit from a long and unbroken tradition of scholarship and excavation in the city.
- Major development sites will require careful archaeological management and could yield valuable new information.

Key issues:

- Few areas of nationally significant archaeology have been protected under legislation as Scheduled Monuments.
- Development pressure from Colleges and the University on sites with large amounts of medieval urban archaeological remains preserved beneath (eg. quads and gardens) and the increased pressure to build below ground.
- The challenge is to support commercial and educational developments whilst avoiding significant cumulative loss of important buried remains.

Recommendations

- The Oxford Archaeological Action Plan should be reviewed and updated as necessary, including the resource assessment and research agenda.
- Continue collaboration between City and County Councils, local archaeology groups, and developers.
- Encourage colleges and major institutions to introduce archaeological management plans for the long-term preservation of buried archaeological remains.
- Ensure the impact on buried archaeological remains is considered at the earliest stages of development proposals to inform development design.
- Seek opportunities to secure greater public benefit, understanding and enjoyment relating to the conservation areas exceptional archaeological heritage.

7.8 Implementation

- Consultation and research for this appraisal in phase 1 of the project revealed a broad consensus for the recommendations made in this chapter. Turning this support into action requires collaboration from several parties.
- In this, the city has two advantages: the nature of land ownership and the strength of civic society. There is already considerable cooperation, both formal and informal, which can be built upon to strengthen.
- The principal responsibility for driving forward the recommendations of this Appraisal falls upon the City Council, not least because of the obligations placed upon it by legislation and in its role in advising on planning applications and listed building consent applications and it is through this process that the City Council will work with partners and landowners to deliver change.
- The City Council recognises and values the importance of collaborative working from stakeholders to help achieve its aims in the current fiscal climate against competing priorities. Therefore, it is essential to derive the most social and economic value from existing resources and budgets. The City Council will continue to work across departments to seek to achieve effective coordination, working together to realise opportunities and achieve successful outcomes.
- Close cooperation will be necessary with the County Council in particular, because as the highways authority it is responsible for the streets and many public space, whose character and use are both the cause of harm to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and also an opportunity for significant enhancement.
- The pre-application process will also be an essential element to the success of managing the conservation area by continuing to communicate and emphasise the findings and recommendations of this appraisal.

Key issues:

- Responsibility for the management and enhancement of the area is split between the City Council as planning authority, County Council as highways authority, landowners, especially the colleges and University, and other bodies.
- A coordinated approach and partnerships are required to meet the challenges and deliver enhancement.
- The partnership between the City Council and the County Council is of great importance because of the impact of transport on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, and the contribution streets and public space could make to enhancing it.
- Effective management requires an on-going review of resources required and available.

7.9 Recommendations

- The City Council should adopt the management recommendations of this Appraisal and, where appropriate, implement them through the City Centre Management Function, the Local Plan or allied strategies.
- The City Council, with partners where necessary, should continue to review the need for the additional studies identified in this Appraisal and seek to undertake them where the resources for this are available.
- The City Council should seek to undertake a review of the Appraisal, ideally every 10 years where resources are available to reflect changes to the condition of the Conservation Area, emergence of new threats and progress with enhancement recommendations.

Chapter 8

Design Advice

Oxford Central (City & University) **Conservation Area**



(Image: OCC)

8.1 Purpose and scope of the design advice

This chapter provides advice to applicants, designers and owners on how the design of new development and alterations to existing buildings might be approached within the conservation area.

- There is a presumption in favour of high-quality design and materials within the Central Conservation Area, as befits the international significance of the city centre and its buildings. The City Council will seek to improve the appearance of structures and spaces through the planning process, requiring justification when it is claimed that this cannot be achieved. Improving the appearance and experience of the area benefits all users, bringing greater economic benefits as well as recognising the high value and importance of providing a place to be proud of.
- The advice applies to proposals inside the conservation area and those outside that might affect the area's setting either because of their height, or their proximity to the boundary, or other factors.
- Good design is recognised in the Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the National Design Guide as fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve, and it is a core objective of the Council's Local Plan. Good design creates better, more sustainable places in which to live and work, affects health and well-being and promotes community cohesion.
- The purpose of this Design Advice is to help applicants apply the Government's national objectives and the City Council's design policies to the specific context of the conservation area. The international significance of the conservation area demands proposals of an exceptional standard that emerge from a deep understanding of the character, history and significance of the place. Because of this, generic solutions are unlikely to be successful. However, by properly applying both an understanding of the site and the following Design Advice, development is possible that can enrich the character and appearance of the conservation area.



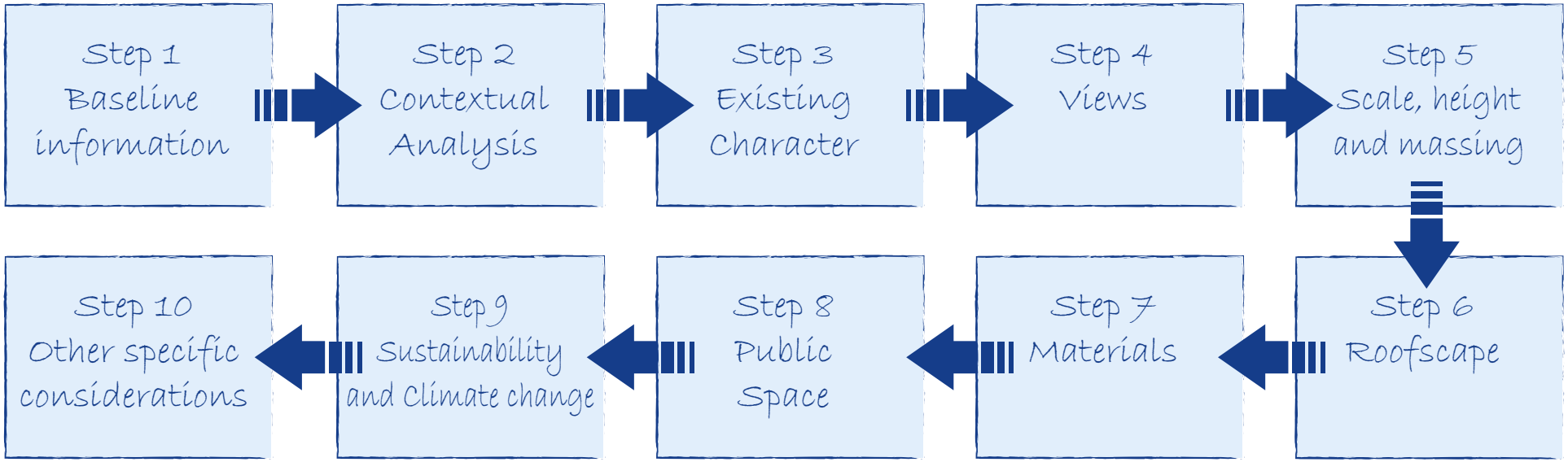
Oxford's historic skyline

8.2 A step-by-step approach to site appraisal

- The City Council believe that the right approach to achieving high quality development in the conservation area can be found in examining the context and relating the new development to its surroundings through an informed character appraisal.
- To aid in the design and assessment of new development in the conservation area, the structure of this document follows a step by step guide setting out what the City Council considers to be a best practice approach to site appraisal and relevant design considerations. This approach is consistent with the approach set out in the Heritage and Design policies in the Local Plan and with advice found in Historic England's Principles for good design set out in their document 'Building in Context' and relevant statements taken from the National Design Guide.

Step 1: Baseline information

- Baseline information is required to understand the context
- The following information should be established at the very beginning of the design process and used to inform that process from the start. This will ensure that design decisions are properly informed and will complement and respect the existing context. Depending on the scale of the proposed development, the amount of information required should be proportionate.
- The council strongly encourage applicants to seek early pre-application advice where applications are located within the conservation area or within its setting, particularly if they may have a harmful impact on the significance of the conservation area, listed buildings, archaeology or historic landscapes. Early discussions with the City Council will help inform the level of information needed.



- The following baseline information is essential to understand the context and should be presented at the beginning of a pre-application process and in all planning application submissions.
  - Understand the historical development of the place, site, building.
  - Identify, research and understand the significance of the heritage assets.
  - Assess the value of retaining what is there.
  - Scope out potential long distance and local views that could be impacted by the development and undertake a townscape and landscape visual analysis. A Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) will be required for any development that is likely to have a significant character or visual effect on an existing landscape or townscape setting.
  - Engage with the Council's Vu.City 3D model through the pre-application and planning application process by providing a 3D model of the proposal and undertaking reviews with the City Council during pre-application discussions.
  - Engage in early consultation with the City Council's specialist teams such as Heritage, Urban Design, Archaeology and Trees (through the pre-application process), Historic England, heritage and community groups, councillors and local residents.



Contextual analysis (Reef Group - Former Boswellls Department Store)


The view from South Park

Step 2: Contextual analysis

- An understanding of place should influence the design of new development and this is achieved through a detailed contextual analysis, created from the gathering of the baseline information set out in Step 1. This information should be set out early in the pre-application process and contained in the Design and Access Statement (DAS) and/or Heritage Statements and include:

  - Identification of the existing features of the site and the wider area.
  - Use this information to reveal opportunities for the design of new developments to link well into the context and enhance these features.
  - Set out the immediate context of the site and the thematic context. For example, the immediate context may be a College but the site may lie in a historic retail area or a 19th Century residential area. Refer back to the relevant character zone that the site lies within.
  - Understand whether a site is suitable for restrained architecture or a landmark, or something in between.

- To be successful in an historic environment as complex and significant as the centre of Oxford, the nature and design of proposals will need to exhibit a deep understanding of the context in which they sit. Successful proposals will have a strong sense - or spirit - of place. Spirit of place is the unique, distinctive and cherished aspects of a place derived from the history and character of both the site and its context and setting. Spirit of place is not just the physical appearance of a location, but how a place engages with all of the senses. To understand this, it may be necessary to look beyond the immediate context and consider the relationship between the site and the wider city.
- One important conclusion to determine from analysis of the history and character of the site and its context is whether a site is suited to a landmark building or to more reticent architecture that defers to its neighbours. Oxford city centre contains exceptional historic buildings, but its character and appearance is a subtle balance between architectural set-pieces and 'good ordinary' architecture, for example the combination and juxtaposition of the colleges and University buildings on the one hand, and more modest houses and shops on the other. In this context, not every site is appropriate for a landmark.
- There is some middle ground, however and a building can comfortably harmonise with its surroundings by responding to its context in an honest and confident way. By following a truly context led design approach, the decision about whether a landmark or more restrained building will be more obvious.



A landmark building - The Ashmolean Museum



More restrained buildings - St. John Street (OCC)

Step 3: Respecting and working with the existing character

- An understanding of the significance of the site will inform the appropriate character and identity for new development. Well-designed new development is influenced by an appreciation and understanding of vernacular, local or regional character, including existing built form, landscape and architectural precedents. The following considerations and elements are all important factors in understanding and relating to the existing character and were identified during the public consultation phase of the appraisal.

Retain, re-use and adapt

- The aim should be to preserve the spatial and structural patterns of the historic fabric and the architectural features that make it significant. Preservation and re-use should always be considered as the first option.
- Where a site presents an opportunity for redevelopment to enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area, it may still be possible to use part of the existing structure of the building with the associated savings in embodied carbon.

Advice

- It is preferable to retain buildings which make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- This includes non-designated heritage assets which are important to the historic and architectural character and appearance of the area.
- Historic shopfronts, boundary walls and other historic features such as paving should also be retained.
- In some cases, retaining the existing frame of the building will be supported where a suitable high quality design can be achieved.

Urban grain, plots, streets and spaces

- Analysis of townscape and significance, supported by consultation, identified the importance of plot size and shape in defining the character and appearance of the conservation area. These historic plot boundaries reveal historic land uses and organisation. They are fundamental to generating the character of streets and sites and make a major contribution to the architectural composition of streets by determining the width of elevations.
- In the historic core, long narrow plots date back to the Saxon Burh and medieval town and are hugely historically significant. They were combined to create colleges and other significant institutional buildings. Outside the core, boundaries are often larger and relate to, for example, historic land ownership or field boundaries.
- As they are significant, these boundaries should be expressed in the new development. This includes rear boundaries, such as walls.
- Where historic boundaries have been combined in the twentieth century the opportunity should be taken to reinstate them when such sites are redeveloped. Limiting such reinstatement to the front elevations is likely to be superficial and unconvincing if it is not also extended to the plan, massing and roof arrangements of the building and the organisation of the site. This might be an opportunity to introduce or improve foot and cycle routes across sites, in order to encourage walking and cycling.



The Jam Factory - a good example of re-use and adaptation (OCC)

Advice:

- Development should respect and reflect historic plot divisions in elevation, plan and roofscape.
- Where opportunities arise, redevelopment should reinstate the pattern of historic plot boundaries where these have been lost or merged.
- Historic boundary walls, railings and other structures should be conserved.

Addressing the street

- The relationship of buildings to streets makes a strong contribution to the distinctive character of the conservation area, and to the way in which this changes from one part of the conservation area to another. In the medieval and Saxon streets, buildings are built up tight against the pavement line. This differentiates them from areas developed since the nineteenth century, where front areas or gardens are more common. These characteristics should be conserved including historic boundary structures such as railings. The same characteristics should be incorporated into new development. Further, active frontages in new development are encouraged because these are historically characteristic of the conservation area.
- Gaps in street frontages are often historic access to yards, gardens or other historic backland use. These are shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1876. Where these survive they should be retained. College perimeters are a highly distinctive part of the character and appearance of the conservation area. By design, the historic college precincts have a perimeter with few openings and little activity.
- Development within gardens and grounds: proposals for historic college sites should respond very carefully to the characteristic perimeter treatment of these precincts. Walls and railings provide glimpses of gardens and create openings in the skyline that are highly characteristic of the distinctive sense of place and historic land use in central Oxford. These gaps in building frontages and the sense of green spaces beyond should continue to be legible (see also section 8.8 below).



St. Thomas Street - more recent development which reinstates historic plot widths (OCC)



The Eagle and Child Public House - an example of historic burgage plots

- Conversion of residential, retail and commercial buildings: to provide additional accommodation, colleges convert buildings. These may adjoin historic college precincts, enabling direct access from the rear into college, for better security and collegiate interaction, but at the expense of traditional street activity that is part of the character of the conservation area. Therefore, the City Council encourages active use of building frontages in these circumstances, such as continued use of historic front doors and shop units.
- Development on other sites: accommodation and other development on satellite sites such as playing fields should be designed to address the street in a positive manner rather than face predominantly inwards behind a fence or wall, because the concept of a traditional college perimeter is not appropriate to the more suburban or open character and appearance of these locations, outside the historic core.

Advice:

- Street frontages should:
- Include activity at street level with active frontages in because these are historically characteristic of the conservation area.
- Be designed with care and attention to detail regardless of whether they are the primary or secondary facades of the building.
- Have a building line that follows the prevailing historic character.
- Retain historic gaps between and under buildings and restore them where they have been lost.
- Retain historic boundaries; where these have been lost it is desirable to restore them.



The Clore Music Centre - A new development which positively addresses the street (OCC)

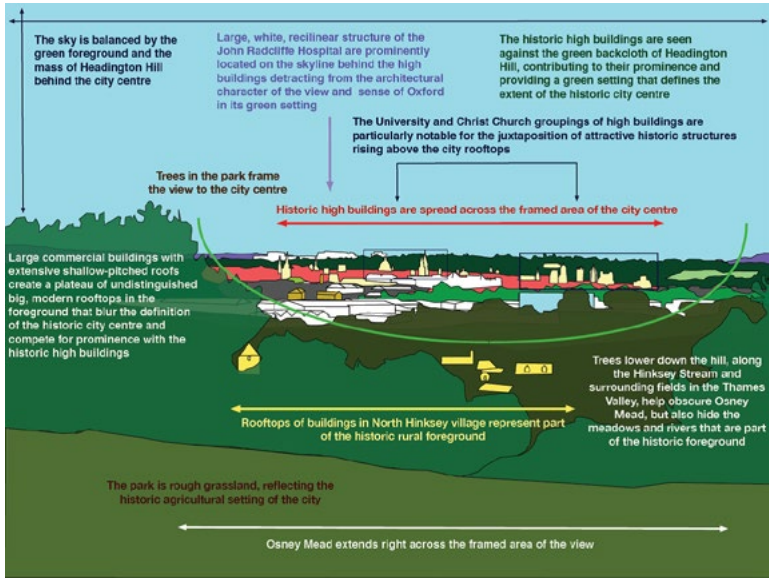

Pembroke Street - facades have been retained but the loss of their original use is to the detriment of the vitality of the street (OCC)

Step 4: Views

- Views are one of the key themes identified in chapter 6, under the assessment of significance (Theme 22).
- Well-designed new development is influenced by views, vistas and landmarks. The significance of the historic core and its setting can be understood in views looking outwards from the historic core from the many publicly accessible towers and in views looking towards it from the surrounding hills and suburbs. The historic core and it's landscape setting are intrinsically linked.
- The relationship between the historic city centre and its setting, and its contribution to heritage significance, can be appreciated in three main ways:
  - Views towards the city from the surrounding landscape with a distinctive cluster of historic buildings signalling the location of the historic core of the city in its landscape setting (including those identified within the Oxford View Cones).
  - Views out from elevated viewpoints within the historic city centre revealing the topographic position of Oxford in its landscape setting.
  - Views between the edge of the historic city centre and the floodplains of the Thames and Cherwell to the south and east of the city, illustrating the original siting of the city on dry ground adjacent to an early river crossing point.
- A views analysis should be undertaken and presented at step 1 to inform all of the following steps. The applicant must refer to the View Cones Study to establish what view cones are affected by the proposal. View positions should be agreed with the City Council as part of the pre-application process.
- The High Buildings Study and evidence base also provides information about some of the high level views within the historic core
- Views analysis. This appraisal identifies typical types of view that characterise the experience of the conservation area and reveal its unique history, character and sense of place. It does not identify specific views because the conservation area townscape is so rich and complex that its visual experience cannot be reduced to a selection of individual viewing points.



The view from Raleigh Park (View Cones document)



The View from Raleigh Park annotated (View Cones document)

Advice:

- Has the impact of the development in views and vistas been assessed in the wider setting using the City Council's High Building Study?
- Has the impact of the development in close views been assessed in the wider setting? Is it either weak or overpowering? Does it respect the scale and rhythm of its neighbours?
- Have you considered views towards the historic core of the conservation area and views out from it towards the surrounding hills, both of which form its setting?
- Have you used a 3D model to test the impact on views?
- Has a Landscape Visual Impact Assessment with verified views been provided for development which would have a significant character or visual effect on the existing landscape and/or townscape setting?
- Does the development create new views and juxtapositions which add to the variety and texture of the area and/or setting? This could be focal points at the end of a view or glimpsed views of spaces beyond and between that give you that sense of space and unfolding visual townscape interest.



View West from The Church of St. Michael (OCC)



New College Lane - overhanging greenery gives interest (OCC)



Visual competition (The High Buildings TAN)

Step 5: Scale, proportion, height and massing

- Built form is determined by good urban design principles that combine layout, form and scale in a way that responds positively to the context.
- Scale means the size of a building in relation to its function and surroundings. In order to make a positive contribution to their context and setting, new buildings should be of a similar scale to those around them.
- Proportion is the relationship between different building elements such as walls and roofs, or window openings and solid walls. These proportions may relate to the large scale, for example the vertical sub-division of terraced housing, or to the small scale, such as the size and shape of windows on an adjacent building. New buildings should respect the proportions of existing buildings; this needs to be carefully considered when designing new buildings which often have lower ceiling heights than older buildings. This can give their elevations a more 'cramped' appearance and scale which can be at odds with that of older buildings.
- The height of any new buildings in or adjacent to a conservation area is important, as any particularly tall buildings can have a visual impact over an extensive area. Careful consideration and assessment using the High Buildings Study will need to be given to any proposal for a tall building and its potential impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area and its setting. Proposals for tall buildings should be supported by a Landscape and Visual Townscape Assessment where the impact of the proposal on views outwards from the historic core towards the city's landscape setting and views in towards the historic core should be identified and the significance of those views set out and then the impact of the proposal on that significance assessed.
- Massing is the three-dimensional form of a building or group of buildings resulting from the combined effect of the height, bulk and silhouette of the building or group.
- The scale, proportion, height and massing of proposed development in conservation areas should be carefully considered in relation to that of surrounding buildings and the area in general, to ensure that the character and appearance of the conservation area is not detrimentally affected.
- This does not necessarily mean that development has to copy adjacent buildings, as the character of townscape depends on how individual buildings contribute to a harmonious whole, through relating to the scale of their neighbours
- The following principles refer back to the contextual analysis and achieving a good development that meets them will come from a study of the site context and the implementation of the learning from that.

Advice:

- Respect the context and setting so that new buildings within the conservation area and in its setting are of an appropriate scale and do not result in harm to the significance of long distance views across the conservation area and from within and towards its setting.
- Respect the proportions of existing buildings.
- Ensure the height and massing of a building has been tested using 3D modelling, LVIAs where necessary and against the City Council's High Building Study.
- Use the contextual analysis to identify opportunities for instances where a new building could create a visually interesting townscape for example, by providing a focal point or enclosing a view or vista.
- Respect the scale of neighbouring buildings.



St John College Kendrew Quad by MJP - relates well to its context (OCC)

Step 6: Roofscape

- Roofscape is one of the key themes identified in chapter 6, under the assessment of significance (Theme 21).
- The highly significant and world famous skyline of the city is created by a balanced combination of spires, domes and towers emerging from a roofscape of pitched and leaded roofs, chimneys, parapets, pinnacles, party walls, turrets and other details, creating a combination of strong horizontal and vertical accents. All development proposals, whether alterations to existing buildings or new construction, should contribute positively to this roofscape through animated and delightful design, showing as much care as the main elevations.
- The following requires careful consideration and a sensitive design response:
  - High buildings. Proposals for tall buildings and structures that might break the skyline, whether inside the conservation area or not, could have a significant impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area and the settings of listed buildings and other heritage assets. Proposals for such development should be developed in accordance with the methodology and guidance set out in the Oxford High Buildings Technical Advice Note, as well as section 8.7.
  - Flat roofs. Large, unbroken flat roofs are not characteristic; until the 20th century only narrow spans were technically achievable, even for large complexes. The cumulative impact of long rows of flat roofs would result in the closing of gaps between historic pitched roofs, chimneys, gable ends and dormer windows from being visible against the sky.
  - Plant and services. Visible or poorly integrated mechanical and electrical engineering plant does not contribute to this exceptional roofscape and requires careful screening or relocation.
  - Roof-mounted photovoltaic panels: these should be integrated well into the roofscape where view testing indicates they would be appropriate.
  - Any proposals within the Historic Core Area that may impact on the foreground of views and roofscape (including proposals where they are below the Carfax datum point, for example plant) should be designed carefully, should be based on a clear understanding of roofscape in the area, and contribute positively to it. Any such proposals will have to be justified by a



Exeter College Fleche and All Souls - the spikiness of Oxford's world famous skyline (OCC)



Beaver House - long flat rooves detract from the skyline (OCC)

comprehensive analysis of place and setting (see section 8.3).

- New landmarks. The character of the roofscape and skyline of the conservation area is created by a combination of mostly average building heights and relatively few taller landmarks. It follows that not every site will be suitable for a new landmark without causing harm to the character and appearance of the conservation area. Where it can be demonstrated and agreed that a location for a higher building or landmark element will make a positive contribution to its setting and the skyline, it will need to be limited in bulk and of the highest design quality.

Advice

- In order to conserve and where possible enhance the internationally famous roofscape and skyline of the city centre:
  - All new or altered roofs should make a positive contribution to the roofscape and skyline by creating animation and delight.
  - Large or unbroken areas of flat roof are not considered appropriate.
  - Plant should be fully integrated in roof design and screened, or located elsewhere.
  - The appropriate height for new development should be informed by the context and a full understanding of the impact on views, roofscape and Oxford's precious skyline.
  - The process, visual tests and guidelines of the Oxford High Buildings Technical Advice Note should be applied where appropriate.
  - The location for new elements that break the skyline these must be very carefully chosen, the proposed design must be of the very highest architectural quality corresponding to the significance of the skyline and the historic structures that form it.
  - Where possible and appropriate, new or altered roofs should be designed to prevent additional water run-off through the use of innovative green and/or blue roofs.
  - Applications for roof terraces and/or gardens should be accompanied by careful analysis of long distance and high level views to ensure that appreciation of the famous city skyline is not impeded by building elements or temporary structures.
  - Flues: where flues may be appropriate (such as in the science area) they should considered as an integrated part of the building from an early stage of the design. Flues must be included in view studies which should be used to inform their placement and design.



Mansfield College - Flues visible from the quadrangle



Science Area - Flues visible amongst the Oxford skyline

Architectural style and authenticity

- Good design is not the same as architectural style and successful design will authentically express its purpose and location. Therefore no one architectural style is more likely to be successful in the conservation area than another. Nevertheless, Oxford has a strong and recognisable building tradition, one that has long been associated with the use of limestone and the Gothic language, creating a townscape of warm, matt tones, deep shadow-casting reveals, careful and delightful details and an animated roofscape.
- As the many fine Classical buildings and the best of postwar architecture illustrate, different architectural styles can work successfully within this earlier tradition if they:
  - intelligently apply a thorough understanding of site and context, as explained in 1.3 above:
  - understand the 'grain' of the townscape, and when to defer and when to assert
  - respect historic building footprints land organisation
  - respect the scale of neighbouring buildings
  - treat the roofscape as importantly as any facade
  - use appropriate materials and high-quality detailing
  - use high quality building methods
  - authentically express their function
  - materials, colours and forms



St John College - Recognisable Oxford architecture (OCC)



Nuffield College - A newer contribution to the roofscape and skyline of Oxford

Step 7: Materials

- Materials are one of the key themes identified in chapter 6, under the assessment of significance (Theme 14).
- The choice and use of materials is central to successful design in the conservation area.
- Historically, a limited range of materials was employed in the conservation area, frequently from local sources. They therefore express a specific sense of place by the direct link to the geology on which Oxford is built. Individually and in combination these are significant and contribute substantially to the character and appearance of the area.
- Localised use of materials such as red brick, buff brick, slate and clay tiles.
- Oolitic limestone is the most famous type of stone and is used as ashlar and rubble. Because good quality stone from the local quarries at Headington and Wheatley is worked out, limestone may now be sourced elsewhere. Bath stone is considered a good match in many circumstances. However, it is always necessary to carefully match stone to adjoining walling, which may vary considerably because of the employment of different stones over the centuries.
- Other types of stone have proved less successful, for example because their tone does not complement local materials or because of the chemical reaction with oolitic limestone. The merits of other stones must therefore be carefully assessed against their context. Importantly, this must take into account how the stone will weather, both in terms of how its appearance might change over time, how quickly it will deteriorate or fail, and how it may interact chemically with any existing adjoining stone.
- Brick has been used in the conservation area for hundreds of years. Until the middle of the 19th century, it was handmade from locally dug clay, creating a texture and warm tone. From the 19th century onwards, modern manufacturing permitted outstanding new effects, with multiple colours and details. Keble College is the most celebrated example of this. Subject to analysis of the site and its context, new brick could be employed but it must always to be a very high standard of material quality and detailing.



Oolitic limestone - St John Street (OCC)



Red brick - St. Thomas Street (OCC)

- Concrete. Concrete has been used successfully in the conservation area when it is employed with a tone, texture, level of detail and articulation that is consistent with the architectural traditions of central Oxford.
- Glass, metal, ceramics. Aside from 19th century retail architecture, there is no tradition for the use of reflective materials for elevations.
- Other materials: The use of other materials will require strong justification and careful consideration to explain why the proposed materials and the way they are to be used would preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area where development is proposed, taking into account impacts on setting and wider context.
- Roof materials: Slate, lead, copper and clay roof tiles have all been used successfully in the conservation area. However, careful detailing of roofscapes is critical to the appearance and good management of the conservation area.
- Detailing and workmanship. Attention to detail and the highest standards of workmanship characterise much of the architecture in the conservation area. In particular, the conservation area is distinguished by the exceptional quality of masonry and the City Council will expect stonework, brickwork and concrete to be detailed and executed to the highest standards, consistent with the exceptional significance and the celebrated architectural and craft traditions of the city centre.
- Depth of facades. Deep reveals for windows and doors, together with projections such as buttresses and cornices, are a characteristic element of the distinctive tradition of architecture in Oxford. By casting deep shadows, they create architectural rhythm and a sense of depth and solidity. These characteristics should be applied to the handling and modelling of materials in new development. Thinly moulded and poorly articulated façades are unlikely to be successful in this architectural and townscape context.



Rhodes House - coursed rubble stone with Clipsham dressings and slate roof (OCC)

Advice

- The character and appearance of the conservation area is shaped by a range of long-established materials, originally sourced locally.
- The use of other materials will require strong justification.
- Hard, reflective materials such as glass, metal or ceramics are not part of the historic character and appearance of the conservation area.
- The highest quality workmanship and careful detailing are central to the architectural qualities of the conservation area and are expected in all development and alterations.
- Depth in the use of the materials, creating shadow and articulation, is an important architectural characteristic of the conservation area and is strongly encouraged.
- Consideration must be given to how materials will change over time, both in appearance and performance.

Step 8: Public, green space and landscaping

- Public space is one of the key themes identified in chapter 6, under the assessment of significance (Theme 19).
- Green space makes a substantial contribution to the distinctive character and appearance of the conservation area, by its extent, history, ecology and design. Much of this is visible or publicly accessible, such as the University Parks and the water meadows of the flood plain.
- Colleges and gardens. In the centre and east of the conservation area there is much less green space and the majority is private college land and rarely accessible. Nevertheless, it contributes to significance by:
  - virtue of its inherent significance as historic gardens and grounds (many Registered)
  - its expression of historic land use (education, recreation, produce)
  - its fundamental contribution to the distinctive arrangement and character of the historic college precincts.
- This is experienced in the streets of the conservation area as gaps in building frontages that are filled with boundary walls and allow more openness to the sky, by glimpses of gardens through gates and by overhanging trees and planting.
- These green spaces should be protected and enhanced in order to preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area whether it visible or not.
- New green space. Green space is good for biodiversity, for well-being and for the climate. New publicly accessible green space is therefore encouraged, especially in the centre and east of the conservation area where there is little. The design of such space should draw on the long tradition of gardens and parks in the city centre to avoid a generic appearance that does not reflect the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- New public space: the medieval street pattern is easily navigable and the streets themselves are public spaces. There are however, few areas of public space aside from the streets. New publicly accessible space is encouraged where it would be an enhancement of existing facilities or the creation of new ones. It should be easily accessible for all users and encourage a variety of uses, including after-dark entertainment spaces. New public space should be carefully designed to sit comfortably with existing historic structures and streets, using a variety of hard and soft landscaping techniques and materials.
- The treatment of existing public realm: The public realm within the conservation area plays a key part in its character. The treatment of and any changes to areas of existing public realm requires a sensitive approach in terms of design and execution. As the public realm within the conservation area is precious and has such an impact on its character, opportunities to enhance it and make it more accessible, usable and attractive are encouraged.



Christchurch Meadow (OCC)



Trinity College on Broad Street

Advice

- The character of new public and green space should reflect and respond to local characteristics, which vary across the conservation area; this includes soft and hard landscaping, seating, cycle storage, use of both innovative and traditional materials, sensory features, and future maintenance.
- It should also take into account the historic environment, including opportunities to enhance heritage assets and or impact on known or potentially unknown archaeological remains.



Public realm in Bonn Square (OCC)



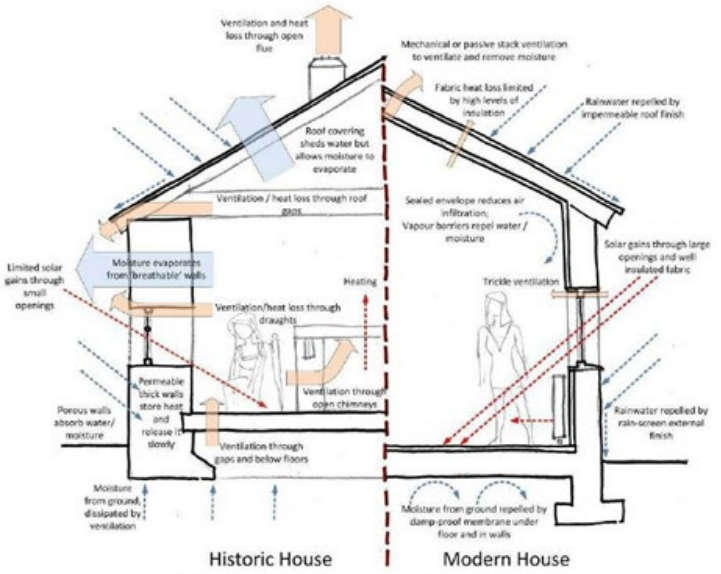
Public realm on Broad Street (OCC)

Step 9: Sustainability and climate change

- Buildings – including historic buildings and conservation areas – have a significant part to play in these efforts. The Heritage and Sustainability Guidance for Householders TAN and emerging Climate Change and the Historic Environment sets out how building and home owners can take practical steps to reduce carbon emissions and adapt buildings for changing weather, without harming those characteristics that make the historic environments special and significant places.
- Retaining historic buildings is inherently sustainable. The inherent embodied energy of historic buildings means that their retention and care is consistent with modern concepts of sustainability and with the ambitions of reducing carbon emissions. There are a range of measures that can be taken to improve the performance of existing buildings and even more options are available when designing new buildings and spaces. In a conservation area there are some additional considerations to be had around the choice between those options including the impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- As a broad principle, historic features should be retained wherever possible, this does not mean that buildings cannot be made more energy efficient however, for example historic window frames and glass should be retained because they contribute strongly to the character and appearance of the conservation area and historic buildings, but options such as careful maintenance, draft proofing or secondary glazing can offer real but sensitive benefits.
- Solar panels can be appropriate in the conservation area where it can be demonstrated that their appearance and attachment will not cause harm to significance of historic buildings and the character and appearance of the conservation area. Proposals to improve the thermal efficiency of buildings must take into consideration the performance of historic fabric and construction techniques, including breathability.

Advice:

- Adapt to our changing climate: For example, changes to gutters and downpipes to cope with more intense rainfall, better shading to prevent overheating during heatwaves.
- Reduce carbon emissions. Better controls, fewer drafts, improved insulation, window improvements. Switching from carbon emitting gas to renewable electricity, and generating your own energy,
- Take a whole building approach by understanding how your building 'works' and target improvements to maximise gains and minimise harm to its heritage importance and traditional building fabric, otherwise you might unintentionally create new problems.
- Seek advice from a heritage expert when considering making alterations to a historic building or where any alterations or additions would have an impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area.



Comparison of Historic and modern houses from the (Climate change TAN)

Step 10: Other specific considerations

Rear extensions and backland development:

- Rear elevations may have considerable significance regardless of any formal architectural qualities. They often reveal evidence of the history and evolution of the building that can be absent from the main frontage where it has been re-faced. They can also illustrate important functional aspects of historic buildings and plots, such as stairs, cooking and sanitary facilities, workshops and other ancillary facilities.
- For these reasons, it is important that the significant aspects of rear elevations and roofs are retained and remain visible in proposals for rear extensions
- Rear plots make an important contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. They provide the setting and ancillary space to the frontage building and afford views of it. They indicate historic land divisions, and frequently demonstrate the narrow historic plots that are characteristic of the area. They provide evidence for the history of ancillary uses and businesses in the conservation area, and sometimes include freestanding buildings. Existing buildings on rear plots may contribute positively to the character and appearance of the backland areas of the conservation area, because of historic uses or design.
- In considering if and how to develop on plots behind buildings, there is not one standard solution. It is necessary to comprehensively understand the particular character and significance of these areas in order to develop and justify proposals that avoid harm to the conservation area and listed buildings (see section 8.3).

Advice

- Proposals for rear extensions or development on plots behind existing buildings will only be supported where:
  - they would not require the destruction or obscuring of significant fabric or evidence of historic uses and activity.
  - the footprint, height and architectural character are demonstrably subordinate to the building on the front of the plot (so that its roof and roof form remains clearly visible) and allow views from public areas of the rear of the host.
  - historic plot shapes, divisions and boundaries are maintained, and are clearly legible in the plan, elevation and massing of the proposals.
  - architecturally, the proposals respond thoughtfully to a thorough understanding of the character and significance of the host buildings and context, and use high quality materials.
  - any necessary access via the main frontage can be incorporated without harming the significance of historic elevations and shop frontages.
  - proposals for bin and bike storage are incorporated within the development site.

Shopfronts

- Oxford was established as a trading centre a thousand years ago and shops have been an integral part of the character and appearance of the conservation area for centuries. Please refer to the Shopfronts Technical Advice note 2021 which expands further on the following information and advice.
- Historic shop fronts and elements. Many historic buildings were built or used as shops, though there are few complete or largely complete shop frontages and interiors. Therefore any surviving historic shop elements are considered significant. These elements illustrate the historic function of the building, how retail and shop designed has evolved over time and are often attractive and carefully considered pieces of design in their own right. For this reason proposals to remove such features will not be supported if they are capable of repair. These include historic fascias, pilasters, cornices, consoles, awning boxes and stall risers.



Guidance (Shopfront and Signage TAN)

- New shop fronts. Choice of design and materials for new shop fronts will need to be justified by analysis of the history of the site and its context. Large areas of glazing are more likely to be acceptable if they are composed in a framework that responds to the architecture of the building above and / or neighbouring buildings if these are historically and architecturally relevant.
- Shops signage – both on the fascia and projecting – has been a characterful component of Oxford's shopping streets for hundreds of years. The City Council's Shopfront and Signage Technical Advice Note advises recommends retaining the traditional elements of the shopfront, returning signage to the traditional fascia zone, removing extraneous signage above and beyond the fascia zone and as a result reducing visual clutter and improving the appearance of the individual buildings and area as a whole.
- Security shutters. The appearance of security shutters can create a blank and hostile appearance which is harmful to the character and appearance of the conservation area, particularly out of shopping hours. The City Council therefore views all applications for replacement or new security shutters as an opportunity to enhance the appearance of the conservation area. The ideal is for no shutters within the conservation area. Where these can be justified, they should be open mesh or 'brick bond' roller shutters, with or without a solid lower panel. The existence of similar or inappropriate shutters at or near the application site will not be accepted as justification for the approval of similarly inappropriate shutters.

Advice

- Proposals for new or replacement shopfronts should:
  - retain and refurbish historic elements and fabric where this survives
  - use durable, high quality materials. Timber is historically appropriate in most cases; alternative materials will be considered subject to the quality of the proposed design
  - avoid entirely frameless designs
  - include retractable awnings rather than Dutch blind canopies
  - contain fascia signage within the historic fascia zone of shopfronts, and it should not be boxed out
  - locate projecting/hanging signs within the fascia zone (it will be resisted on the elevation above)

Left: Existing detailing has been retained and incorporated into the shopfront which does not obscure or detract from the design of the existing shopfront. Lettering is painted onto the fascia board which is of an appropriate scale and proportion to the building, in accordance with Policy DH6.



Guidance (Shopfronts and Signage TAN)



Left: The materials used for the fascia board and lettering are bulky, shiny and of an inappropriate colour. The signage is not appropriate to the setting and does not reflect the materials or design of the building above. The use of plastic for advertisements is generally discouraged, particularly in this historic setting within a conservation area. This shopfront would not meet the criteria set out in Policy DH6, in particular criteria a) and criteria c).

Guidance (Shopfront and Signage TAN)

Painting

- Painted render, in a coordinated range of colours, is an important component of the character and appearance of streets in the historic core, decorating historic town houses and complementing the limestone facades.
- In the mid-twentieth century most of these buildings were painted in whites and greys. Beginning in the 1970s the City Council has pursued a policy of repainting these in colours carefully chosen to enhance the conservation area. Earthy tones – such as ochres, pale greens and blues, and browns have been selected to respond to the, limestone, brick, light conditions, architecture and townscape of the city centre.
- With a few exceptions, buildings are not unified compositional groups such as terraces. Therefore colours have been applied in combinations to enhance the mixture of architecture and townscape: exploiting and emphasising changes in height, projection, finish and design.
- Brilliant white and bright tones will be resisted unless they can be convincingly justified in the specific context of the proposal because they are not historically appropriate - they were not achievable with the lead based paints used until the mid twentieth century – and because they look harsh against the warm earthy tones of limestone and brick. For woodwork, therefore, ivory is preferred.
- In most cases limewash is not considered necessary because it requires frequent reapplication, but there may be occasions where it makes a significant contribution to the significance of specific historic buildings or is preferred as part of a fabric conservation strategy.

Advice

- Where new rendered elevations or a change in the colour of existing painted elevations are proposed, the colours must be agreed with Oxford City Council in order to conserve and where possible enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- The use of brilliant white or bright tones will not normally be supported because these are not historically accurate colours.



Painted facades on Broad Street (OCC)



Painted facades on Walton Street (OCC)

Archaeology

- The archaeology of the conservation area forms part of the City Centre Archaeological Area and is of national significance, with, for example, particularly good survival of the Saxon and medieval town and medieval and Civil War fortifications.
- Proposals for basements, foundations, including piling, and for buried services could have a substantial impact on these and other remains. Any significant breaking of the ground in this location will require an archaeological assessment. A full archaeological desk-based assessment and the results of evaluation by fieldwork (produced by an appropriately qualified contractor) may be required. Pre- application discussion is encouraged to establish requirements.
- Development should seek to avoid harm to archaeology through design. New development should seek to find creative innovative ways to conserve and protect Oxford's exceptional and irreplaceable archaeological legacy from cumulative harm and loss. Building designs should therefore aim to preserve significant archaeology in situ.
- Where harm to an archaeological asset has been convincingly justified and is unavoidable, mitigation should be agreed with the City Council and should be proportionate to the significance of the asset and impact. The aim of mitigation should be where possible to preserve archaeological remains in situ, to promote public enjoyment of heritage and to record and advance knowledge. Appropriate provision should be made for investigation, recording, analysis, publication, archive deposition and community involvement.

Advice:

- Development proposals must take account of the below ground archaeology of the conservation area and Oxford City Council's policies for managing this.
- Development will not be permitted where it would have a harmful effect on nationally significant remains or their settings, whether scheduled or not.



Excavation of burials at the medieval Hospital of St. John the Baptist, Longwater Quad, Magdalen College (David Radford)

Lighting

- There is a growing interest in adding architectural lighting within the conservation area. Excessive, poorly designed lighting can have a harmful impact on the character of the conservation area during the day and night. Within conservation areas, this can harm the visual appreciation of the historic environment, particularly where seemingly small changes can cause cumulative erosion of the character.
- Poor lighting can obliterate striking architectural details and the colour of building materials. Bright white LEDs are more energy efficient than older more traditional lighting options, but they have a harsh appearance which drains an area of colour and vibrancy. Strings of lights across wide streets can de-value their appearance while providing minimal lighting, whereas their use in narrow and vibrant streets can enhance the experience for users.
- Good lighting positively contributes to a human scale after dark, improving safety by providing legibility through vertical surfaces. Well-designed, the overall amount of light can be reduced, thereby improving energy use and amenity, by using it strategically where needed rather than flooding areas which would not benefit from it. The flexible use of lighting can enhance an area's character by changing it as needed, utilising existing historic light fittings, reducing the impact on amenity and ecology.
- Safe and secure cycling and walking can be achieved after dark with a coordinated approach to lighting throughout the city centre. This would involve working with landowners, applicants, and the County Council's highways department to ensure that lighting is functional yet appropriate for its historic setting.

Advice

- Applications for lighting within the conservation area should:
  - Include a lighting assessment that takes into account the historic environment, existing lighting facilities and fixtures, and propose alternatives which not only provide more appropriate light levels (e.g. for security), but also enhance the appearance of the area.
- The City Council will:
  - Consider an holistic, collaborative approach to lighting within the city centre to balance light and dark to meet both a functional and aesthetic need
  - Encourage lighting to be used architecturally to enhance places and spaces, highlight key landmarks, and provide conditions to support night-time events
  - Use conditions to control lighting colour temperature, hours of illumination, fittings and fixtures.
- Landowners and developers are encouraged to:
  - Take opportunities to upgrade poorly functioning light sources with lower energy LEDs with appropriate colour temperatures for the location.

Making an application

- The conservation area is a highly complex and internationally significant historic environment. Applicants will need to be able to demonstrate that this context has been comprehensively understood and applied to proposals in the accompanying Design and Access Statement and a Heritage Statement (which could be combined). Fully complying with the council's validation requirements and its design checklist can help to demonstrate how proposals are consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework. This will help speed up the application process.
- Heritage Statement requirements. The Heritage Statement should not rely solely on this appraisal for research (see section 8.2 below). It should explain how the site contributes to the significance of the conservation area as it is defined in the appraisal - as well as other heritage assets such as listed buildings and registered parks and gardens.
- It should include an impact assessment that demonstrates how the proposals conserve or enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area by reference to the significance themes in chapter 6 and the analysis of the relevant character area assessments.
- The impact assessment must also assess the effect of the proposals on all other heritage assets affected by the proposed scheme. Where harm is found, the Heritage Statement must outline appropriate mitigation measures and any public benefits to justify remaining harm.

Pre-application advice:

- Pre-application advice. Seek pre-application advice from the Planning Department. This may help you to prepare proposals that are more likely to be supported, saving wasted time and cost.
- Please see Step 1 above which sets out the baseline information that may be necessary to submit with a pre-application, depending on the scale of development to get the most out of the process.

The planning application:

- Any formal submission needs to clearly demonstrate how the contextual analysis and understanding of the sites heritage significance have informed the brief and design response to site.
- Comply with Oxford City Council's planning validation requirements.
- Follow the Oxford Local Plan policy requirements.
- Submit a Heritage Statement incorporating an Impact Assessment with any application.
- Provide views analysis through Visual Impact Assessment with 3D modelling.
- Engage with other stakeholders such as Historic England and local amenity societies prior to submitting an application.

8.3 Further reading

Oxford View Cones Study 2015
Oxford View Cones Study provides an understanding of the ten protected view paths in Oxford, which are important heritage assets and fundamental to the city's distinctive character.
https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/1610/oxford_view_cones_study_full_report

Oxford High Buildings Technical Advice Note (TAN)
Informs decisions regarding the growth and intensification of Oxford in a positive and structured way. Includes the four visual tests.
https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/7509/tan_7_high_buildings

Shopfronts and Signage (TAN)
Provides guidance for the design of shopfronts and signage in Oxford.
https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/7673/tan_10_shopfronts_and_signage

Planning Validation Strategy
Explains the process of submitting a planning application.
https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/6853/planning_application_validation_strategy

Pre-application Planning Advice
Explains the pre-application advice service to applicants.
https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20066/planning_applications/724/making_a_planning_application/4

Character Zone Assessment 1

Principal Streets

Oxford Central (City & University) **Conservation Area**

Zone includes:

- From the north, St Giles' – Magdalen Street – Cornmarket Street
- From the east, the High Street and Broad Street
- To the south, St Aldate's
- To the west, Queen Street and George Street





Principal Streets Character Zone
Oxford Central (City & University) Conservation Area

The Conservation Area Appraisal divides the Conservation Area into nine character zones. This chapter contains a detailed analysis of one of these: the Principal Streets Character Zone. It can be used to understand the history, character and appearance of this part of the Conservation Area, and to inform planning application and development proposals.

This Conservation Area Appraisal aims to promote and support developments that are in keeping with, or enhance, the character of the Central (City & University) Conservation Area. This section is concerned with the reasons for designation, defining the qualities that make up its special interest, character and appearance. It is not possible to describe every facet of the area that contributes positively to its character. The omission of any reference to a particular building, feature, space or positive contributor should not be taken to imply that it is of no interest. Additional positive contributors will be identified through the development management process.

Contents

1.1	An overview of character and special interest
1.2	A brief history
1.3	An analysis of character (considering use, street and townscape, green space, buildings, roofscape, landmarks and views, movement and activity, archaeology)
1.4	Further useful information

Icons

Throughout, icons direct you to relevant sections of the Conservation Area Appraisal and links to other relevant documents.

- relevant layers of the conservation area map / GIS mapping
- relevant character themes in the appraisal
- relevant sections in the appraisal
- suggestions for further reading
- information relevant for planning
- sources of further information

Maps

The maps below are extracts from the Conservation Area mapping set, which consists of layers of useful information ranging from archaeology and historic maps to green space, listed buildings and street materials. Please note that maps may not show the full extent of listed buildings and do not show curtilage-listed structures. If you are unsure if your building is listed check the National Heritage List for England and seek the advice of the City Council's Urban Design and Heritage Team.

1.1 Overview of character and significance

This character zone comprises the principal streets of the city centre, which have formed the historic backbone of Oxford for over a thousand years, and include some of the most famed and beautiful streetscapes in the country.

The following aspects of the zone are of considerable historical, architectural, townscape or social significance and contribute positively to the character and appearance of the conservation area:

- These streets developed into the principal cross streets of the Saxon burh by the late ninth or early tenth centuries, spreading from the central crossroads at Carfax to link the river crossings to the south and west with the routes to the north and west.
- Broad Street and George Street emerged as key routes just outside the city walls. Broad Street also developed important ceremonial and institutional functions, encapsulated in its generous shape and grand architectural expression.
- The principal streets have been the public, ceremonial, educational and retail core of Oxford for centuries.
- These uses create characteristic and picturesque architectural variety: narrow commercial and domestic buildings that correspond in scale to the medieval plot divisions, frequently in painted render and with active frontages, which contrast with larger, more architecturally imposing and mostly impermeable institutional buildings made of ashlar stone.
- The High Street in particular has long been famed and admired for its exceptional architectural and townscape beauty. Sir Nikolaus Pevsner concluded: 'The High Street is one of the world's great streets. It has everything.'
- Character changes correspond closely to the line of Oxford's former medieval walls. Beyond the line of the walls there was less pressure on space, allowing development on a more generous scale and occupying larger plots.

The principal aspects of the zone that harm character and appearance are:

- Intensive use, as these streets form the commercial, transport and visitor backbone of Oxford.
- Saturation of pedestrians and vehicles in pinch locations, which is degrading their character.
- Pollution, traffic and overcrowding detracts from the appreciation of their architecture and outstanding townscape.
- Changing commercial pressures are leading to a loss of independent retail, undermining Oxford's individual character.
- The loss of ground floor retail use, particularly where units are converted to alternative uses by colleges results in a loss of active frontage which undermines the vitality of the city's historic commercial core.

Opportunities for enhancement are:

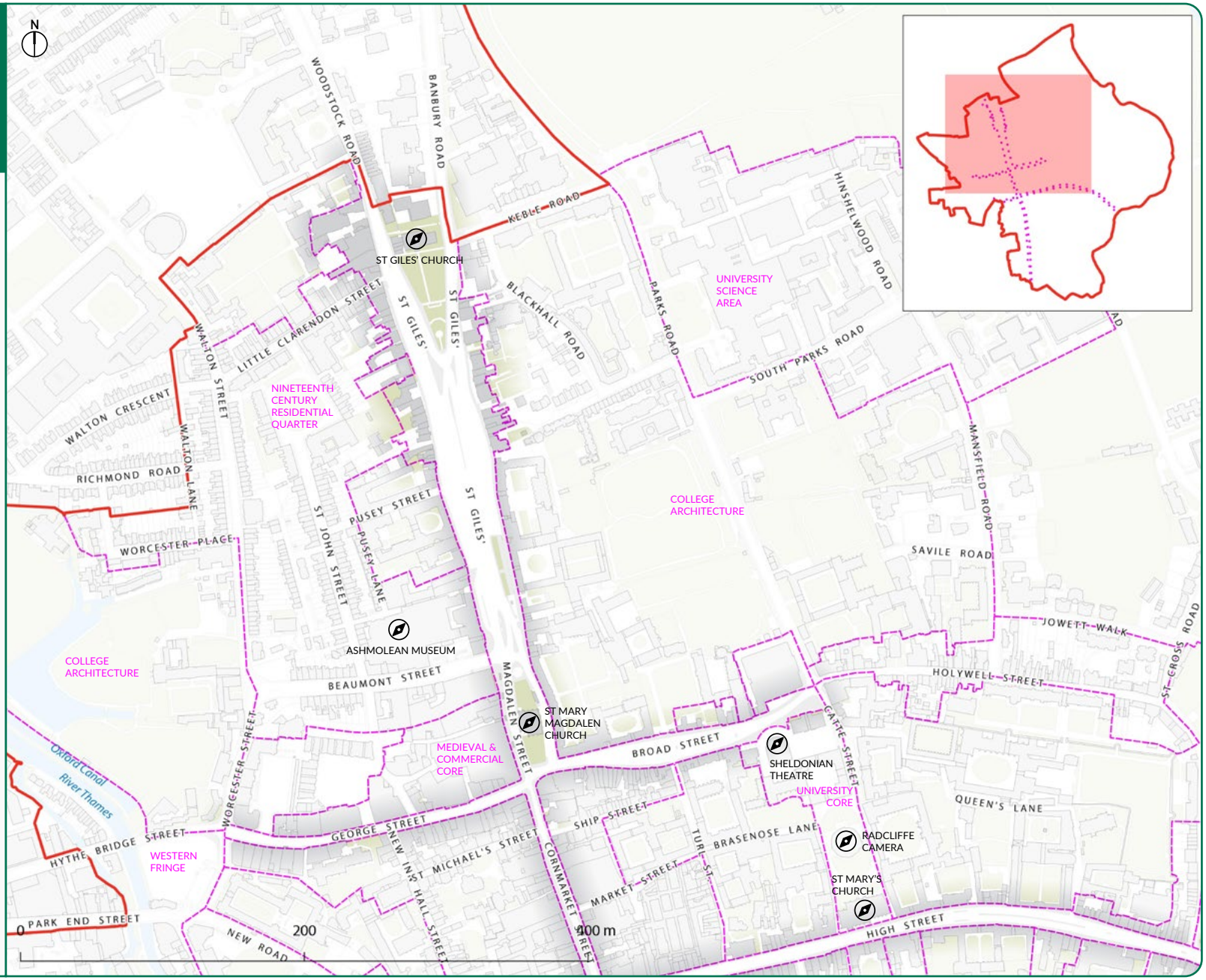
- Removal of insensitive signage and reinstatement of historic shop fronts.
- Rationalisation of street furniture and signage.
- Reinstatement of historic street surfaces.
- Building on the successes of the Broad Meadow and Broad Street projects, a permanent removal of parking and the creation of a wider pedestrian area with seating and planting in the highway, creating a new public space for people to enjoy'.
- Improving awareness and interpretation of the Martyr's Cross on Broad Street by improving its setting within the road surface.

Notes for use:
This character zone is confined to the streets and façades that enclose them. See adjoining character zones for the plot and buildings behind them (refer to character zone map).

Overview
Principal Streets

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- NAME Neighbouring character zones
- Reference point

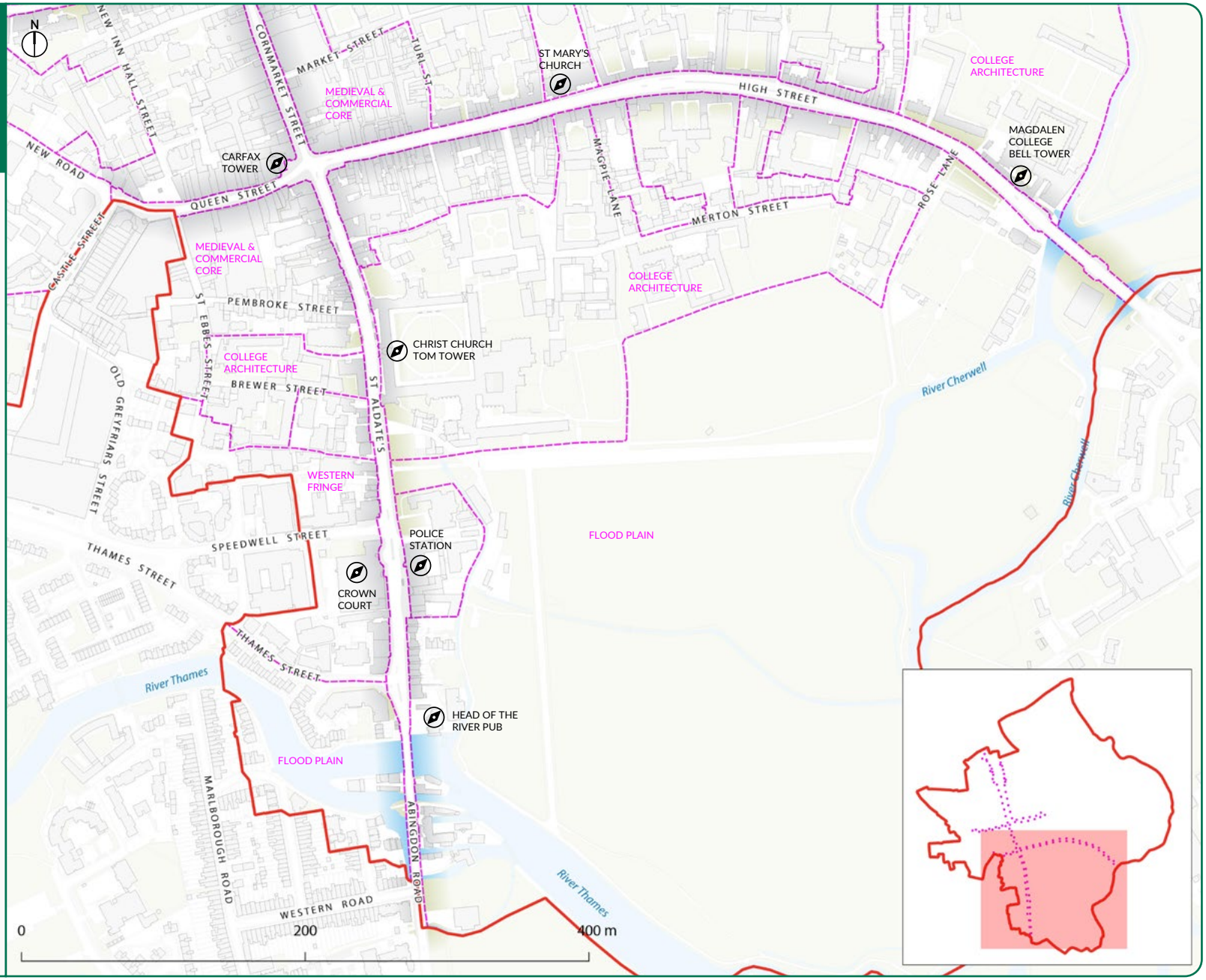


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Overview
Principal Streets

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- NAME Neighbouring character zones
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1.2 History

Most of these streets in this character zone have Saxon origins, and have been the key commercial and transportation routes of the city ever since.

1.2.1 Saxon burh

- The core thoroughfares of this character zone formed the heart of the Saxon burh, by the late ninth or early tenth centuries. They link the river crossings to the south and east with the routes to the north and west.
- Markets spread along the four axes from the crossroads at Carfax. This has been the focus of commercial and retail activity ever since. The markets included butter at Carfax, corn on the Cornmarket, meat at the western end of the High Street, dairy on Queen Street (later meat) and fish on St Aldate's (then called Fish Street).
- Ongoing retail and commercial use is an important part of the character of these streets.

1.2.2 Middle Ages and expansion beyond the walls

- Wealth generated from the cloth and leather industries and trade was at a peak in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, leading to suburban expansion beyond the city walls.
- Broad Street and George Street are examples of medieval expansion beyond the walls, on the site of the northern defensive ditch; the distinctive bulbous shape of Broad Street is a result of the forward extension of the line of the town wall to create an expanded graveyard for St Michael at the Northgate.
- Broad Street was well established by the thirteenth century, when it was home to a horse market and known as Horsemonger's Street.

1.2.3 Institutional occupation

- The character of the principal streets to the north, south and east of the commercial heart was altered from the c. 1300 onwards, by the growth of the University and colleges when narrow commercial and domestic medieval plots were combined to create these large institutional sites. The juxtaposition of these large sites and narrow plots creates a distinctive townscape, but further loss of the narrow medieval plots would cause harm by reducing the ability to understand the city's medieval past.
- The impressive University buildings clustered around the east end of Broad Street (the earliest of which date from the 1660s) create an attractive juxtaposition with the terraced townhouses (now shops) at the western end of the street.
- St Giles' became a popular place for the city's elites to live in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, enabling them to occupy large residences on more spacious plots than in the city centre.

1.2.4 Commercial renewal

- There has been much renewal of the commercial core on Magdalen Street, Cornmarket Street, Queen Street, George Street and St Aldate's over the past 200 years, reflecting changing demands for city centre shopping use during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and pressure for stores with larger footprints to accommodate national chains.
- In the Post-War period, the process of redevelopment has resulted in relatively few examples of high-quality architecture, and has significantly reduced the number of buildings representing Oxford's mercantile history up to the mid-twentieth century.
- More recently, pedestrianisation of Cornmarket Street and partial pedestrianisation of Queen Street was introduced to sustain the vitality of the retail core, effectively creating new public spaces.

1.3 Character

1.3.1 Use and access

Saxon and medieval streets; Historic urban characterisation

Theme 1: contrasts and complexity
Theme 2: university
Theme 8: commerce and retail
Theme: 9 civic administration
Theme 11: living

There is a strong continuity of retail and commercial use in the city centre, although the long-term trend has been for expansion of college and University use at the expense of private residential and commercial activity:

- The central area focused on Carfax provides the highest concentration of retail usage. This includes Cornmarket Street, Queen Street, George Street and West Magdalen Street (although this is now extended further beyond Queen Street with the redeveloped Westgate Centre). This is historically significant because these streets have been the commercial hub of Oxford since the foundation of the Saxon burh over a thousand years ago.
- Travelling further from Carfax along High Street, St Aldate's, St Giles' and Broad Street, retail is increasingly diluted by institutional use, especially once beyond the line of the former city walls. Mostly these institutions are the colleges, but Broad Street has a unique character because of the University buildings at the east end (Sheldonian Theatre, Clarendon Building and Weston Library), and St Aldate's has a distinctively civic aspect in the form of the Town Hall and the Post Office (and further south, the Law Courts, Police Station and County Council offices).



Cornmarket Street is a hub of commercial activity at the city's centre



There is a wider mixture of commercial, retail and institutional use along St Giles'

1.3.2 Streets and townscape

Comprising the principal streets of the Saxon burh, this zone contains some of finest streetscape in the country:

Topography

Saxon and medieval streets; Historic urban characterisation

Theme 23: topography and geology

- Topography shapes the character and appearance of the two streets rising up from the floodplain: the eastern end of High Street, and St Aldate's.
- Other streets are largely level, though Cornmarket Street has a noticeable change in level at the northern end which corresponds with the former city wall. This is an important feature.

Street pattern

Saxon and medieval streets; medieval plot boundaries

Theme 18: street layout of the Saxon burh
Theme 10: defence
Theme 12: archaeology
Theme 22: views of the conservation area

- With the exception of Broad Street and George Street, the streets of this character zone have been the principal thoroughfares of the settlement for over a thousand years. They are therefore of great historical interest for preserving its Saxon and medieval plan.
- The difference between the density and order of the walled medieval town settlement and the space beyond the walls is still discernible in the shape and width of streets. This is most obvious north of the line of the walls, in St Giles', with its broad and gently widening form, and in Broad Street, with its generous width and distinctive bulbous form.
- The lower part of St Aldate's was widened by clearances in the early twentieth century, so its character is not as historic.
- Much of the acclaimed townscape of High Street is due to its gentle curve towards Magdalen Bridge, which constantly reveals new views and buildings (see Section 13.3.7 Landmarks p. 15).

Public space

Theme 19: public space

Central Oxford has few formal public spaces, but this character zone contains significant places for markets and public gathering, some historic and others recently reinforced by pedestrianisation:

- St Giles', unusual in Oxford because of its generous width, and home to the annual St Giles' Fair for over 200 years. The War Memorial at the north end is an important focus during Remembrance Day services, while the Martyrs' Memorial at the south end is a popular place for people to gather and sit.
- Broad Street, a place shaped and used for assembly since its creation as a horse market, later by virtue of its proximity to University buildings, and now because it is semi-pedestrianised. Redevelopment of the Weston Library has transformed public use and the enjoyment of the eastern end, by creating south-facing steps where people can sit and linger.
- Carfax, modest in scale but of great historical and communal significance as the centre point of Oxford for over a thousand years.
- Queen Street and Cornmarket Street, historically thoroughfares but now pedestrianised with informal opportunities to stop, rest and meet.



The generous width of Broad Street reflects its location outside the city walls and provides space for assembly

Plots and building line

Medieval plot boundaries; Building lines and gaps

Theme 20: medieval plots

- The zone contains a high concentration of surviving medieval tenement plots, which are characteristically narrow and long. They are historically significant evidence of the nature of the medieval town, and how it extended in suburbs beyond the city walls.
- Much larger plots were later created for educational, civic, and nineteenth- and twentieth-century retail use by amalgamating medieval plots. The contrast and mixture express the historical evolution of the city and gives the city centre its very distinctive character. Loss of these narrow plots would cause harm by reducing the ability to understand the city's medieval past.
- Alleys and entrance ways such as Wheatsheaf Yard are historically important where they survive; many of these are ancient and illustrate how back plots were accessed and used.
- The building line is predominantly at the back of pavement, creating enclosed streetscapes, but variety in the way buildings relate to the street is essential to the zone's character and appearance, creating a picturesque texture and expressing historical property uses. For example, buildings can be set back and step forward, or have façades slightly angled to the street, or stand in detached plots (e.g. at the north end of St Giles'), or be set back behind collegiate boundary railings and walls (e.g. on the High Street and Broad Street)

Pavements and street materials

Street materials

Theme 14: materials

- The majority of street surfaces in this zone are new and in most cases this is not detrimental to its character. Shared and pedestrian surfaces in Queen Street and Cornmarket Street are not wearing well, and mismatched patch repairs are unattractive.
- The stretches of old paving that remain are often located in front of colleges, such as St John's, The Queen's College, Christ Church and Magdalen.
- There are also some surviving riverstone cobbles in Broad Street, at risk from inappropriate tarmac repairs.
- The Martyrs' Cross marks the possible site at the western end of Broad Street where the Oxford martyrs were burned at the stake by Queen Mary I (in 1555-56). It is a historically significant piece of nineteenth-century street surfacing, made of contrasting stone setts exposed amongst the tarmac, but is presently in poor condition, and its significance is not readily apparent to passers by.



Medieval plots on St. Giles (OCC)

Street furniture

- The spine of St Giles' is defined by tall and handsome streetlights, and at its southern end there are Victorian ironwork railings to subterranean public lavatories. These all contribute essential texture to its character.
- There are surviving Dean and Son gas lamp standards, now converted to electricity, on the west side of St Giles', which are of historic interest.
- Other historic street furniture includes K6 red telephone boxes (several of which are listed) and cast-iron manhole covers manufactured by local business such as Lucy & Co.
- With the exception of Cornmarket Street and recent temporary installations on Broad Street, there are few dedicated places for people to sit along these streets.
- Proliferation of street furniture such as litter bins, bollards and information boards can clutter space on already narrow pavements and detract from the streetscape, particularly where their designs lack uniformity or quality.



Mature plane trees along St Giles' form a green thoroughfare into the city, punctuated by tall and handsome streetlights

1.3.3 Green space

Public access to green spaces

Theme 25: green space

- By its very nature, this character zone has little green space, but overhanging trees and glimpses over walls and through gateways into quads and gardens provide welcome contrast and incident. This is a defining and much enjoyed aspect of the conservation area's character and appearance.
- Uniquely in the city centre, St Giles' / Magdalen Street form a green thoroughfare. There are green pockets at either end (St Giles' churchyard and memorial garden to the north, and the churchyard of St Mary Magdalen to the south, which are connected by a fine avenue of mature plane trees, forming an attractive vista. This precious environment is historically significant, and aesthetically and ecologically valuable.



Green pockets, such as St Giles' churchyard, provide welcome areas to sit in an otherwise hard urban streetscape

1.3.4 Buildings

Designations; Historic urban characterisation

Theme 1: contrasts and complexity
Theme 14: materials
Theme 15: architectural details

Quality, variety and materials

- Two overarching characteristics of the buildings in this zone combine to create a streetscape of national and in places international architectural quality and importance:
  - The sheer number and concentration of historically and architecturally significant buildings (see number of listed buildings and positively contributing buildings).
  - The delightful variety and contrast, most particularly between narrow domestic frontages and grand institutional façades, which is quintessentially the character of Oxford city centre.
- The variety and contrast in types of building in this zones is reflected in the materials: predominant use of painted plaster for domestic use and ashlar (Headington, Clipsham and Bath stone) for institutions.
- The 'coral rag' stone used for St Michael at the Northgate tower and is notable as the first type of stone to be used in the town. It is also found in St George's Tower and parts of the town wall at New College.
- In the core retail area, commercial redevelopment in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty first centuries introduced a wider variety of materials including red and buff brick (particularly prevalent along George Street). Plots were often combined to create wider frontages (e.g. William Baker House on the corner of Broad Street and Cornmarket, 1915).

Shopfronts and other details

- There are some fine historic shopfronts, for example on the High Street, the west side of St Giles' and Broad Street, and these enhance the appearance of the area. Modern shopfronts are more prolific, and overall the number, form, materials and lighting of these fascias and signage detracts from the historic character and appearance of the zone, especially on Cornmarket Street, Queen Street, the northern end of St Aldate's and the western end of the High Street.
- Surviving historic architectural details, such as handsome cast ironwork on Nos. 5-9 Magdalen Street, create a rich streetscape, which is an important element of the character and appearance of this part of the conservation area.
- There is generally a good survival of historic windows, with very few replacement uPVC windows, which also contributes to the quality of the streetscape.

1.3.5 Positive contributors

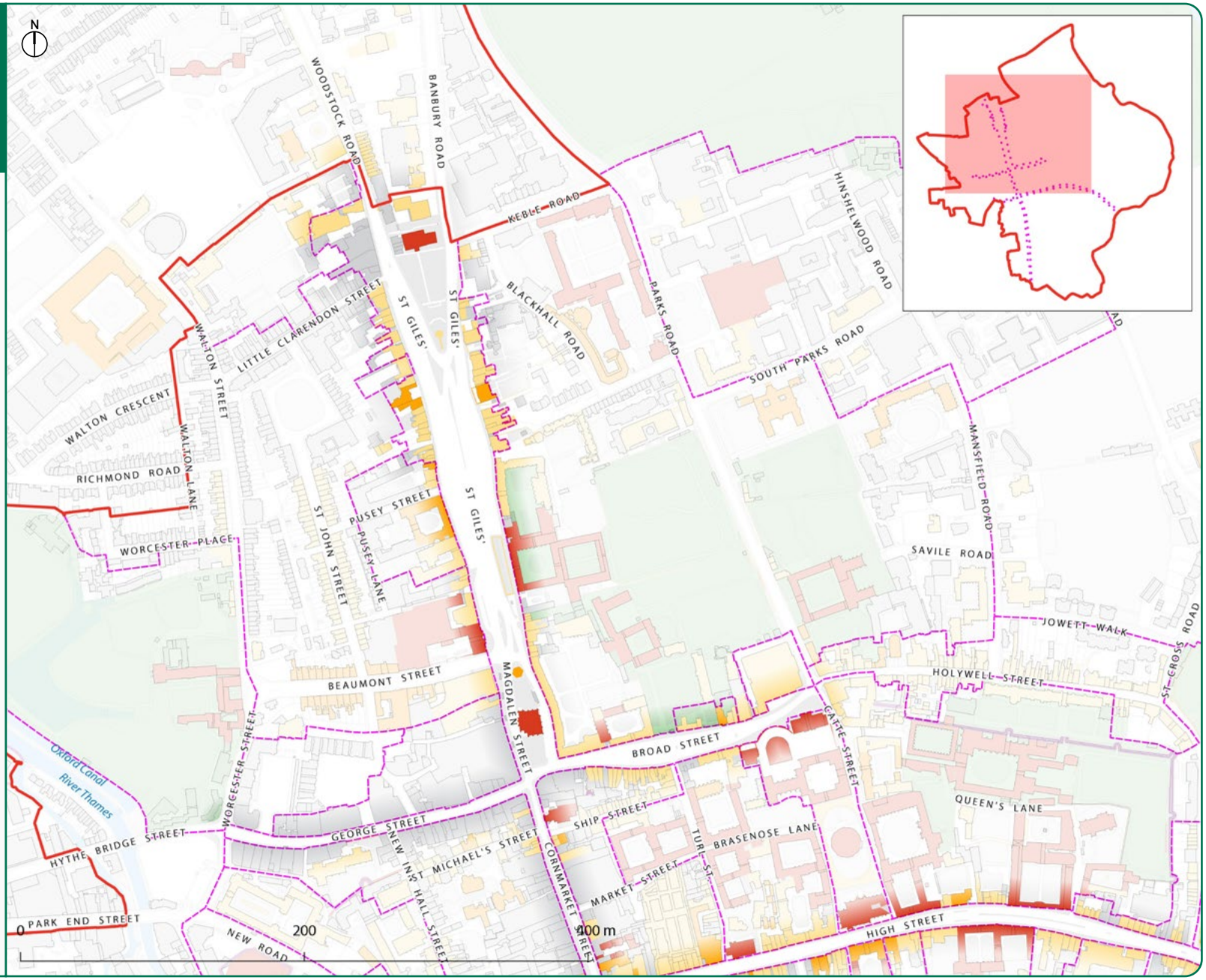
Positive contributors

- A very high proportion of the unlisted buildings within this zone make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the streets and the conservation area, because of their age, use, materials and details.
- Amongst these are good examples of post-war architecture that intelligently relate their context by maintaining a consistent scale, conserving the medieval plot rhythm or using vertical emphasis in detailing to reflect it, and providing carefully detailed frontages that reflect the architectural intricacy and materials of the older buildings.
- The character of the Principal Streets is predominantly influenced by the buildings that align them but also by other key features within the streetscene such as shopfronts and signage, street surfaces, street furniture and street trees which are all considered to be positive contributors.
- There are a number of historic and traditional shopfronts within the area and some historic and attractive signage. As often the closest physical features at eye level, these make a significant and positive contribution to the character of these streets.
- Historic and traditional street surfaces such as York stone paving, granite setts, river cobbles and Staffordshire blue pavers make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area, providing an attractive setting to adjacent buildings and the highway and often providing a visual reference to the history of the area.
- There is a high concentration of good quality, historic street furniture along the principal streets including cast iron railings, light columns, red telephone kiosks and post boxes. Together, these historic features help create a cohesive and visually rich environment.

Designations
Principal Streets

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- Grade I listed
- Grade II* listed
- Grade II listed
- Scheduled monument
- Registered parks and gardens



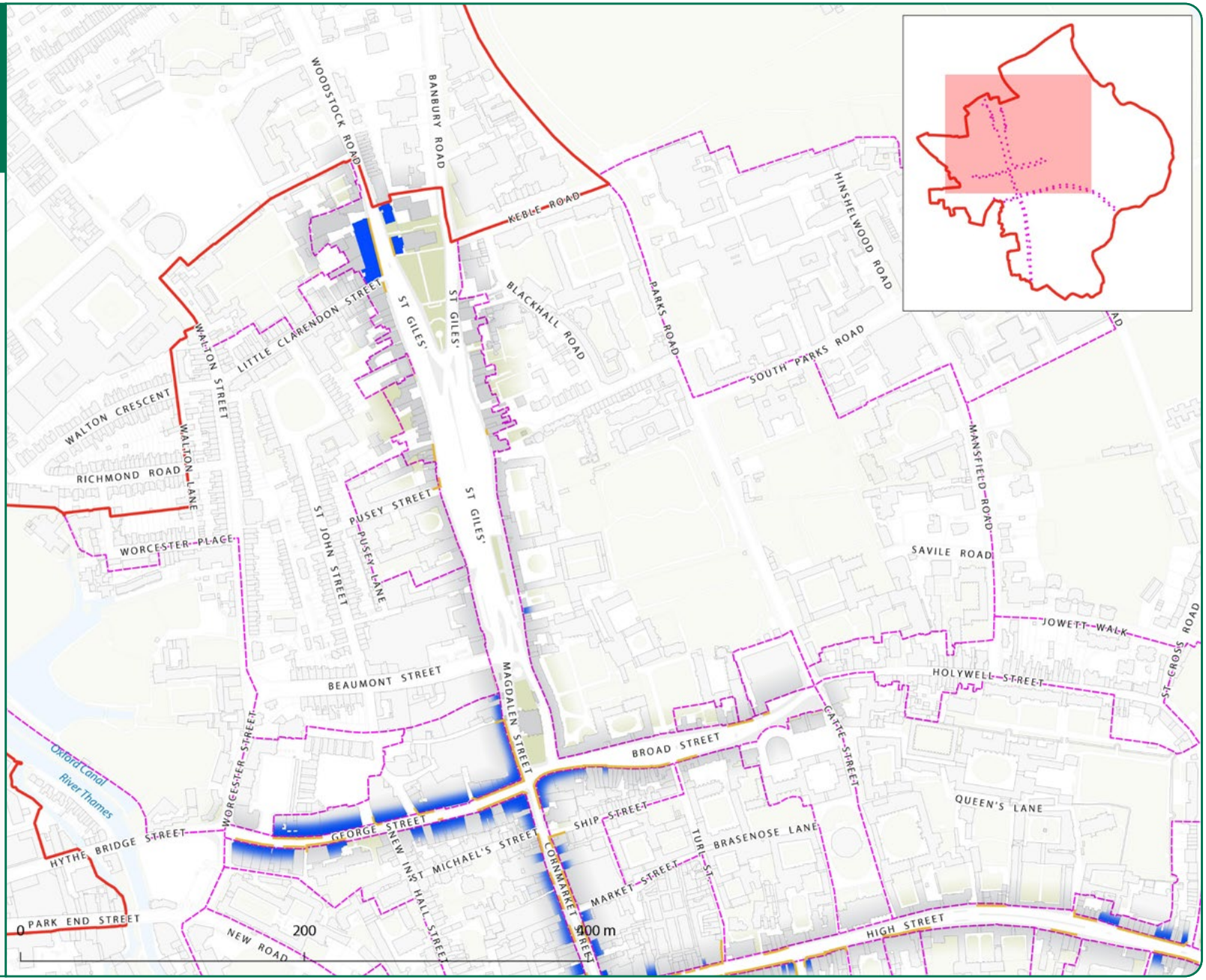
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Positive contributors

Principal Streets

Key

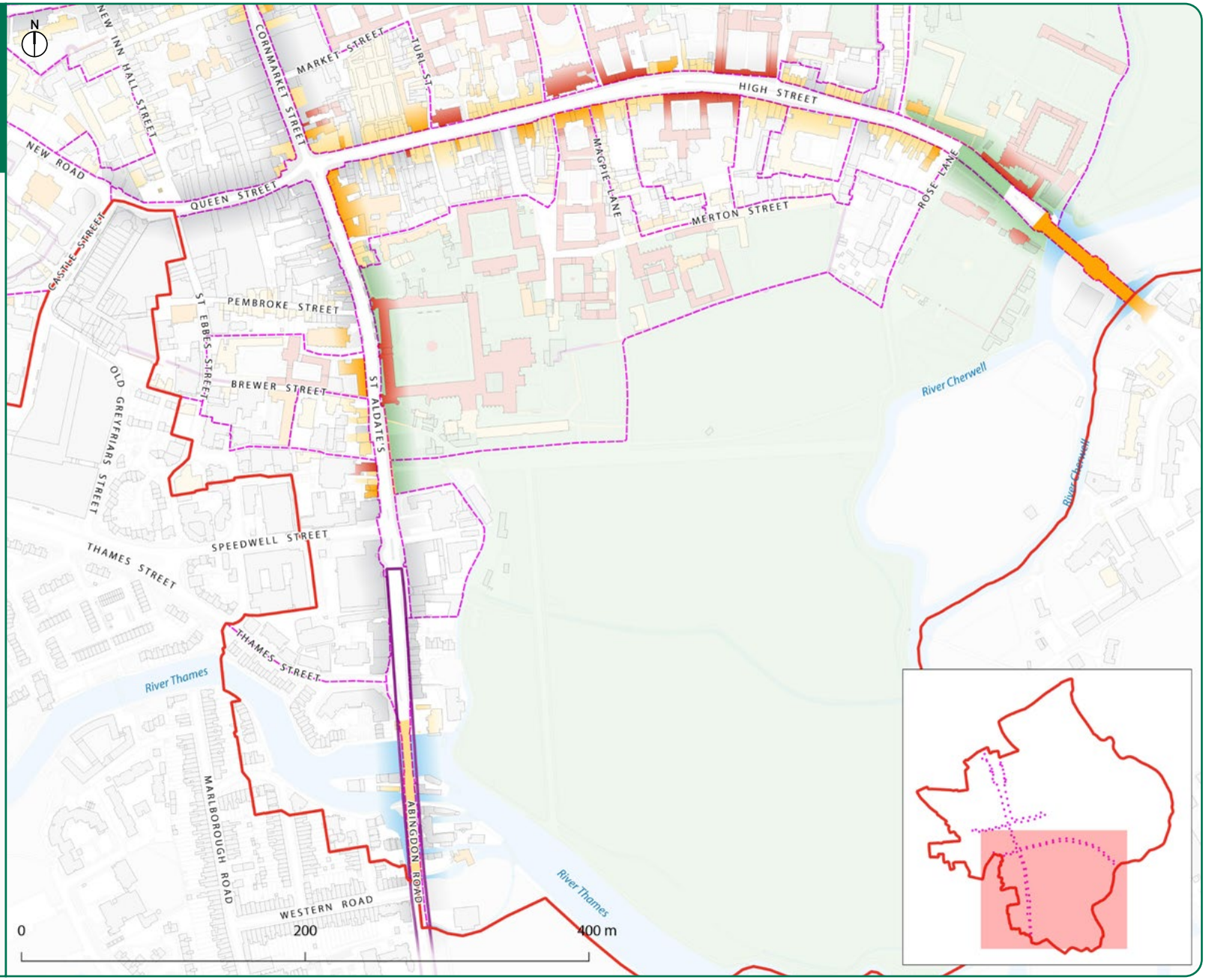
- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- Positive contributors (non-designated)
- Attractive shopfront



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Designations
Principal Streets

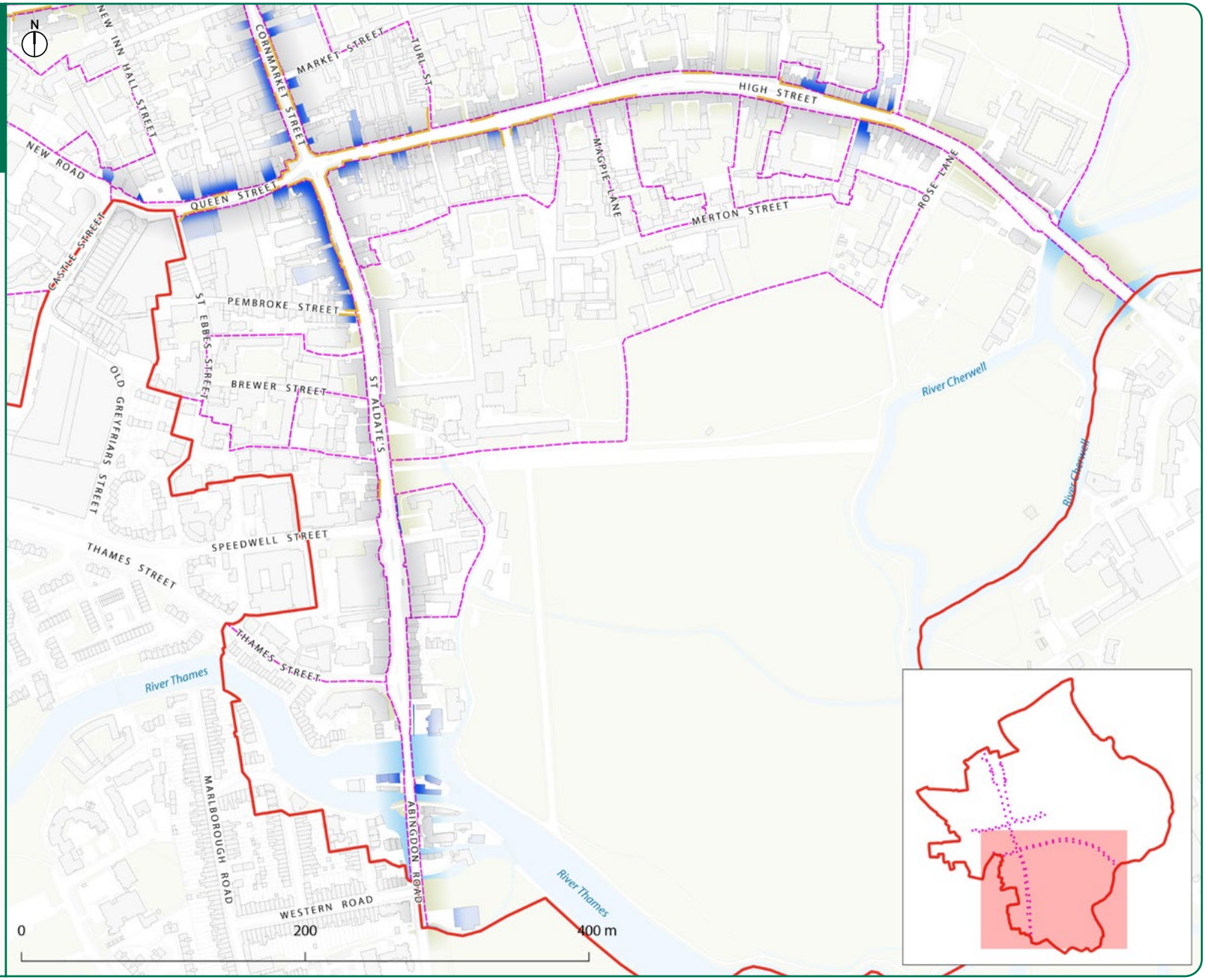
Key
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- Grade I listed
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- Grade II listed
- Scheduled monument
- Registered parks and gardens



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Positive contributors
Principal Streets

Key
- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- Positive contributors (non-designated)
- Attractive shopfront



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- Street trees play a significant role in creating visual interest when viewed in the streetscene. Some trees provide an element of 'surprise and delight' such as those on the High Street that pop out as your view unfolds. Others lean over into the street and help frame a view. Street trees provide a dynamic and ever changing landscape, creating a sense of place and reinforcing the unique character of the area.

1.3.6 Roofscape

Roofscape

Theme 21: roofscape, skyline and landmarks

- The roofscape of this character zone has more variety than most, reflecting the passage from the commercial and institutional hub of the city to the beginnings of its suburbs. It is of fundamental importance to the character and appearance of the conservation area because of its richness, quality and relatively few recent changes:

Building heights

- The variations in building heights are fundamental to the character of the streets because they reflect the pattern of historical development and function. The seventeenth-century rubble stone and timber framed barn (now belonging to St John's College) on the east side of St Giles' is only a single storey high and indicates the historically rural character of this area outside the city walls. In contrast, late-nineteenth-century and twentieth-century retail premises on Cornmarket Street, Magdalen Street and Queen Street can be up to four storeys in height (rising to four storeys with attics at the corner of George Street and Magdalen Street), demonstrating the pressure on space in the city centre.
- Buildings of five storeys or higher (other than landmark spires and towers) are extremely rare in the conservation area because of the successive tall buildings policies that have been in place since the 1960s, which have sought to protect the city's significant skyline and the settings of its internationally important architecture on which tall buildings can have an adverse impact

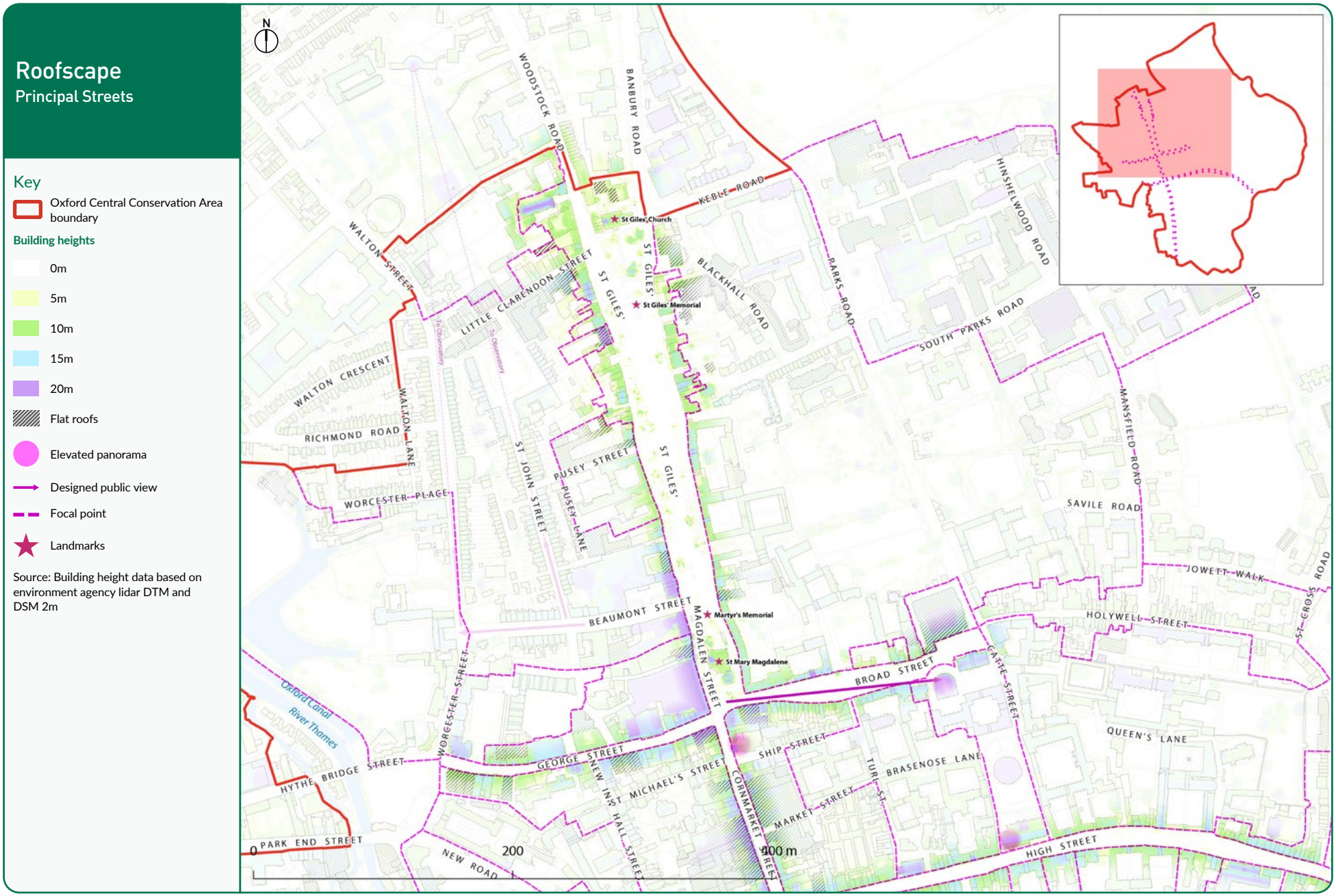
Roofscape and skyline

- Roofscape is extremely varied and this is fundamental to the townscape qualities of the streets and the wider views of the conservation area.
- This variety arises from plot widths, building heights, roof forms (pitched, gabled, parapets, pediments etc.), chimney stacks and architectural ornamentation (e.g. finials and turrets).
- Because of the building heights and roofscape, the skyline in this zone is varied. It is richest on the High Street, Broad Street and the top of St Aldate's because of the wealth of institutional and religious architecture, but throughout the zone the skyline is vital to its character and appearance.
- The Gormley statue 'Another Time' on the roof of Exeter College's Thomas Wood Building on Broad Street is an attractive recent addition to the roofscape and skyline of this street.



The High Street, showing a sample of the many building heights and roof forms along the principal streets

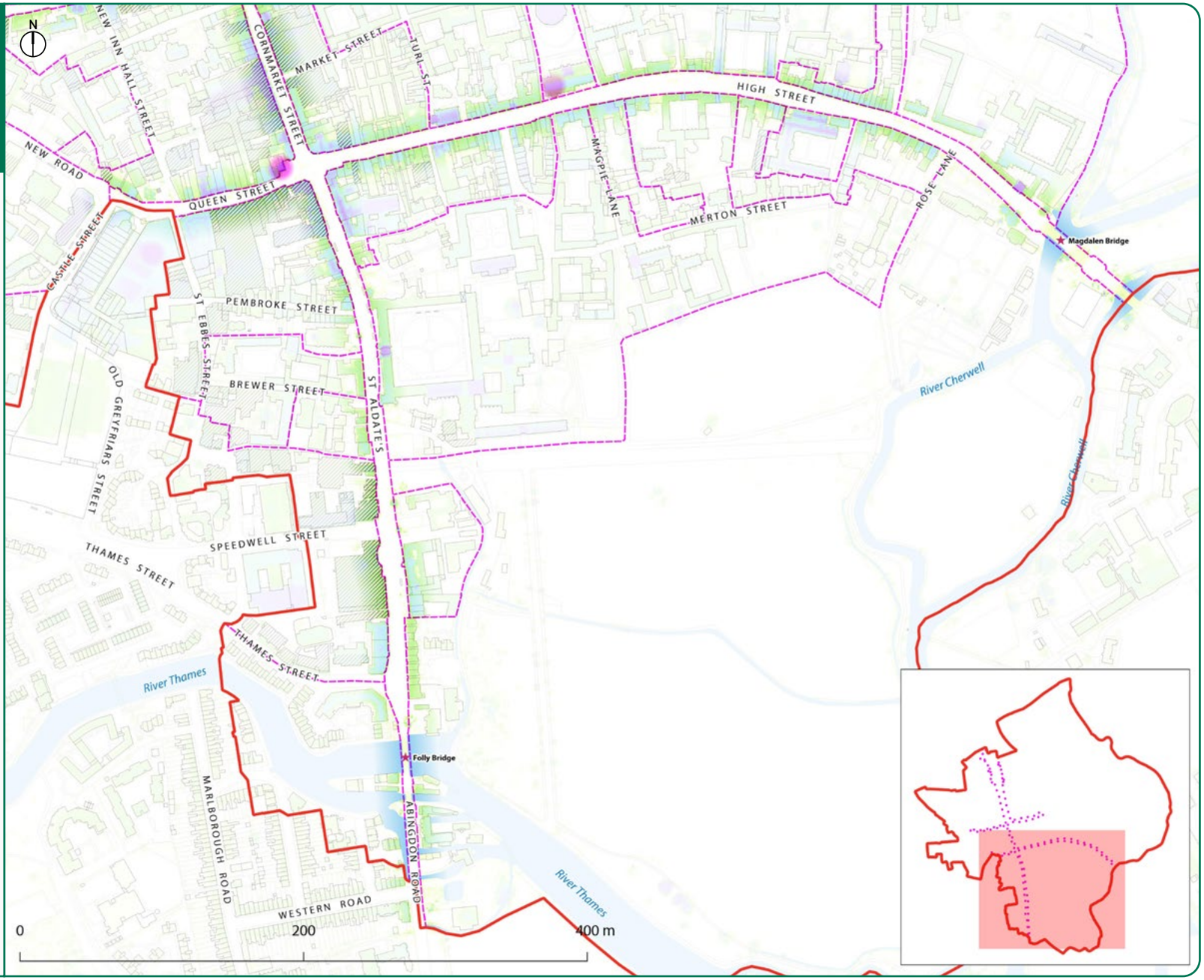
Roofscape
Principal Streets



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Roofscape

Principal Streets



Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary

Building heights

- 0m
- 5m
- 10m
- 15m
- 20m
- Flat roofs
- Elevated panorama
- Designed public view
- Focal point
- Landmarks

Source: Building height data based on environment agency lidar DTM and DSM 2m

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1.3.7 Landmarks

Roofscape

Theme 21: roofscape, skyline and landmarks
Theme 22: views in the conservation area
Theme 27: setting of the conservation area

- Several of Oxford's most famous architectural landmarks punctuate these streets, making a defining contribution to its world-famous townscape. The zone is exceptionally rich in both designed and glimpsed views of these landmarks, which are fundamental to the experience of its character and appearance:

Landmarks with the zone

- Magdalen College bell tower, High Street.
- Entrance cupola and statue, The Queen's College, High Street.
- University Church of St Mary the Virgin, High Street.
- Former All Saints' Church (now Lincoln College library), Turl Street.
- Carfax Tower, Carfax.
- HSBC Bank, Cornmarket Street.
- Lloyds Bank, Cornmarket Street and High Street.
- Saxon tower of the church of St Michael at the Northgate, Cornmarket Street.
- 26-28 Cornmarket Street (3 storey timber framed building on the corner with Ship Street)
- Former Debenhams Building, Magdalen Street.
- Church of St Mary Magdalen, Magdalen Street.
- Martyrs' Memorial, Magdalen Street.
- St Giles' Church, St Giles'.
- St Giles' War memorial, St Giles'.
- Tom Tower, Christ Church, St Aldate's.
- Town Hall, St Aldate's.
- Sheldonian Theatre, Broad Street.
- Gloucester Green, George Street.

Landmarks outside the zone

- Exeter College Chapel, Turl Street.
- Wesley Memorial Methodist Church, New Inn Hall Street.
- Westgate Centre, Queen Street.

1.3.8 Views

Public viewing panorama

- Carfax Tower, the tower of St Mary's Church and the tower of St Michael at the Northgate all provide 360-degree panoramas, from which the viewer can experience and appreciate the historical form and architectural character of central Oxford, and its relationship to its landscape setting and suburbs.

Designed views

- The University created views of the new Sheldonian Theatre by demolishing houses in the middle of Broad Street in 1667.

Vistas to focal points

- For example, Tom Tower is the focal point of the north–south axis of Oxford, clearly visible for the length of Cornmarket Street and St Aldate's, while the vista between St Giles' War Memorial and the Martyrs' Memorial along St Giles' creates a distinctive townscape.

Unfolding views

- The curving topography of the High Street creates a continuous sequence of unfolding views of streetscape and landmarks such as All Saints Church and the University Church. This is one of the finest and most thrilling townscape experiences in Europe.
- Glimpsed views: of landmarks, for example, from Broad Street southwards down Turl Street to the spire of All Saints Church, or the Radcliffe Camera from the High Street; charming glimpses down alleys and side streets and into colleges, especially along the High Street.

1.3.9 Movement and activity

Theme 26: tranquillity and sound

As the streets comprising this character zone still constitute the main movement routes to Oxford city centre, as well as the core streets of the commercial heart itself, they are characterised by high levels of activity. While this adds to the vitality of the city, it can also be harmful to the conservation area's character and appearance.

Traffic

- The river crossings of Magdalen Bridge and Folly Bridge act as pinch points, making travel into the city centre slow and difficult, especially for people travelling form the east and south.
- Vehicular congestion has been successfully reduced along parts of the Principal Streets through the introduction of bus gates, replacing large numbers of cars with smaller numbers of buses and taxis. Overwhelmingly, this has had a positive effect on the character and appearance of the conservation area. However, in some locations buses and coaches do have a negative impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area:
  - In the narrow Magdalen Street East, where the succession of buses and coaches overwhelms the space and harms the setting of the buildings, including the Grade I listed Church of St Mary Magdalen.
  - Outside the Taylor Institution on St Giles', where there are on-street coach pick-up and drop-off points that are in near-constant use during peak times.
  - Outside Christ Church in St Aldate's and Queen's college on the High Street, where principal bus stops harm the settings of these exceptional Grade I listed buildings.
- Congregated groups of food delivery service scooters are also a problem in some locations, such as Carfax, where they detract from the setting of this important landmark and other surrounding listed buildings.
- Highways engineering, signage and other paraphernalia has a harmful impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area in some locations. For example, at the junction of St Giles' and Magdalen Street, the highways design creates alien geometry and traffic islands, hemming in the Grade II* listed Martyr's Memorial.



Designed view eastwards along Broad Street towards the Clarendon Building and Sheldonian Theatre



Vista south down St Aldate's towards the focal point of Tom Tower

- On-street parking is extensive in St Giles but the impact is lessened by the great width of the street and the screening provided by the plane trees.
- By contrast to St Giles, Broad Street is smaller and there is no screening. Parking here is harmful to its character and appearance, and to important views of the Sheldonian Theatre, and it would be beneficial to these if the temporary parking restrictions in place as part of the Broad Street project were made permanent.

Cycling

- These streets are important cycling routes across the city; bicycles make up nearly half of all vehicles travelling over Magdalen Bridge.
- Cycling is permitted on Cornmarket and Queen Street only between 6pm and 10am due to the volume of pedestrians and to reduce conflict between users.
- The demand for cycle parking is very high due to the number of cyclists. However, large, untidy racks can detract from the public realm and from the settings of architectural landmarks, as can hire cycles and scooters.

Pedestrians

- Pedestrian activity is most intense near the city centre.
- Cornmarket Street is pedestrianised. Broad Street and Queen Street are also partially pedestrianised. As well as removing the appearance, noise and pollution of vehicles, pedestrianisation is in keeping with the historic market functions of these areas.
- Where streets are not pedestrianised some pavements get heavily very congested, for example at the west end of the High Street and in Magdalen Street. This is harmful to the experience of the conservation area.
- On St Giles', the width of the street and the range of traffic movements can make crossing the space as a pedestrian, away from the designated crossing points, difficult.

1.3.10 Archaeology

Theme 12: archaeology

Oxford Archaeological Action Plan further detail and guidance

- This character zone comprises the historic main thoroughfares of the city, most dating back to the Saxon burh and crossing the medieval fortifications.
- The lower section of St Aldate's by Folly Bridge incorporates a section of the Grandpont beneath the modern road surface, a rare survival of the Norman causeway over the Thames floodplain which may have even earlier origins.
- Although there are localised impacts from modern road building and extensive buried service routes throughout this zone, the below-ground archaeological potential of the zone is considered to be variable to high. There remains potential for the buried remains of earlier street surfaces, the medieval town gates, the medieval central kennel drain, cellars and post-medieval conduits to be preserved within islands of undisturbed ground between service runs.



Section through Castle Street with multiple road surfaces from the saxon period (Tom Hassell and Oxford Archaeology)

1.4 Useful documents and further guidance

Refer to the following Historic Urban Character Assessments on the Oxford City Council website for detailed accounts of the character zone. The key plan shows their boundaries.

- HUCA 10 Thames Crossing: Colleges and University.
- HUCA 15 City Centre and Commercial Core: Pembroke Street and St Aldate's.
- HUCA 16 City Centre and Commercial Core: Queen Street and Bonn Square.
- HUCA 18 City Centre and Commercial Core: Cornmarket.
- HUCA 19 City Centre and Commercial Core: The High Street, Townhouses and Market.
- HUCA 21 Former Northern City Ditch: Broad Street.
- HUCA 26 St Giles': The Street and Islands.
- HUCA 27 St Giles': Western Frontage Commercial.
- HUCA 28 St Giles': Ashmolean Museum and Colleges.
- HUCA 29 St Giles': Townhouses.
- HUCA 30 St Giles': St John's College Expansion.
- HUCA 31 St Giles': Medieval Colleges.
- HUCA 32 The Eastern Colleges: Turl Street Colleges.
- HUCA 33 The Eastern Colleges: University Buildings.
- HUCA 34 The Eastern Colleges: South of the High Street.
- HUCA 35 The Eastern Colleges: Broad Walk.
- HUCA 36 The Eastern Colleges: Former Eastgate.
- HUCA 37 The Eastern Colleges: North of the High Street.
- HUCA 41 The Eastern Suburb: Magdalen College.
- HUCA 42 The Eastern Suburb: Botanic Garden.

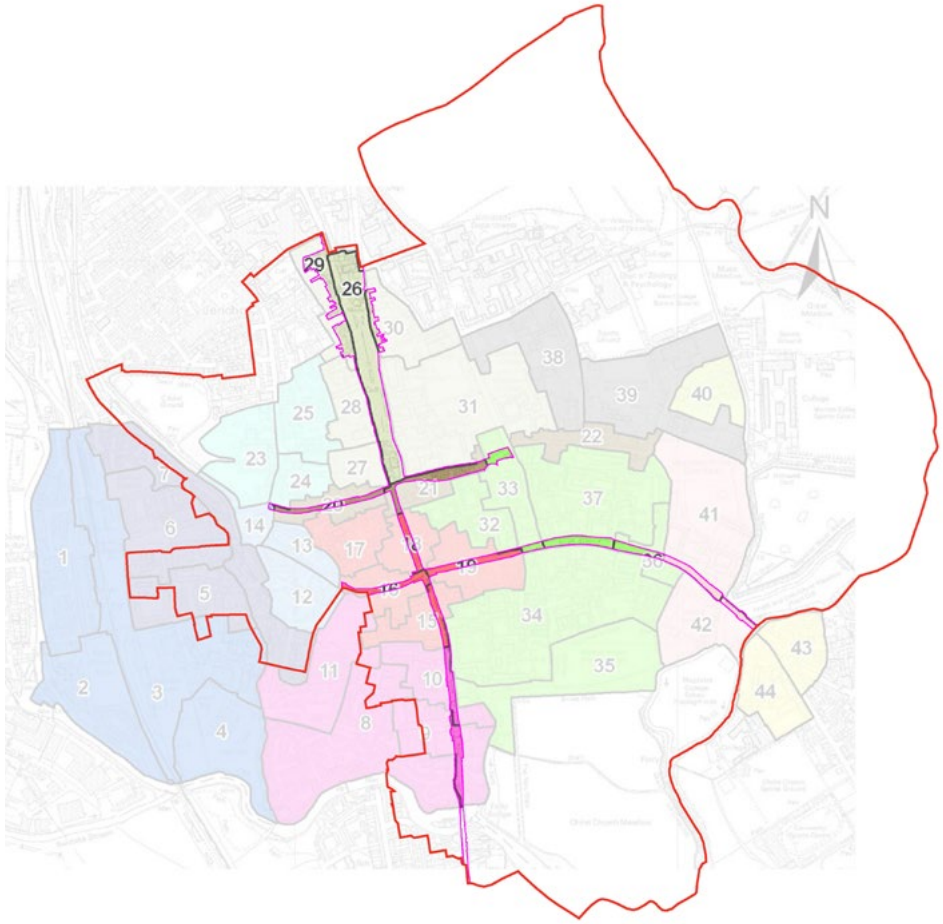
Other useful documents include:

Oxford Heritage Walks Book 1: On foot from Oxford Castle to St Giles', Malcolm Graham 2013

Oxford Heritage Walks Book 2: On foot from Broad Street, Malcolm Graham 2014

Oxford Heritage Walks Book 3: On foot from Catte Street to Parson's Pleasure, Malcolm Graham 2015

The Broad Street Plan, Kim Wilkie, 2004



Character Zone Assessment 2

Medieval and Commercial Core

Oxford Central (City & University) **Conservation Area**

Zone includes:

- High Street/Queen Street and Cornmarket/St Aldates
- Longwall Street, Holywell Street and Broad Street
- Turl Street, Market Street and Ship Street
- George Street, St Michael's Street and New Inn Hall Street
- Blue Boar Street, Bear Lane, King Edward Street, Oriel Street and Magpie Lane





Medieval and Commercial Core Character Zone
Oxford Central (City & University) Conservation Area

The Conservation Area Appraisal divides the Conservation Area into nine character zones. This chapter contains a detailed analysis of one of these: the Medieval and Commercial Core Character Zone. It can be used to understand the history, character and appearance of this part of the Conservation Area, and to inform planning application and development proposals.

This Conservation Area Appraisal aims to promote and support developments that are in keeping with, or enhance, the character of the Central (City & University) Conservation Area. This section is concerned with the reasons for designation, defining the qualities that make up its special interest, character and appearance. It is not possible to describe every facet of the area that contributes positively to its character. The omission of any reference to a particular building, feature, space or positive contributor should not be taken to imply that it is of no interest. Additional positive contributors will be identified through the development management process.

Contents

2.1	An overview of character and special interest
2.2	A brief history
2.3	An analysis of character (considering use, street and townscape, green space, buildings, roofscape, landmarks and views, movement and activity, archaeology)
2.4	Further useful information

Icons

Throughout, icons direct you to relevant sections of the Conservation Area Appraisal and links to other relevant documents.

- relevant layers of the conservation area map / GIS mapping
- relevant character themes in the appraisal
- relevant sections in the appraisal
- suggestions for further reading
- information relevant for planning
- sources of further information

Maps

The maps below are extracts from the Conservation Area mapping set, which consists of layers of useful information ranging from archaeology and historic maps to green space, listed buildings and street materials. Please note that maps may not show the full extent of listed buildings and do not show curtilage-listed structures. If you are unsure if your building is listed check the National Heritage List for England and seek the advice of the City Council's Urban Design and Heritage Team.

2.1 Overview of character and significance

This character zone comprises areas of Oxford that lie within the boundaries of the Saxon burh and its expansion beyond the walls in the Middle Ages. The zone largely retains its historically residential and commercial character, and the central area around Carfax still constitutes Oxford's commercial core.

The following aspects of the zone are of considerable historical, architectural, townscape or social significance and contribute positively to the character and appearance of the conservation area:

- Oxford's Saxon and medieval past are discernible throughout the zone, in the presence of early landmarks, street and plot layout, and alleyways that indicate the division of medieval tenement plots.
- Though few medieval structures are visible, significant elements of medieval fabric remain in the city centre behind later facades including 107 High Street (Tackley's Inn) and the building containing the Elizabethan 'Painted Room' at 3 Cornmarket Street, and medieval vaults under Frewin Hall, the Mitre, and the Town Hall.
- The zone is characterised by its quantity of attractive seventeenth- and eighteenth-century town houses which correspond in scale to the medieval plot divisions. These are found in particular concentration on Holywell Street, Pembroke Street, Turl Street and Ship Street. Their form, colour and historic detail is fundamental to the famed picturesque townscape of these streets.
- Elsewhere, commercial buildings vary significantly in scale, from small shops in Georgian buildings and the single-storey Covered Market, to larger Victorian and twentieth-century premises.
- The areas which offer the strongest sense of the city's historic character are those where the scale and materials of later developments, both modern and historic, are in keeping with those of the original medieval buildings, and retain humane rear spaces.
- Limitations on vehicle use in streets, in particular Holywell Street, which has reduced the harmful impact of vehicles on setting and character.

The principal aspects of the zone that harm character and appearance are:

- Twentieth-century commercial buildings occupying large plots with frontages out of scale with their surroundings and inappropriate materials, which has resulted in the loss of historic plot boundaries, gardens and yards.
- The weight of traffic and poor quality of the urban realm in some locations.
- Loss of commercial or residential character where town buildings have been taken over by colleges or university.
- The absence of activity in some streets (e.g. Holywell Street and Pembroke Street) caused by the use of historic town houses as student accommodation with access provided from the rear, and the front doors unused.

Opportunities for enhancement are:

- Improvements to the public realm on Market Street, which is currently dominated by servicing and motor vehicles and provides an unwelcoming entrance to the covered market.
- Replacement of the cementitious render that has been applied to many of the 17th and 18th century timber-framed townhouses in this character zone with breathable lime render would help to preserve the fabric of these important buildings.
- Reinstating the legibility of the narrow medieval plot widths where plots have been combined in the twentieth century, if and when sites come forward for development.
- Reinstating historic shopfronts where these have been lost or unsympathetically altered.

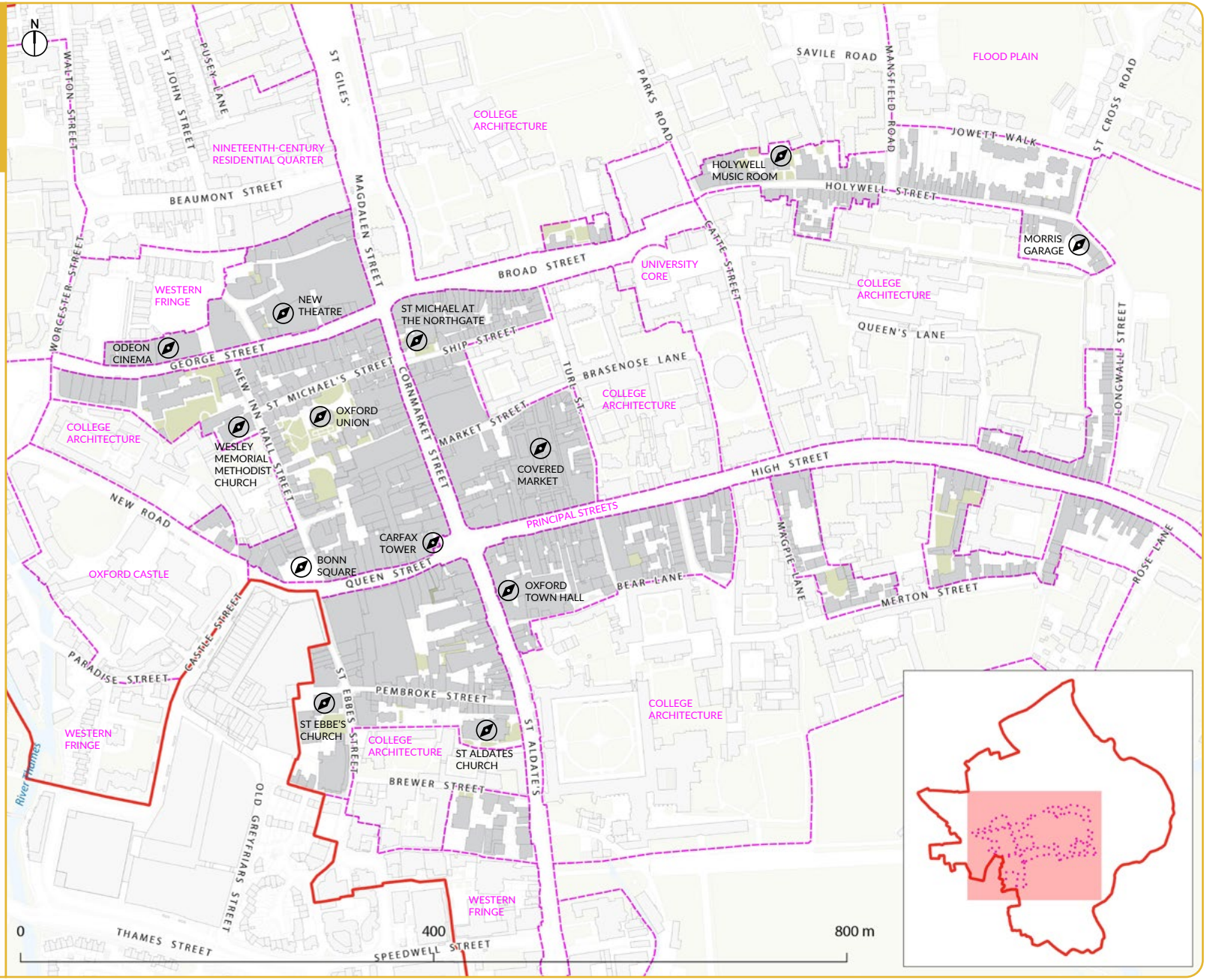
Notes for use:
Colleges, University properties and the principal streets are addressed as separate character zones (see character zone map).

Overview

Medieval and Commercial Core

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- NAME Neighbouring character zones
- Reference point



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2.2 History

2.2.1 Saxon origins and Norman Conquest

- Whilst Oxford's first origins remain uncertain, its established history began with the development of a Saxon burh (defended settlement) by the tenth century. This settlement centred around Carfax and expanded in the tenth and eleventh centuries with the arrival of Viking and then Norman settlers.
- In the thirteenth century, the walls of the Saxon burh were reconstructed in stone and bastions were erected.
- Numerous parish churches were founded in the city, including St Aldates, St Ebbe's, St Michael at the Northgate and St Martin (demolished 1896, except for the tower at Carfax), making Oxford (along with York, Norwich and the City of London) one of the several towns in medieval England with multiple churches.

2.2.2 Medieval prosperity

- The twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw Oxford prosper as a commercial trading centre, with a particular focus on the cloth and leather industries, and it expanded with suburbs beyond the walls to the north and south.
- It was during this period that the Saxon plots were divided to form an arrangement of tenement plots, many of which still define the pattern of development today.



Golden Cross, one of Oxford's surviving medieval inns, set around a narrow courtyard off Cornmarket Street

2.2.3 Subsequent expansion

- After periods of decline and stagnation from the fourteenth century Oxford expanded again intermittently from the late sixteenth through to the eighteenth centuries. There was large-scale redevelopment and many medieval buildings were replaced by townhouses.
- The historic core was also a focus for entertainment and socialising, containing many historic inns and public houses including the Golden Cross and the Turf Tavern.
- The surviving elements of the medieval town were further damaged by the fire that spread from George Street to Queen Street in 1644.

2.2.4 Evolution and growth of the commercial core

- In 1771 the streetscape of Oxford's commercial core changed dramatically with the creation of a Paving Commission, which oversaw the removal much of its remaining medieval fabric, including the north and east gates, and the rebuilding of Magdalen Bridge with the present structure. The open markets in Carfax and surrounding streets were moved indoors: the Covered Market opened in 1774.
- The Oxford Union Society moved to new building in St Michael's Street in 1857 and provided a focus for university debating.
- Purpose-built entertainment venues were established, including the Holywell Music Room in 1748 (the oldest custom-built concert hall in Europe); the Oxford Town Hall, containing a large hall for concerts and public meetings, 1897; Magdalen Street cinema, 1924; the New Theatre on George Street, 1934; and the Odeon Cinema, George Street, 1936.
- Commercial expansion and redevelopment in the nineteenth century shifted the centre of retail gravity to the west, because the presence of the colleges prevented expansion to the east. This has particularly changed the character and appearance of streets such as George Street, Cornmarket Street and Queen Street, creating new building types on large amalgamated plots.
- At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Cornmarket Street was pedestrianised and in Queen Street only buses are permitted during daytime.

2.3 Character

2.3.1 Use and access

Historic urban characterisation

Theme 11: living
Theme 8: commerce and retail

This zone has a predominantly commercial and residential character, but also contains a number of religious buildings and entertainment venues. These uses correspond remarkably closely to the historic uses of the Saxon city and its medieval expansion.

- **Commercial:** buildings with frontages onto Oxford's principal streets are primarily commercial, corresponding to the city's medieval market area around Carfax. This has expanded to the west in the last 150 years.
- **Residential:** the areas of the zone to the east and south where development fronts onto secondary streets have a predominantly residential character today that reflects their history on medieval tenement plots. Many buildings on secondary streets previously had commercial uses at ground floor level, but in some streets, whole buildings have now been converted to student housing (e.g. Pembroke Street, Blue Boar Street and Holywell Street).
- **Spiritual:** the historic centre contains numerous churches, both medieval in origin (e.g. St Michael at the Northgate; St Ebbe's and St Aldates) and later foundations, often for other religious denominations (e.g. Wesley Memorial Church, New Inn Hall Street; St Columba's URC Church, Alfred Street). Some of these have been taken over into college use, e.g. All Saints, High Street (now Lincoln College library).
- **Entertainment:** the city centre is a focus for entertainment and recreation, including pubs, theatres, cinemas and concert halls.



Narrow-fronted commercial buildings along the bustling High Street



St Ebbe's Church, twelfth century in origin and much restored in the Victorian period, is one of central Oxford's many churches

2.3.2 Streets and townscape

This zone preserves a discernible sense of its Saxon and medieval origins through its narrow streets, historic yards and dense development on narrow plots.

Topography

Topography

Theme 23: topography and geology

- The zone is generally flat, with a gentle incline towards the city centre east from Oxford Castle and north from St Aldate's.

Street pattern

Building lines and gaps; Saxon and medieval streets; Medieval plot boundaries

Theme 18: street layout

- Though there are some larger streets such as George Street, the zone is characterised by narrow streets and historic alleyways and yards stemming from the principal streets. Most of these are Saxon or medieval origin, such as the alleyway leading to 130A High Street (built 1637 as Kemp Hall in the back yard of 130 High Street). Golden Cross, Bath Place and Wheatsheaf Yard are examples of distinctive yards, alleyways and passages, which in many cases have existed for hundreds of years.
- Bulwarks Lane and George Street Mews is particularly atmospheric: a narrow, paved alley that curves and winds along the trace line of the former northern bailey of the Castle and retains a variety of historic surfaces including limestone flags and different types of stone setts.

Public spaces

Theme 5: religion
Theme 19: public space

- There is limited public space within the zone because of its dense early street pattern and the high value of land.
- The pedestrianisation of Cornmarket Street and semi-pedestrianised neighbouring streets have shifted the balance of these streets from primarily thoroughfares to more public spaces.
- There are small areas of public space comprising the churchyards or former churchyards of the churches within the zone: St Aldate's, St Michael at the Northgate, and St Ebbe's, although the yards of St Michael and St Ebbe's are only accessible through the church.
- The Covered Market forms a characterful internal space, of great historic and social value, though the present relationship with Market Street is of a poor quality (dominated by servicing and with poor quality surfaces, signage etc.).
- Bonn Square provides the main area of public space in this zone, shaded by trees and busy with people. It was formerly the graveyard of St Peter-le-Bailey church and was re-named in 1974.



Bonn Square, one of the few areas of public space in the city centre

Plots and building line

Medieval plot boundaries; Building lines and gaps

Theme 20: medieval plots

- The zone is characterised by the widespread survival of the regular medieval and post-medieval tenement plots, with narrow, typically two- or three-bay frontages and deep plans. Holywell Street is the finest and most evocative example of this.
- In the west, however, plots have been amalgamated into much larger footprints in the nineteenth and especially the twentieth century, for retail use. Typically, these occupy most of the full depth of the plots, resulting in the loss of historic gardens and yards. Blank rear and flank elevations and servicing arrangements combine to degrade the quality of some of these back streets, such as Pembroke Street.
- Entertainment buildings such as the late nineteenth and early twentieth century New Theatre and Odeon Cinema on George Street also occupy larger urban plots.
- The predominant building line is back of pavement. This creates intimate streetscapes, with variety and interest provided by occasional forecourts and boundary walls, but buildings of larger scale, such as the Odeon Cinema, can appear oppressive.



Stone setts in George Street Mews reflect the past industrial character of this area, nearby the former canal basin

Pavements and street materials

Street materials

Theme 14: materials

- Street materials are mainly new and largely appropriate, though in Cornmarket Street and Queen Street they are suffering from heavy wear, and in some places suffering from poor quality patching up and mismatched repairs.
- Some historic fabric remains in the alleyways and streets off the principal streets, such as Bulwarks Lane, which has some well-preserved historic street materials, including limestone paving slabs, polished limestone blocks, black basalt and red granite setts.
- Where industrial surfaces have been retained, such as in Gloucester Place, stone setts in George Street Mews and iron kerb edging along Oriel Lane and Market Street, these contribute positively to the historic character of these areas by reflecting the past industrial uses of these areas.
- Important historic river cobbles remain in Merton Street but have suffered greatly from poor quality repairs and disruption due to the large amount of construction traffic and continual works undertaken by utility companies
- Several of the streets in the zone have long sections of characteristic granite sett gutters.

Street furniture

- The zone has relatively little street furniture owing to its characteristically narrow streets.
- There are some handsome examples of historic street lamps attached to buildings on Ship Street and St Michael's Street.
- Some historic cast iron manhole covers survive, bearing the names of local foundries. Examples include Eagle Ironworks in Beaumont Street and Dean & Co and Hutchins and Sons in Ship Street. These are of local historic interest.
- Other historic street furniture such as post boxes and telephone boxes (several of which are listed) contribute positively to the character of the zone.
- Surviving parish and boundary markers show historic parish divisions and contribute to the historic interest of the conservation area.

2.3.3 Green Space

Public access to green spaces

Theme 22: views in the conservation area

- There is limited green space within this zone owing to its narrow street pattern and dense development, therefore glimpses of trees and gardens are particularly important.
- The former churchyard at St Aldate's forms a small area of publicly accessible green space, while there is an area of paved public space by St Michael at the Northgate, softened by a mature lime tree and grassed area.
- Trees in Bonn Square are a welcome softening of the predominantly hard urban townscape.
- The green space surrounding the Oxford Union on the south side of St Michael Street is private but nonetheless important to the character of the street and the setting of the listed buildings.



St Aldates' churchyard provides a small area of public green space



Small cafe and seating space in the grounds of St Michael at the Northgate



The garden of Oxford Union Society provides an attractive setting for the listed buildings

2.3.4 Buildings

Designations

Theme 1: contrasts and complexity
Theme 14: materials
Theme 15: architectural details

Typology

Like most of the conservation area, this zone contains considerable architectural variety, but three building types are particularly characteristic:

- Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century town houses, often with timber frames – sometimes jettied – concealed behind painted render. This is demonstrated to memorable effect on Holywell Street and parts of the High Street.
- Large retail buildings such as those between east of Magdalen Street / Cornmarket Street / St Aldate's, built in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These go against the grain of earlier development by combining plots, building higher (up to five stories) and extending deeper. Some later examples consist of new construction behind retained historic façades.
- Medieval buildings which illustrate the origins of the zone. These are of particular significance as relatively few survive and many are listed. Examples include handsome houses in the Golden Cross yard and the reconstructed New Inn on the corner of Cornmarket Street and Ship Street. Medieval fabric can also survive behind later facades, important examples include the hall and cellars at 107 High Street (Tackley's Inn), the medieval vaulted cellars at the Town Hall, and the building housing the Elizabethan 'Painted Room' at 3 Cornmarket Street.
- Properties along Ship Street and St. Michaels Street incorporate sections of the medieval town wall bastions.

Details

- The majority of earlier historic buildings have rendered façades and timber sash windows. The coloured render, bay windows, jettied storeys, gabled dormers, doorcases, etc. forms a rich palette of recurring details. This creates the picturesque architectural and streetscape texture that is so much admired.
- Few early shopfronts remain, but the shop at the corner of Holywell Street and Mansfield Road is a rare surviving example in Oxford of an eighteenth-century shopfront. There are some good examples of traditional nineteenth- and early twentieth-century ground floor shops fronts in some of these streets.
- Nineteenth- and twentieth-century retail buildings are typically but not exclusively pale brick or Headington / Clipsham Stone ashlar, with timber sash or metal-framed windows such as Crittalls.
- The less successful modern insertions are generally those buildings whose scale, materials and details are insensitive to their historic surroundings.



Jettied town houses on Pembroke Street are characteristic of the medieval and commercial core

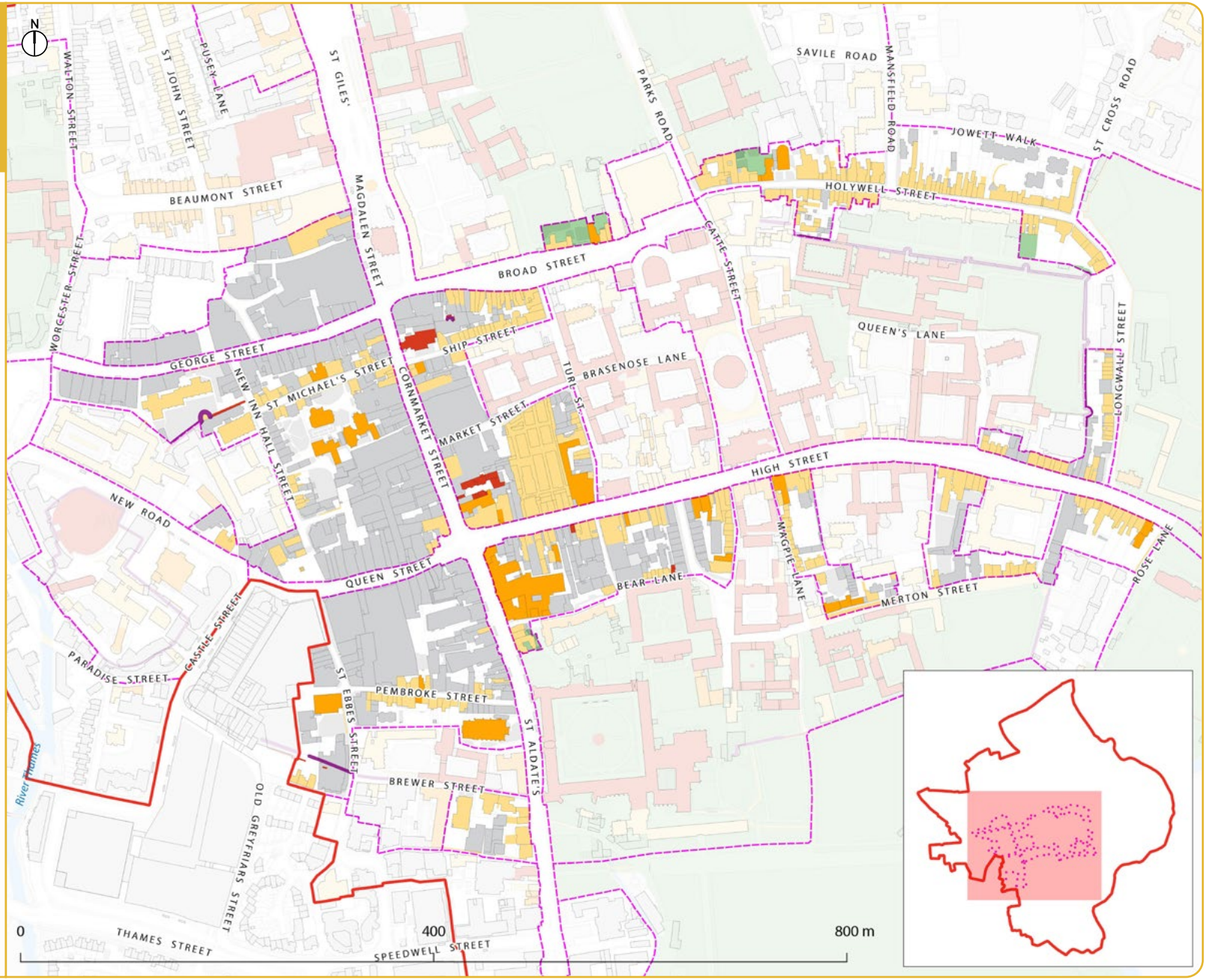
2.3.5 Positive contributors

Positive contributors

- The majority of the unlisted buildings that make a positive contribution to the zone's character are those which correspond to the typical building materials and modest scale of the medieval plot sizes.
- Many Victorian and twentieth-century buildings, for example on George Street, make a positive contribution as good examples of the evolution and styles of retail and commercial development. Other good examples of Victorian architecture can be found on King Edward Street and St. Aldates.
- Oxenford House (No.s 13-15 Magdalen Street) 1965, by Fitzroy Robinson & Partners has a simple and well ordered primary facade and contributes to the character and appearance of the zone as an excellent example of mid-20th century architecture.
- The post-box to the front of the post office on St. Aldates is an unusual item of street furniture, possibly dating from the 1920s and possibly unique in its design. It retains it's original signage and remains unaltered. It makes a positive contribution to the streetscape and represents a significant component of the communication process in the pre-digital age.

Designations
Medieval and Commercial Core

Key
- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- Grade I listed
- Grade II* listed
- Grade II listed
- Scheduled monument
- Registered parks and gardens



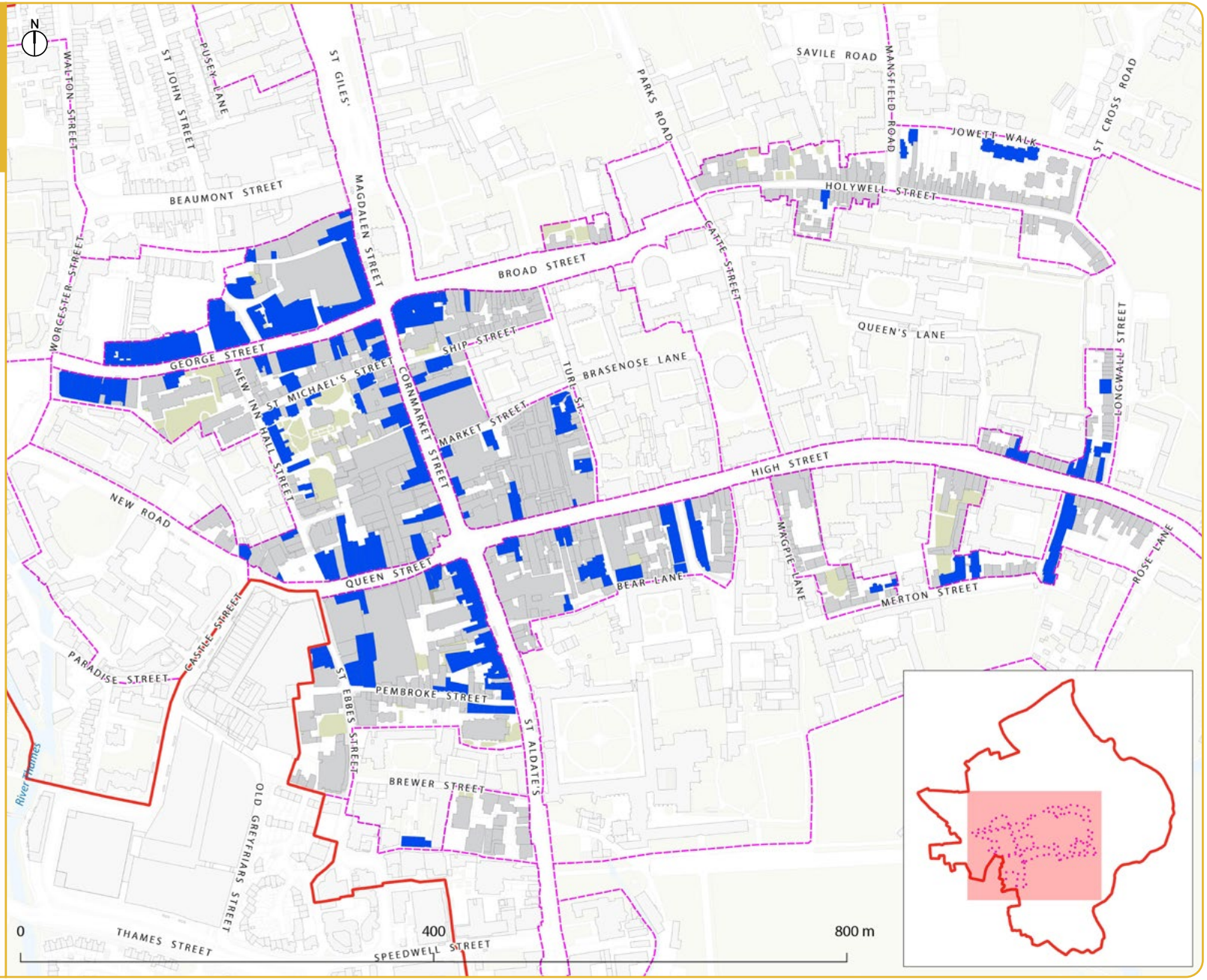
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Positive contributors

Medieval and Commercial Core

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- Positive contributor (non-designated)



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2.3.6 Roofscape

Roofscape

Theme 21: roofscape, skyline and landmarks

The roofscape of this zone reflects the two predominant building types: where post-medieval town houses survive, buildings are generally three to four storeys in height with lively pitched roofs and gables; where post-war retail redevelopment has taken place, buildings can be up to five storeys high and the roofscape frequently less interesting, with horizontal parapets and flat roofs.

Building heights

- Pre-Victorian buildings within the zone generally range between three and four storeys in height, though some are two plus occupied roofs.
- Victorian and twentieth-century retail developments in the west of the zone can be up to five storeys.
- Some of these taller, more recent, buildings are not in keeping with the overall character of their surroundings, such as those at the southern end of New Inn Hall Street.

Roofscape and skyline

- Lively roofscapes of pitched tiled roofs are characteristic of this zone, animated by the vertical accents of chimney stacks, which can be experienced from many high level viewpoints including those from the publicly accessible towers within the city centre.
- Where buildings have been re-fronted in the eighteenth century, pitched or gabled roofs can be concealed behind horizontal parapets. While these are often not visible from street level, they contribute to the lively roofscape in the many views across the conservation area from raised viewing areas such as St Michael at the Northgate, Carfax tower and St Mary's tower.
- Flat roofs on more recent development are not in keeping with the famously varied and energetic roofscape of the conservation area, whilst modern exposed rooftop plant equipment and metal flues are incongruous stark additions which detract from the materials and character of the roofscape.
- Within the zone, views of the skyline are limited because of the narrow and enclosed character of its streets.



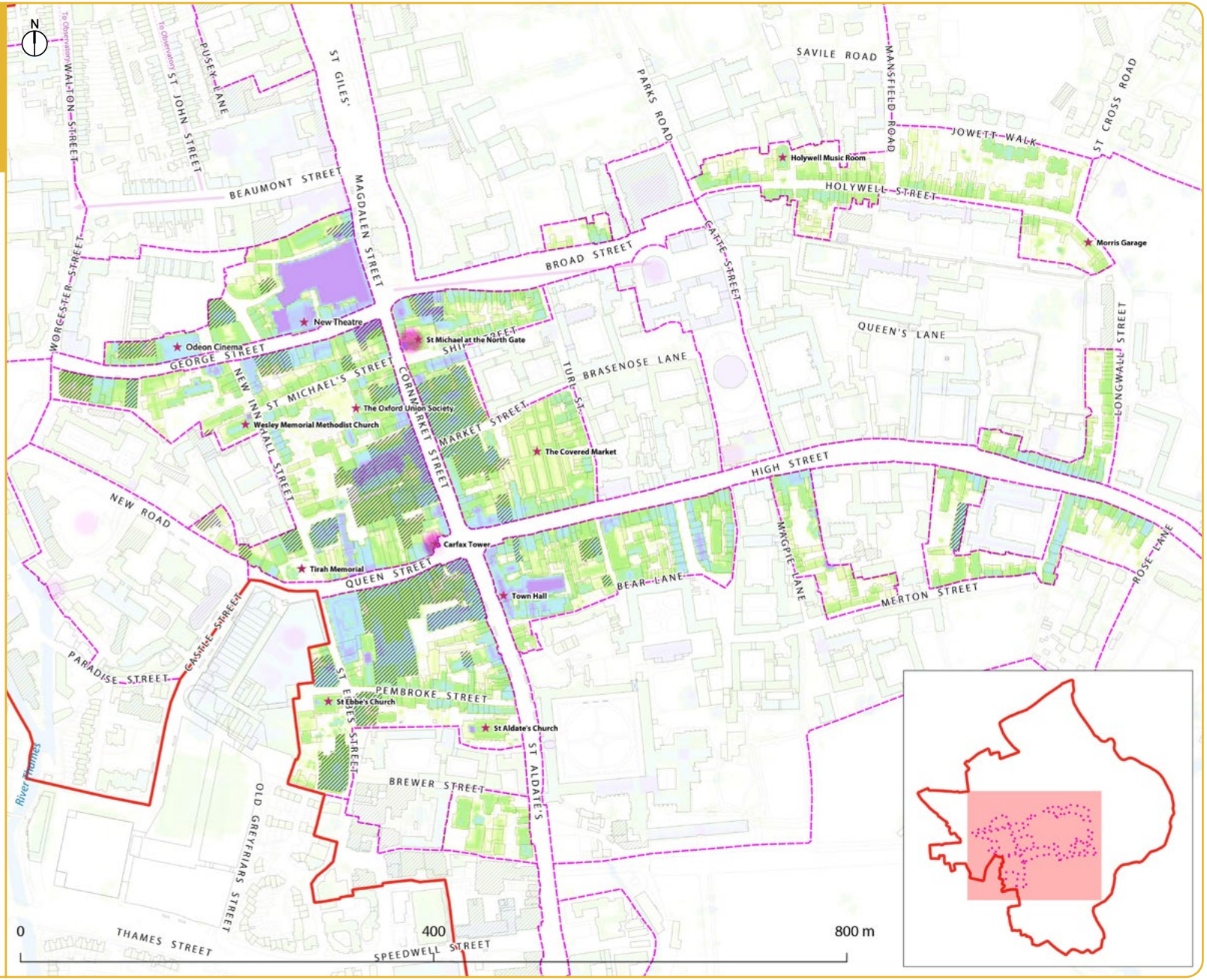
Holywell Street with modest building heights and a lively roofline



St Ebbe's Street, a post-war building occupying a larger-scale plot with a horizontal roofline

Roofscape

Medieval and Commercial Core



Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary

Building heights

- 0m
- 5m
- 10m
- 15m
- 20m
- Flat roofs
- Elevated panorama
- Designed public view
- Focal point
- Landmarks

Source: Building height data based on environment agency lidar DTM and DSM 2m

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2.3.7 Landmarks

Roofscape

Theme 21: roofscape, skyline and landmarks
Theme 22: views in the conservation area
Theme 27: setting of the conservation area

This zone contains many landmarks, some of them ancient, such as churches and sections of Oxford's medieval wall. These include two of the six publicly accessible elevated vantage points from which the city centre and its context can be studied and enjoyed.

Landmarks within the character zone

- Church of St Michael at the Northgate, Cornmarket Street.
- Carfax Tower, Carfax.
- Morris garage, Holywell Street.
- Holywell Music Room, Holywell Street.
- The Covered Market, Market Street.
- New Theatre, George Street.
- Odeon Cinema, George Street.
- Oxford Union Society, Frewin Court.
- Wesley Memorial Church, New Inn Hall Street.
- Tirah Memorial, Bonn Square.
- St Aldate's Church, Pembroke Street.
- St Ebbe's Church, Roger Bacon Lane.
- Oxford Town Hall, St Aldate's.

Landmarks outside the character zone

- Clarendon Building, Broad Street.
- Exeter College Chapel, Turl Street.
- Former All Saints Church (now Lincoln College library), Turl Street.
- Sheldonian Theatre, Broad Street.
- Tom Tower, Christ Church College, St Aldate's.
- University Church of St Mary the Virgin, High Street.
- Oxford Castle motte, Castle Mound.
- Oxford Prison (now a hotel), Oxford Castle.
- St George's Tower, Oxford Castle.

2.3.8 Views

Public viewing panoramas

This zone contains two of the elevated positions from which the public can view 360 degree panoramas of the city: the Saxon tower of St Michael at the Northgate and Carfax Tower. From these positions, the public can experience and appreciate the historical form and architectural character of central Oxford, and its relationship to its landscape setting, something that is otherwise difficult in a dense and largely flat city centre.

Glimpsed views

Glimpsed views include those of landmarks, for example, St Mary's spire glimpsed along Oriel Street; charming glimpses down alleys and side streets such as Magpie Lane and Kybald Street, and into colleges, such as the Turl Street colleges: Exeter, Jesus and Lincoln.

Vistas to focal points

Vistas to focal points include the long view westwards along St. Michael's Street which terminates in the slender tower of the Wesleyan Memorial Church on New Inn Hall Street.

2.3.9 Movement and activity

Theme 26: tranquillity

The zone includes the commercial core of Oxford where the activity levels are high. Since the zone is characterised by its narrow streets and alleyways, its activity is largely limited to that of pedestrians and cyclists.

Traffic

- Traffic within the zone is mostly limited to New Road, Castle Street and Longwall Street. Activity is moderate.

Cycling

- Cycling accounts for 25% of work journeys entirely within Oxford and is a major form of transport in the city centre. Because of the narrowness of some of the side streets and alleys, cyclists can be diverted onto the main vehicular routes.
- Cornmarket Street and Queen Street are closed to cycles during the daytime, restricting cycle routes across the city centre, and making secondary streets such as New Inn Hall Street much busier cycle routes.
- Ranks of parked cycles and e-scooters can clutter already narrow pavements, creating conflicts with pedestrians.

Pedestrian

- The commercial core of Oxford maintains high levels of pedestrian activity, and in some streets this is supported by full or partial pedestrianisation. Pavements can be crowded and at times, over-crowded, detracting from the experience of the town centre.
- Some buildings which were formally in retail use on secondary streets have been re-purposed as student accommodation, for example on Pembroke Street, reducing the vitality and footfall along these streets.
- Many of the historic houses on Holywell Street, Ship Street and Longwall Street are used as student accommodation by colleges, with no or very infrequent use of front doorways. This can also make these secondary streets quieter and more lifeless than they were historically.



The core streets such as Cornmarket Street have high levels of pedestrian activity and can become over-crowded



Historic houses on Longwall Street used as student accommodation with sealed front doors and lifeless frontages

2.3.10 Archaeology

Theme 12: archaeology

Oxford Archaeological Action Plan further detail and guidance

- This character zone comprises the bulk of the surviving tenement plots within the Late Saxon and medieval historic core.
- It includes the principal market frontages along the roads converging on the central crossroads at Carfax where property was most desirable for medieval merchants and traders, and also the side streets and alleys. These streets preserve building stock from the late-medieval period onwards, though the upstanding structures are mostly post-medieval or later in date. The tenement plots in this zone have the potential to preserve information related to domestic, commercial and low-level industrial activity dating back to the Late Saxon period as well as material culture associated with the development of academic halls from the thirteenth century through to the sixteenth century.
- Assets in this zone also include the sites of several medieval churches, parts of the Late Saxon and medieval town defences and castle bailey ditch, the site of the Crutched Friars, the site of the failed late-medieval St Mary's College and the surviving eighteenth-century Covered Market.
- Although there will be localised below-ground disturbance within this zone from cellars and other impacts the below-ground archaeological potential is assessed as high.



Surviving bastion of the medieval city wall, tucked in a courtyard behind shops on the south side of Broad Street



The eighteenth-century Covered Market on Market Street

2.4 Useful documents and further guidance

Refer to the following Historic Urban Character Assessments on the Oxford City Council website for detailed accounts of the character zone. The key plan shows their boundaries.

- HUCA 7 The Western Suburb: Castle Mill Stream and Fisher Row.
- HUCA 8 Thames Crossing and Floodplain: Thames Waterfront.
- HUCA 10 Thames Crossing and Floodplain: Colleges and University.
- HUCA 11 Thames Crossing and Floodplain: Westgate Centre.
- HUCA 13 Castle and Periphery: Nuffield College.
- HUCA 14 Castle and Periphery: Former Canal Basin.
- HUCA 15 City Centre and Commercial Core: Pembroke Street and St Aldate's.
- HUCA 16 City Centre and Commercial Core: Queen Street and Bonn Square.
- HUCA 17 City Centre and Commercial Core: New Inn Hall Street.
- HUCA 18 City Centre and Commercial Core: Cornmarket.
- HUCA 19 City Centre and Commercial Core: The High Street, Townhouses and Market.
- HUCA 20 Former Northern City Ditch: Broad Street.
- HUCA 21 Former Northern City Ditch: Broad Street.
- HUCA 22 Former Northern City Ditch: Holywell Street.
- HUCA 31 St Giles': Medieval Colleges.
- HUCA 32 The Eastern Colleges: Turl Street Colleges.
- HUCA 33 The Eastern Colleges: University Buildings.
- HUCA 34 The Eastern Colleges: South of the High Street.
- HUCA 36 The Eastern Colleges: Former Eastgate.
- HUCA 37 The Eastern Colleges: North of the High Street.
- HUCA 38 Holywell and Northeast Expansion: Mansfield Road.
- HUCA 39 Holywell and Northeast Expansion: Modern Colleges.

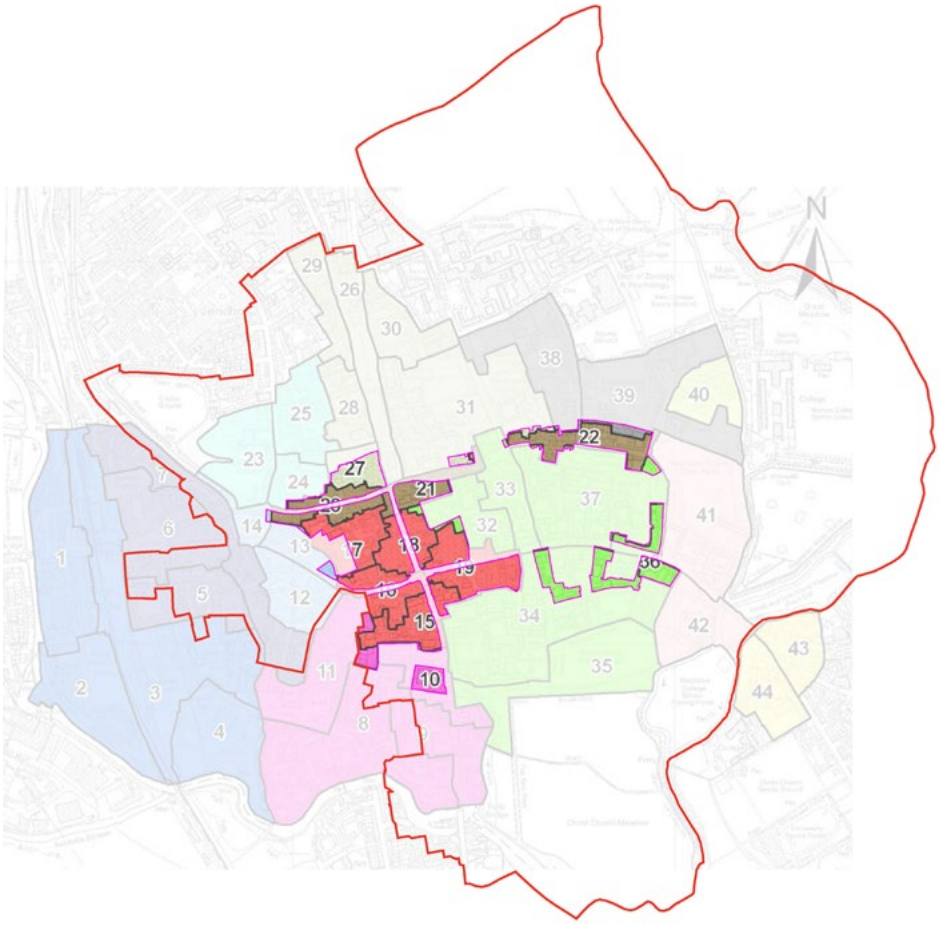
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Oxford Heritage Walks Book 1: On foot from Oxford Castle to St Giles', Malcolm Graham 2013

Oxford Heritage Walks Book 2: On foot from Broad Street, Malcolm Graham 2014

Oxford Heritage Walks Book 3: On foot from Catte Street to Parson's Pleasure, Malcolm Graham 2015

Oxford Heritage Walks Book 4: On foot from Paradise Street to Sheepwash, Malcolm Graham 2016



Character Zone Assessment 3

Oxford Castle

Oxford Central (City & University) **Conservation Area**

Zone includes:

- The Oxford Castle complex, including Castle Mound, St. George's Tower, County Hall and the former prison





Oxford Castle Character Zone
Oxford Central (City & University) Conservation Area

The Conservation Area Appraisal divides the Conservation Area into nine character zones. This chapter contains a detailed analysis of one of these: the Oxford Castle Character Zone. It can be used to understand the history, character and appearance of this part of the Conservation Area, and to inform planning application and development proposals.

This Conservation Area Appraisal aims to promote and support developments that are in keeping with, or enhance, the character of the Central (City & University) Conservation Area. This section is concerned with the reasons for designation, defining the qualities that make up its special interest, character and appearance. It is not possible to describe every facet of the area that contributes positively to its character. The omission of any reference to a particular building, feature, space or positive contributor should not be taken to imply that it is of no interest. Additional positive contributors will be identified through the development management process.

Contents

3.1	An overview of character and special interest
3.2	A brief history
3.3	An analysis of character (considering use, street and townscape, green space, buildings, roofscape, landmarks and views, movement and activity, archaeology)
3.4	Further useful information

Icons

Throughout, icons direct you to relevant sections of the Conservation Area Appraisal and links to other relevant documents.

- relevant layers of the conservation area map / GIS mapping
- relevant character themes in the appraisal
- relevant sections in the appraisal
- suggestions for further reading
- information relevant for planning
- sources of further information

Maps

The maps below are extracts from the Conservation Area mapping set, which consists of layers of useful information ranging from archaeology and historic maps to green space, listed buildings and street materials. Please note that maps may not show the full extent of listed buildings and do not show curtilage-listed structures. If you are unsure if your building is listed check the National Heritage List for England and seek the advice of the City Council's Urban Design and Heritage Team.

3.1 Overview of character and significance

This character zone comprises the judicial and defensive heart of the city. It contains exceptional structures that illustrate the Norman seizure and domination of Oxford and the austere character of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century penal system. It continues to be a centre of civic governance. The redevelopment of the Castle complex has opened this unique area to the public for the first time in centuries, rejuvenating this part of the city.

The following aspects of the zone contribute positively to the character and appearance of the conservation area:

- Oxford's Saxon, Norman and medieval past are discernible in the surviving structures in the Castle complex and in the surrounding street pattern.
- The domed green banks of the motte are a distinctive landmark which define this part of the city.
- Redevelopment of Oxford Castle has made the medieval castle, motte and former prison accessible to the public for the first time in centuries and has created the only significant new publicly accessible open space in Oxford's recent history.
- The area remains a hub of County administration, continuing its long association with judicial and administrative functions.
- The views from the Castle motte and St George's Tower were designed to command all of their surroundings and contribute greatly to its significance.
- The zone has a high level of archaeological interest and has yielded significant information about Oxford's Saxon, Norman and medieval past.

The principal aspects of the zone that harm character and appearance are:

- Large twentieth-century Council office buildings which are out of scale with their surroundings and lack active street frontages, reducing vitality.
- Buildings set back behind tarmac forecourts, used for parking, which detracts from their setting and the character of New Road.
- Parked vehicles adjacent to Justice Walk detract from the appearance as well as reducing the quality of the public realm and pedestrian permeability through the site.
- The accumulation of various types of advertisements which detract from the simple form and appearance of the Castle.

Opportunities for enhancement are:

- Measures to reduce or prevent parking within the Castle Quarter.
- Ensure consistent installation and management of signage, lighting and street furniture across the castle site which has an appropriate and cohesive appearance that does not detract from the simple form and appearance of the castle.
- Appropriate repairs to historic street materials where these are in poor condition and have been patched or otherwise repaired with inappropriate materials such as tarmac, for example granite sett gutters on Tidmarsh Lane.
- Improving awareness of the public open spaces available within the Castle Quarter, which are of great importance given the shortage of public spaces within the Conservation Area, but are currently under-utilised.
- Introducing lighting, of an appropriate form, to the Airing Yard in the Oxford Castle Quarter to encourage its use during the later opening hours of the associated businesses.

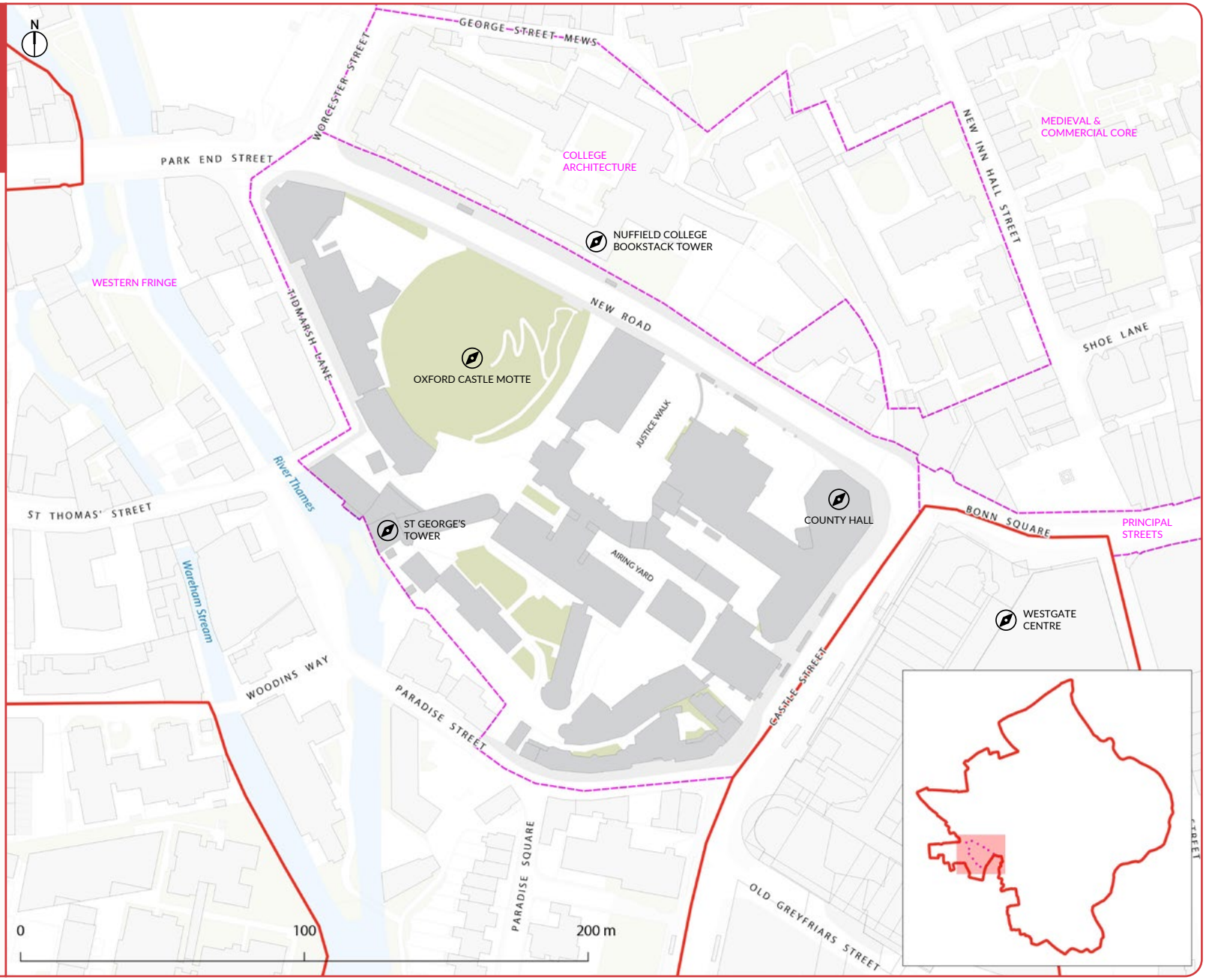


Redevelopment has opened the Castle complex to the public for the first time in centuries

Overview
Oxford Castle

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- NAME Neighbouring character zones
- Reference point



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3.2 History

3.2.1 Saxon origins and Norman Conquest

- The Norman overlord Robert d'Oilly built a motte and bailey castle over the west of the burh in 1071, to dominate and intimidate the Saxon population. This interrupted the Saxon street pattern at the west side of the city.
- The late-eleventh century St George's Tower is the only survivor of several towers set at intervals along the stone defensive wall of the Castle. It guarded the old west gate into the city.
- St George's Chapel by St George's Tower was founded in 1074 and survived into the eighteenth century, when it was demolished to make way for the prison. The Norman crypt survives, with a reconstructed stone vault, and has historic associations with the historian Geoffrey of Monmouth, who was a canon of St George in the twelfth century.
- The other surviving Norman structure is the motte, although the ten-sided stone tower which once surmounted it has gone. Set deep within the motte is a vaulted well chamber dating from the thirteenth century.
- The Castle continued to be used as a defensive structure; most notably, the Empress Matilda was besieged in the Castle in 1142.

3.2.2 Decay and demolition

- The Castle suffered badly during the Civil War, when Parliamentary forces pulled down most of the buildings.
- It was further mutilated in 1769-70 with the construction of the New Road to improve connections to the west of the city. This cut through the Castle's outer bailey and ramparts, although the motte was protected by Christ Church as 'a venerable monument of antiquity'.
- The remains of the outer bailey on the north side of New Road were obliterated with the construction of the Oxford canal basin in 1790 (now the site of Nuffield College).
- The Castle's ditches were gradually colonised with narrow tenement plots.

3.2.3 County administration

- The Castle became the focus for the growing judicial and administrative functions of the city in the nineteenth century.
- Continuing its historic use, it was the site of the county gaol, which was rebuilt in 1785-1805 to designs by William Blackburn and enlarged by H J Underwood in 1850-52.
- The Assize Court was added in 1839-41, designed by John Plowman in a heavy Neo-Norman style with crenellations and arrow slits.
- New offices for the County Council's education department were constructed at the south end of the site in 1912, designed by W A Daft in yellow brick with Bath stone quoins (now the Oxfordshire Register Office).
- Further Council offices were added in the post-war period: Macclesfield House to the south of the motte in 1969, designed by the County Architect Albert E Smith in pre-cast concrete and set back by Tidmarsh Lane (now the Oxford Centre for Innovation); and the County Council offices in 1974 on Castle Street, facing the Westgate Centre.

3.2.4 Closure of prison and redevelopment

- The closure of the prison in 1996 prompted a redevelopment of the Castle site, allowing public access for the first time in centuries.



Malmaison Hotel occupying the former Oxford Prison building

3.3 Character

3.3.1 Use and access

Historic urban characterisation

Theme 11: living
Theme 8: commerce and retail
Theme 9: civic administration

This zone maintains its important role as a hub of civic administration, but now is also a significant leisure and entertainment destination.

- This zone is the administrative core of the County Council, containing their main offices and the County Register Office.
- Following the redevelopment and conversion of the prison in 2006, the buildings and historic structures host a range of commercial and educational uses, including a museum, apartments, hotel and restaurants.
- There is also residential on the Castle site, built as part of the 2006 redevelopment.
- The Castle Quarter is now an important area of public realm and outdoor space, which is now an under-utilised yet key use of the site.



Following redevelopment, the Castle complex is now an important leisure and entertainment destination



The Castle motte is a distinctive feature in the streetscape and provides a welcome area of green space with panoramas over the city



The County Council offices continue the long history of civic administrative in this area

3.3.2 Streets and townscape

The Castle site preserves a palpable sense of being a distinct zone set apart from the rest of the city. Despite the truncation of the Castle bailey by the construction of the New Road, the outline of the former Castle precinct is still discernible in the curve of Paradise Street, skirting the southern boundary, while Bulwarks Lane to the north curves and winds along the line of the former northern bailey.

Topography

Topography

Theme 23: topography and geology

- There is a gentle incline towards the city centre from the west and south, rising from the river valleys.
- The man-made mound of the Castle motte stands out as an elevated area of higher ground with views across the city.

Street pattern

Building lines and gaps; Saxon and medieval streets; Medieval plot boundaries

Theme 18: street layout of the Saxon burh

- Remains of the medieval street pattern survive at Tidmarsh Lane and Paradise Street, which skirt the outer line of the Castle precinct.
- The New Road is an example of eighteenth-century town planning, reflected in its relative straightness and greater width compared to the majority of Oxford's streets.
- Re-aligned in the twentieth century, Castle Street is dominated by the looming bulk of the Council offices on the west side and the Westgate centre on the east side of the road.
- Within the Castle complex, routes across the site were significantly altered as part of its conversion to a public leisure site.

Public spaces

Theme 5: religion
Theme 19: public space

- The modern development of the Oxford Castle complex has created the only significant new publicly accessible open space in Oxford's recent history.
- All the spaces between the buildings in the Castle quarter are open to full public access 24 hours a day.
- The Castle motte is open to the public on payment of a small fee.

Plots and building line

Medieval plot boundaries; Building lines and gaps

Theme 20: medieval plots

- The Castle complex consists of buildings occupying large footprints and set back from the road (originally behind a high wall), limiting their bulk in the streetscape.
- Development around the south and east perimeter of the Castle complex is generally back of pavement, creating a more intimate streetscape.
- Some buildings are set back behind forecourts, now dominated by parking, which is unsightly and detracts from their setting.



The forecourt of the Oxford Centre for Innovation is dominated by parking and vehicle controls, which detracts from the character of New Road

Pavements and street materials

Street materials

Theme 14: materials

- Street materials along New Road and Castle Street are mainly new and largely appropriate.
- The Oxford Castle complex generally uses new but appropriate materials including sandstone flags and areas of resin-bonded gravel which have a softer appearance that compliments the stone buildings.
- Some historic fabric remains in the secondary streets, especially along Tidmarsh Lane, which has surviving granite sett gutters and driveways, and a long stretch of blue clay pavers on the pavements (associated with waterside and nineteenth century industrial areas around St Thomas's) which contributes positively to the historic character of this area.
- Paradise Street also retains its granite sett gutters, which add to the historic character of the conservation area, and may have some surviving older street materials under the later tarmac surface near Quaking Bridge. There is a small border of cobbles at the corner with Castle Street but this is in poor condition.



Blue clay pavers and granite sett gutters on Tidmarsh Lane

Street furniture

- Street furniture in this area is generally modern and of a variety of different designs, creating an overall lack of cohesion.
- The Castle Quarter contains a suite of modern public realm and wayfinding signage fixtures, in addition to individual business signage boards and Council wayfinding totems. For the most part, these are minimal and employ a limited palette of materials, which helps to ensure that they do not unduly detract from the simple, austere architecture of the site.
- Galvanised steel railings along Castle Street and New Road are utilitarian and do not enhance the character of the area.
- The main historic survivals in this area are the characteristic Oxford street name plates, either free standing or attached to buildings, which create a strong sense of place.

The former Assize Court retains its highly characterful entrance pedestals surmounted by iron fasces, now topped with lanterns of a sympathetic design, which add to the historic character of its forecourt.



Cobbles in relatively poor condition and modern paving on the corner of Paradise Street and Castle Street. The galvanised steel railings do not contribute positively to the character of the conservation area

3.3.3 Green Space

Public access to green spaces

Theme 19: public space
Theme 22: views in the conservation area
Theme 25: green space

- The motte at Oxford Castle provides a welcome area of green space for the public to enjoy, with a small fee for entry to the mound.
- The Castle complex provides some welcome areas to sit and linger away from the busy streets, with an area of lawn behind the former prison block and other areas of trees, shrubs and planting. However, these public spaces are under-utilised with car parking on Justice Walk and by the entrance along the Paradise Street contributing towards the false sense of these as private rather than public spaces.
- Street trees along New Road outside Nuffield College and the Oxford Centre for Innovation, complemented by the grassy banks of the Castle motte, create a pleasantly green streetscape, which is distinctive to this part of the city.
- The Castle Mill Stream is tucked away behind buildings on secondary streets, giving it a peaceful and secluded character, with pockets of trees and climbers overhanging the stream.



Area of lawn with deckchairs behind the former prison block



The grassy banks of the motte and mature street trees on New Road create a pleasantly green streetscape



St George's Gate development adjoining St George's Tower by the Castle Mill Stream, a successful recent addition to the conservation area

3.3.4 Buildings

Designations

Theme 1: contrasts and complexity
Theme 14: materials
Theme 15: architectural details

Typology

- Like most of the conservation area, this zone contains considerable architectural variety, but three types are particularly characteristic:
  - The Castle, a unique site due to its medieval fortifications, and also its scale, form and historic prison complex.
  - Smaller-scale development around the Castle periphery, which has a more 'town' character of small plots with a lively roofscape.
  - Twentieth-century development, most notably for County Council offices, which have large floorplates and starkly horizontal roof profiles.

Details

- The Castle buildings are predominantly built of limestone and have an austere and forbidding character reflecting their former defensive and judicial functions.
- New development on the Castle site has respected the integrity of the historic buildings and is sympathetic in scale and materials.
- Buildings around the periphery are more diverse, with materials including yellow and red brick and painted render.
- The post-war Council offices are characterised by exposed reinforced concrete frames and large sheet glazing.

Lighting

- The Airing Yard is the large open space surrounded by dominant and robust walls. Lighting this space would encourage it to be used during the later opening hours of the associated businesses. Simple and utilitarian lighting would complement the industrial starkness of the site while enabling this later use.
- Frivolous or residential Victorian-style lighting, including catenary lighting, would not be appropriate for this large and open area, even though the benefit of increasing the after-dark uses is acknowledged.

3.3.5 Positive contributors

Positive contributors

The core buildings in the Castle complex are listed. Unlisted buildings are largely confined to the periphery of the site. Those which are sympathetic to its historic character use appropriate materials and address the street successfully, contributing positively to the area's character and vitality.

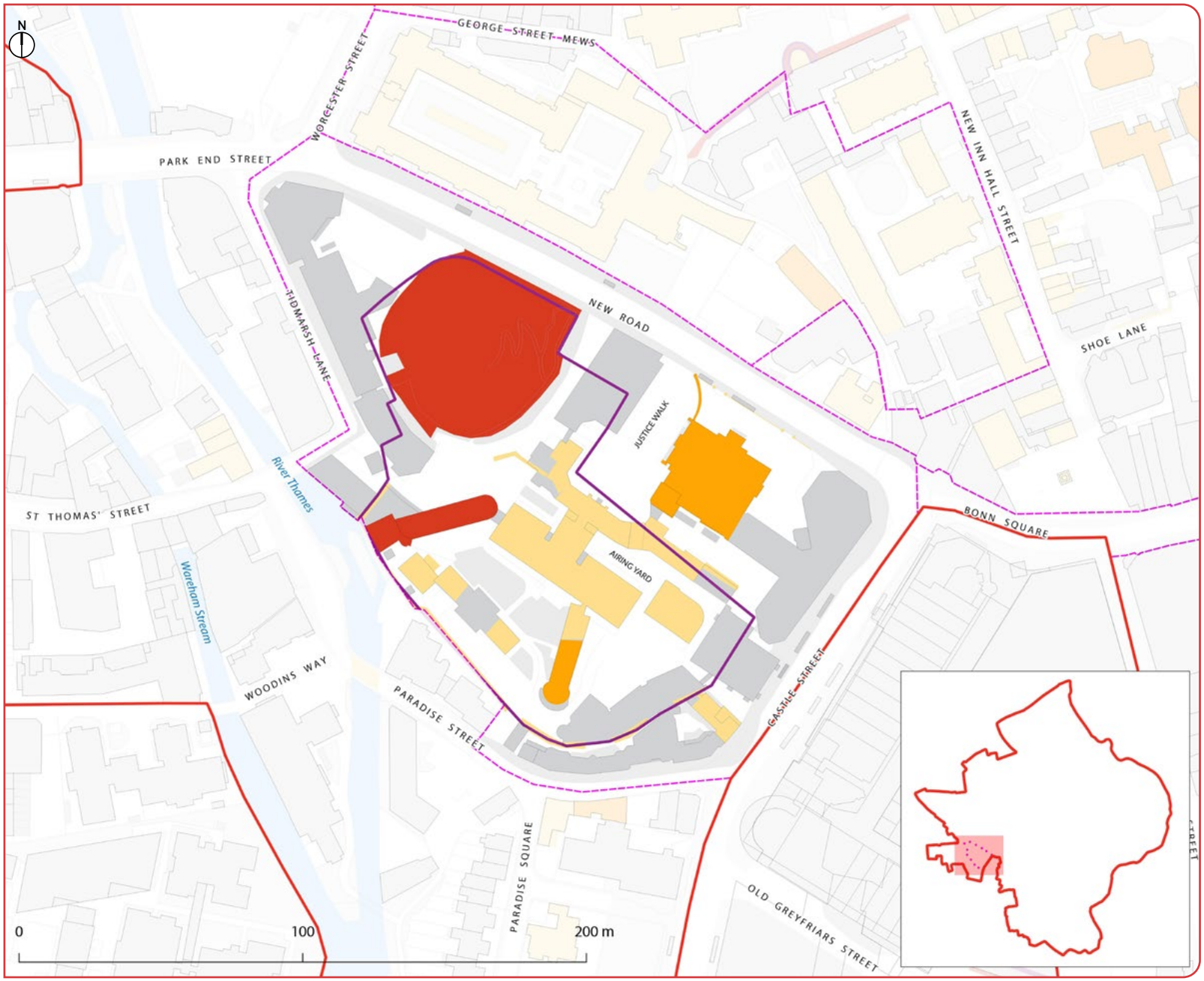
- The Register Office on New Road has a high degree of historic and architectural interest through its association with the area's development as a focus of civic administration and through its architecture, which complements the later Nuffield College on the opposite side of the road.
- The Quaking Bridge over Castle Mill Stream possesses historic interest as there has been a bridge in this location since at least the thirteenth century. The current structure is a good example of the a late Georgian iron bridge with elegant railings.
- Other positive contributors that have been identified within the character zone include sections of stone walling and areas of traditional surfacing materials which contribute positively to the appearance of the area.

The less successful modern insertions are generally those buildings whose scale and materials are insensitive to their historic surroundings, such as:

- County Hall, on the corner of New Road and Castle Street, is an unforgiving neighbour to the Castle and its motte and lacks an active street frontage.
- The Oxford Centre for Innovation (former Council offices) is set back from New Road behind an unsightly area of tarmac given over to parking, which detracts from the experience of pedestrians walking towards the city centre from the station, and provides an oversized and unfriendly elevation to Tidmarsh Lane.
- Where historic surfaces have survived or are reinstated they contribute positively to the character of the area, such as the blue clay pavers and granite setts on Tidmarsh Lane.

Designations
Oxford Castle

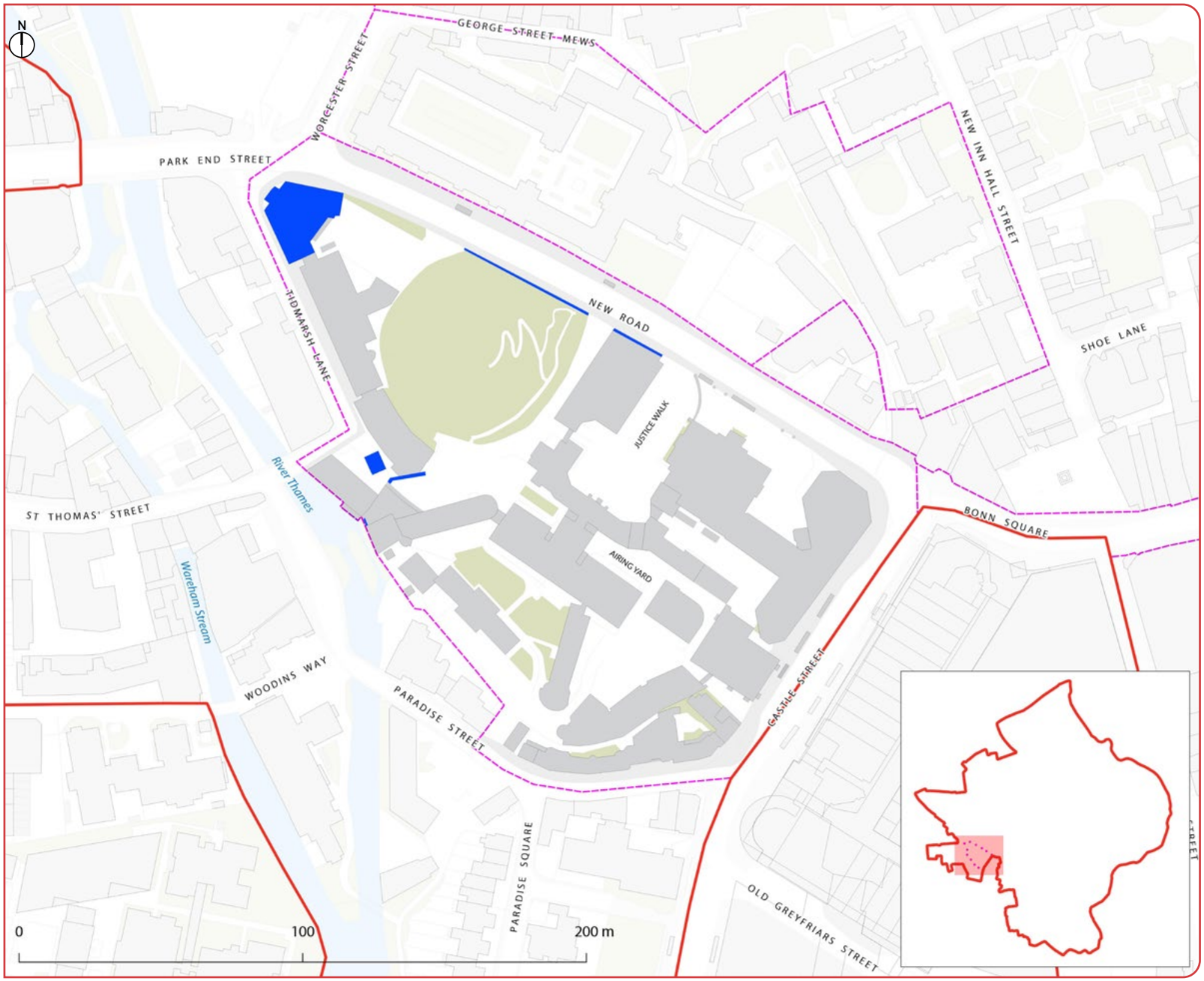
Key
- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- Grade I listed
- Grade II* listed
- Grade II listed
- Scheduled monument



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Positive contributors
Oxford Castle

Key
- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- Positive contributors (non-designated)



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3.3.6 Roofscape

Roofscape

Theme 21: roofscape, skyline and landmarks

The roofscape in this zone is notable for its horizontal emphasis, in contrast to the lively pitched roofs which are characteristic of the city centre. The skyline is dominated by the distinctive domed profile of the motte, which defines this part of the city.

Building heights

- Building heights are mostly three to four storeys, rising higher to the focal point of St George's Tower.
- The new County Hall on the west side of Castle Street rises to five storeys and is overly dominant because of its height and scale, exacerbated by the rising slope up New Road which makes it more prominent in views east.

Roofscape and skyline

- The Castle motte rises to 20 metres and create a distinctive skyline in this part of the city.
- The Castle complex is characterised by long stretches of predominantly horizontal rooflines, relived in places by crenellations and the gatehouse to the former prison building.
- This characteristic is continued and intensified by modern development such as County Hall, the Oxford Centre for Innovation, which have long stretches of starkly horizontal roof profiles that can be oppressive.



The Register Office on New Road has architectural interest and continues the history of civic administration in the area



The Castle Motte creates a distinctive part of the skyline. Crenellations add interest to the roofline of County Hall.

Roofscape
Oxford Castle



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3.3.7 Landmarks

Roofscape

Theme 21: roofscape, skyline and landmarks
Theme 22: views in the conservation area
Theme 27: setting of the conservation area

The monumental motte of Oxford Castle is the defining landmark in this zone, with a character quite unlike any other part of the city.

Landmarks within the character zone

- County Hall, New Road.
- Oxford Castle motte, Castle Mound.
- Oxford former Prison (now hotel), Oxford Castle.
- St George's Tower, Oxford Castle.

Landmarks outside the character zone

- Nuffield College bookstack tower, New Road

3.3.8 Views

Public viewing panoramas

- This zone contains two of the elevated positions from which the public can view 360-degree panoramas of the city: the motte of the Castle and St George's Tower (which was provided with a viewing platform behind the parapet as part of the redevelopment of the Castle complex in 2006). From these positions, the public can experience and appreciate the historical form and architectural character of central Oxford, and its relationship to its landscape setting, something that is otherwise difficult in a dense and largely flat city centre.

Designed views

- The views from the motte and St George's Tower of Oxford Castle were designed to command all of their surroundings, for the purposes of surveillance and defensive action. Therefore, maintaining these panoramas is essential to conserving the significance of the Castle.

Glimpsed views

- St George's Tower looms ominously over the Castle Mill Stream and appears in glimpsed views from the Castle complex and surrounding streets.
- Pedestrians can experience a variety of views moving through the quarter, as compressed passageways open out onto wider spaces.

3.3.9 Movement and activity

Theme 26: tranquillity

This zone has inconsistent levels of activity, busy along the main thoroughfare of New Road and around the Castle museum and motte, but far quieter in the remainder of the Castle complex and in the peripheral streets.

Traffic

- New Road, as one of the main approach roads from the west, is a key transport route for buses and taxis.

Cycling

- Cycling activity is moderate along the main roads and low on the secondary streets such as Tidmarsh Lane.

Pedestrian

- The Oxford Castle complex has an inconsistent level of activity; the Castle's museum attracts high numbers of visitors but this is not sustained in the areas surrounding the former prison.
- There is a steady stream of pedestrians moving along New Road either towards the station or the city centre.
- The pavements on the south side of Paradise Street are very narrow, forcing pedestrians to the opposite side of the street.

3.3.10 Archaeology

Theme 12: archaeology

Oxford Archaeological Action Plan further detail and guidance

- This character zone comprises parts of the Saxon burh and the Norman Castle. Notable archaeological assets within this zone include the buried remains of the late-Saxon town rampart and wall and contemporary street grids and buildings, the upstanding late-Saxon or Norman St George's Tower, the upstanding Norman motte and thirteenth-century well chamber, the remains of the Norman Collegiate church of St George at the Castle and St Budoc's Church, the buried remains of walls, gates, bridges, towers, defensive ditches and barbican belonging to the medieval castle, the site of the medieval Shire Hall and the upstanding remains of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century prison complex and associated burials.
- Excavations undertaken as part of the redevelopment of the Castle complex in 2003–05 revealed important information about Oxford's late Anglo-Saxon origins. Part of the late-Saxon town wall remains on public display.
- Archaeological works at the motte have revealed evidence of the construction of the mound and remains of the twelfth-century stone tower on its summit, with Civil War earthworks and later eighteenth- and nineteenth-century landscaping of the mound.
- The area has exceptional potential for further well-preserved archaeology including water-logged remains in the base of the motte and bailey ditch system and burials from the prison and the Collegiate Church of St George at the Castle. The below-ground archaeological potential of the zone is considered to be very high.

3.4 Useful documents and further guidance

Refer to the following Historic Urban Character Assessments on the Oxford City Council website for detailed accounts of the character zone. The key plan shows their boundaries.

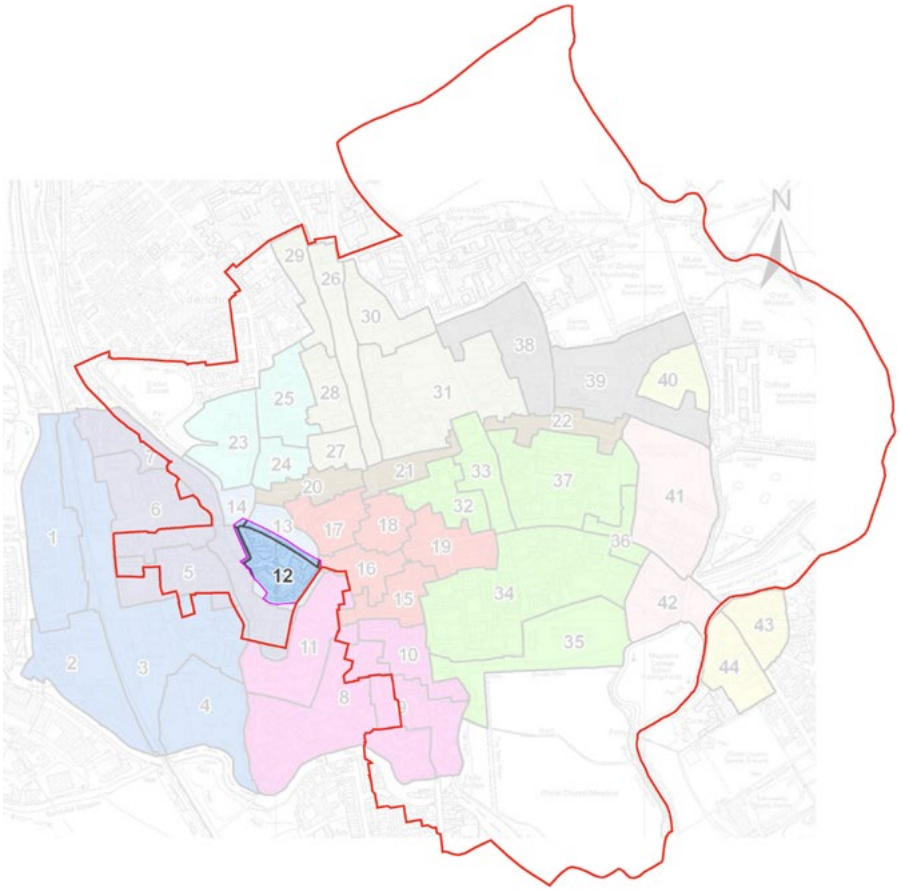
HUCA 12 Castle and Periphery: Oxford Castle.

Other useful documents include:

Oxford Heritage Walks Book 1: On foot from Oxford Castle to St Giles', Malcolm Graham 2013

Castle, Canal, College, Oxford Preservation Trust, Oxfordshire County Council and Nuffield College, 2007

Excavations at Oxford Castle 1999-2000, Mumby, Norton, Poore and Dodd, 2019



Character Zone Assessment 4

College Architecture

Oxford Central (City & University) **Conservation Area**

Zone includes:

- Early foundations within the medieval walls (Sub-zone 1)
- Early foundations outside the medieval walls (Sub-zone 2)
- Modern foundations from the mid nineteenth century onwards (Sub-zone 3)





College Architecture Character Zone
Oxford Central (City & University) Conservation Area

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Contents

4.1	An overview of character and special interest
4.2	Early foundations within the medieval walls (Sub-zone 1)
4.3	Early foundations outside the medieval walls (Sub-zone 2)
4.4	Modern foundations from the mid C19th onwards (Sub-zone 3)
4.5	Further useful information

Icons

Throughout, icons direct you to relevant sections of the Conservation Area Appraisal and links to other relevant documents.


relevant layers of the conservation area map / GIS mapping


relevant character themes in the appraisal


relevant sections in the appraisal


suggestions for further reading


information relevant for planning


sources of further information

Maps

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4.1 Overview of character and significance

The colleges contribute more to the exceptional architecture and world famous townscape of Oxford than any other single factor: through sheer extent, history and continuity of use, range and age of architecture, gardens and distinctive planning.

The vast majority of college are located within the Conservation Area: 34 in all, including all the historic foundations. Taken together they occupy approximately half of the developed land in the Conservation Area. Though inevitably their character varies, there is a consistency across a number of key characteristics which identify these groups of buildings as colleges. These consistent, recognisable identifying characteristics are:

- The arrangement or organisation of buildings - linear ranges set around quadrangles
- A defensive boundary that encloses private space
- Typical recognisable functions
- A common use of materials – a golden limestone typically cut as ashlar blocks
- Extensive, designed gardens including areas of lawn as well as parkland and meadow

Three broad sub-zones have been identified for the purposes of characterising the Conservation Area:

Sub-zone 1: Early Foundations within the medieval walls, which are densely planned and inward looking (building complexes with gardens)

Sub-zone 2: Early foundations outside the medieval walls, with much larger grounds and open aspect (buildings set in grounds)

Sub-zone 3: Modern foundations from the mid nineteenth-century onwards, inserted into the expanded city. Compact and often inward looking.

These zones are shown on the map on the following page.

Other aspects of the zone that contribute positively to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area include:

Townscape and architecture:

- A harmonious and picturesque balance of, on the one hand, commonality - materials, plan form, lawns and gardens – and, on the other, variety – age, style, scale, detail.
- A world famous roofscape and skyline, arguably the most acclaimed and recognised in the UK.

History:

- Exceptional academic and scientific advancement across eight centuries.
- Association with historically significant figures and acclaimed literature and art.

The principal aspects of the zone that harm character and appearance are:

- Restricted public access.
- Lifeless streets.
- Any development that conflicts with the established character described here.

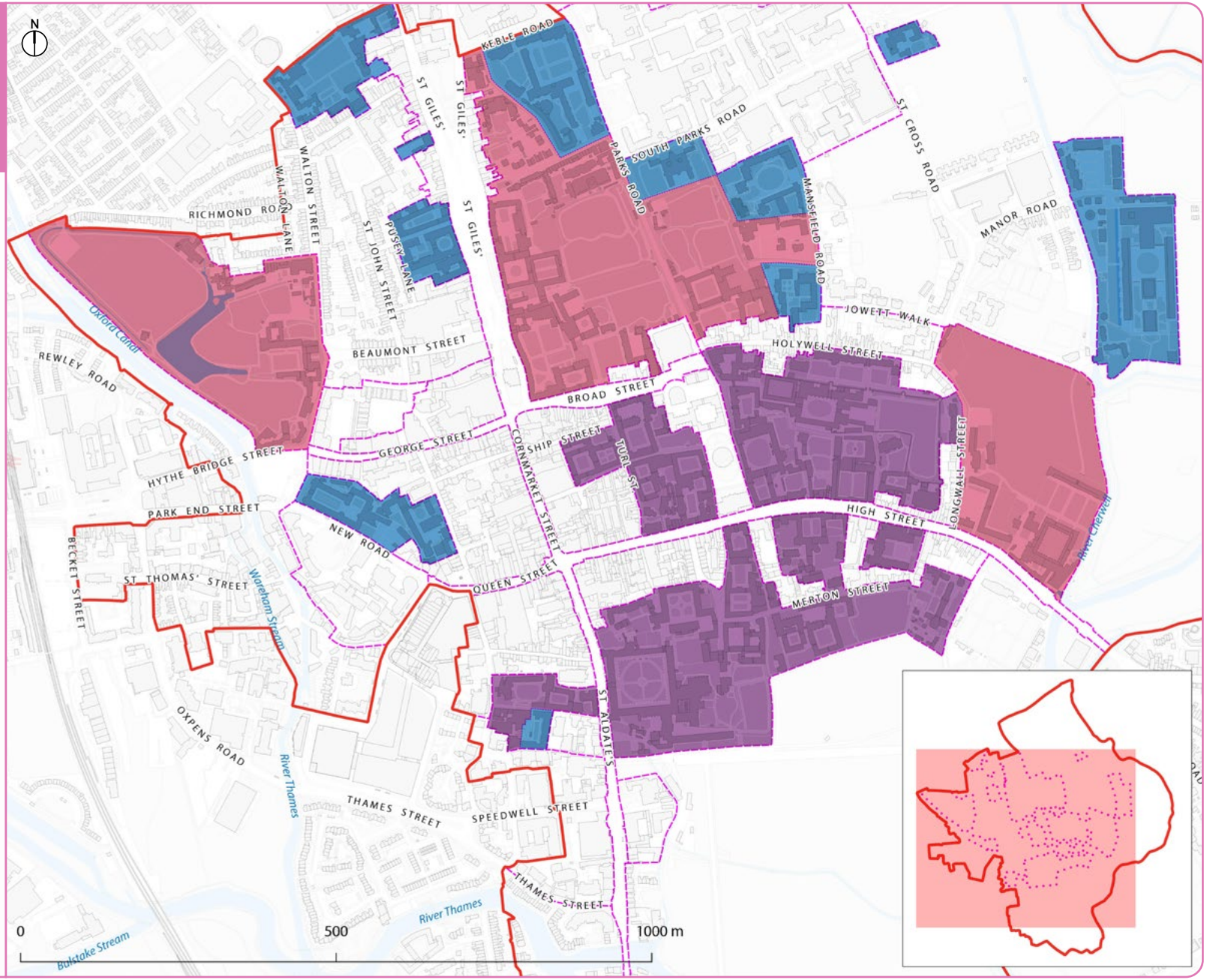


View of Brasenose College Old Quad, showing typical college architecture characteristics of a large urban block with defensive perimeter and tightly controlled access

Overview
College Architecture

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- Sub-zone 1: Early foundations within the medieval walls
- Sub-zone 2: Early foundations outside the medieval walls
- Sub-zone 3: Modern foundations from the mid nineteenth century onward



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4.2 Sub-zone 1: Early foundations within the medieval walls

4.2.1 History

Medieval defences
Survival of medieval plot outlines
Salters Plan
1879 Ordnance Survey map

Theme 2: university
Theme 5: religion
Theme 13: colleges and quadrangles
Theme 17: post-war architecture

Early history

- Colleges emerged as distinct places in the thirteenth century, gradually replacing the halls which had provided accommodation for students in the town.
- The earliest foundations still extant are University College, Merton College, and Balliol College, all founded in the thirteenth century. They differed from halls because they were endowed, often generously, giving them financial independence and enabling them to develop their sites.
- Colleges were academic communities intended to further the education of groups of scholars by providing them with accommodation, meals, libraries and seclusion for study. They also had a religious function in saying Masses for the souls of Founders and benefactors; therefore the chapel formed a core part of the medieval college and monasteries influenced the development of college form and architecture.

Development of the quadrangle

- Merton College's Mob Quad is the earliest complete example of an Oxford quad, developed piecemeal between c.1300-80 and gradually combining into a quadrangle around a central open space.
- The form was perfected at New College (founded 1379), where the Great Quadrangle was conceived as a coherent architectural whole: chapel and hall were arranged back-to-back on the north side of the quadrangle, with a library at first floor in the east range and a gate-tower containing the Warden's Lodgings forming a focal point over the entrance of the quad, with the remaining ranges providing bedrooms and study cubicles.
- This served as a model for collegiate architecture down to recent times.

Expansion

- The expulsion of the Jewish community in 1290 and the decline of the town following Black Death in the 1340s enabled colleges to buy up cheaper land in the east and south of the walled town, gradually colonising these areas between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries.
- Although there was a hiatus in college foundations between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, there was a significant phase of expansion and rebuilding in existing colleges during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries e.g. Oriel College quad (1637-42), Queen's College front quad (1710–19); Christ Church Tom Tower (1681) and Peckwater Quad (1707–14).
- In the nineteenth century, Victorian university reforms and increase in numbers of subjects offered led to a corresponding increase in undergraduates, with numbers doubling in a century. This prompted a significant phase of college building, such as at Exeter College (Broad Street range, Chapel and Rector's Lodgings, all by Scott, 1850s), New College Holywell Street buildings (Scott, 1872) and Brasenose New Quad (T G Jackson, 1889).
- Student numbers expanded again in the twentieth century, with many colleges adding post-war accommodation blocks.
- The desire to provide updated accommodation and new facilities has led to development such as Jesus College (Northgate House) and Lincoln (Berrow Foundation building).

4.2.2 Character overview

College character; Historic urban characterisation

Theme 13: colleges and quadrangles

Colleges founded within the walled medieval city are characterised by their compact plan and defensive perimeters.

They contain elements ranging in date from the thirteenth to the twenty-first centuries, exhibiting a corresponding range of architectural styles. Nevertheless, they share core characteristics:

- Occupy large plots, often entire urban blocks.
- Inward looking behind clearly defined boundaries more often formed of long building facades than high stone walls. This creates separation from the town but also other colleges.
- Imposing, institutional buildings with a distinctive architectural language, consistent but limited articulation. There is a principal range usually facing onto the street, but otherwise faces inwards.
- A clearly defined entrance marker, usually a gateway beneath a turret or tower (e.g. Christ Church, Merton, Jesus).
- Core functions of chapel, hall, and library set around a quadrangle, with secondary quads for accommodation clustered around staircases.
- A hierarchy of formal lawns, gardens and yards with degrees of restricted access.



New College Great Quadrangle, the model for subsequent collegiate architecture

4.2.3 Use and access

Public access to green spaces

Theme 2: University
Theme 5: religion
Theme 19: public space
Theme 11: living

- Colleges are educational and residential.
- All have a chapel with regular services which are open to the public.
- Most colleges offer some controlled public access at set times, including for events such as concerts and talks.
- A few colleges have longer opening hours but charge for entry (e.g. Christ Church, New College).
- Some offer summer courses, conferences and accommodation to let.



Clearly defined main entrance to Merton College, with gatehouse and turrets

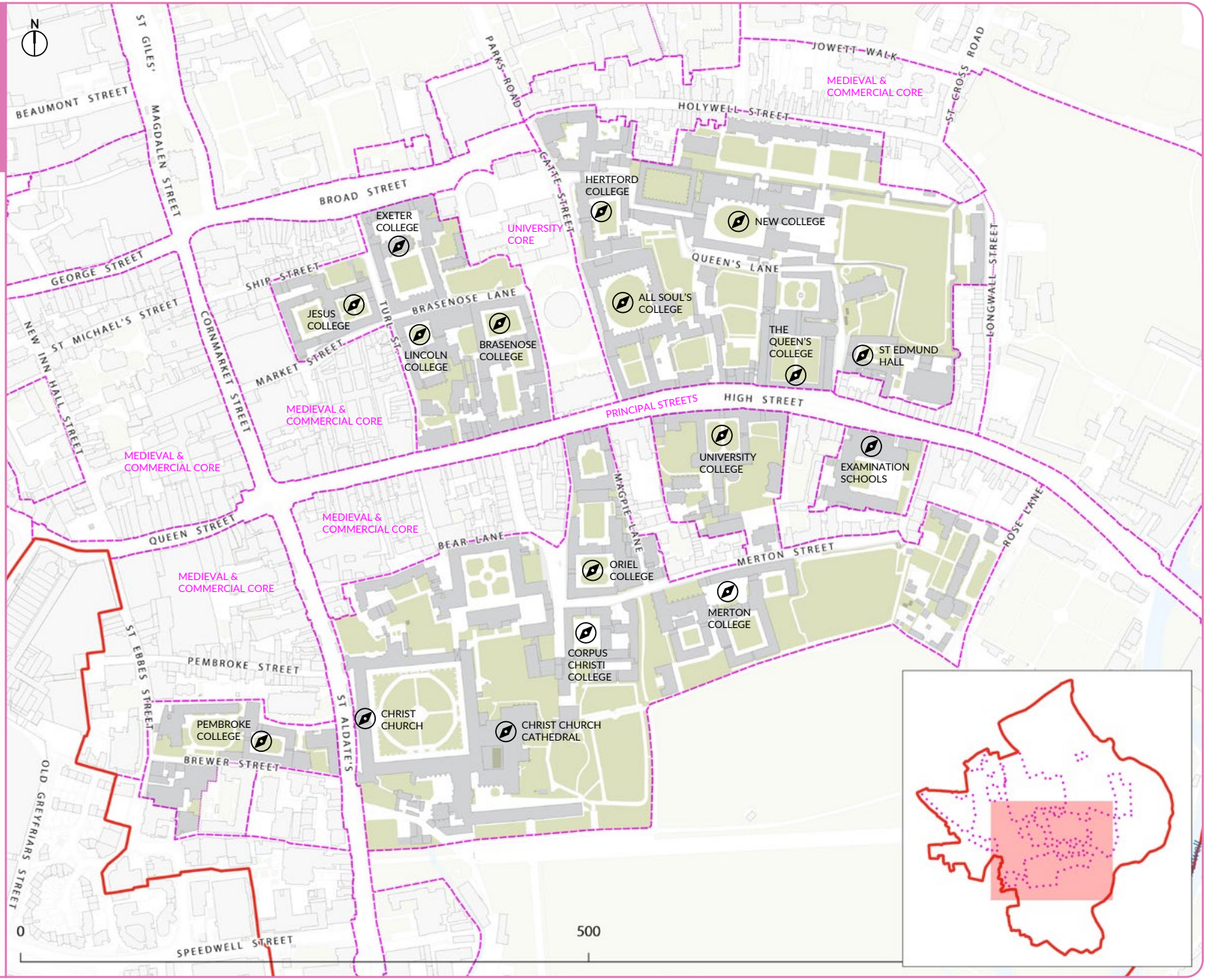
Overview

College Architecture

Sub-zone 1: Early foundations within the medieval walls

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- NAME Neighbouring character zones
- Reference point



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4.2.4 Streets and townscape

Saxon and medieval streets; Public access to green spaces

Theme 18: street layout of the Saxon burh
Theme 19: public space
Theme 20: medieval plots

Street pattern and public spaces

- Some of the most picturesque streets in the city centre are surviving medieval lanes flanked by college buildings or building ranges, such as New College Lane, Magpie Lane and Brasenose Lane. These are restricted to the passage of motor vehicles, enabling the preservation of their tranquil and historic character.
- There are lanes such as Beef Lane and Logic Lane that have been absorbed into college precincts as these have expanded, although Logic Lane is still a public through-route during daylight hours.
- The zone is characterised by the scarcity of public space, but college gardens supply green glimpses.



New College Lane, a historic street

Plots and buildings lines

Medieval plot boundaries; Building lines and gaps

Theme 6: land ownership
Theme 13: colleges and quadrangles
Theme 20: medieval plots

- Colleges established within the medieval town have mostly destroyed evidence of the narrow medieval tenement plots by merging them into much larger blocks.
- These blocks are characterised by long unbroken, defensive perimeters consisting of architecturally impressive building frontages, pierced occasionally by gatehouses and gateways and long runs of high wall, enclosing gardens and yard. Typically, they sit at the back edge of the pavement like the medieval tenements they replaced.
- Though the effect at street level can sometimes be lifeless and overpowering, mostly it adds a distinctive charm and texture derived from:
  - Architectural animation: gateways and tower, projecting bays, lively rooflines, the arrangement of windows, mouldings and many other details.
  - Variations in the building line: some colleges are set back c.1–2m, often behind cobbles or railings; some buildings disrupt the prevailing building line such as Merton College's former Warden's Lodging on Merton Street, which occupies a much larger, detached plot than its neighbours and is set back from the street, giving a sense of openness.
  - A glimpse of the spaces beyond the college, soften streets and create openings in the skyline such as the view from Merton's walls to the Meadows beyond.

Pavements and street materials

Street materials

Theme 14: materials

- A good survival of historic materials on lanes and squares by colleges contributes strongly to these atmospheric streetscapes, such as:
  - Brasenose Lane (retains the pattern of its medieval central gutter)
  - Cobbles along Merton Street.
  - Stone setts and cobbles in New College Lane and Logic Lane.
  - York stone paving, stone kerbs and stone setts with cobbles at west end of Pembroke Square and along Beef Lane (now absorbed into Pembroke's precincts).
  - A mixture of stone setts, cobbles and York stone paving in Oriel Square.
- Some sections are in poor condition. For example, uneven surfaces, missing cobbles and poor quality tarmac repairs in Merton Street detract from the appearance of this Grade II listed street.



The historic street surface of Merton Street is marred by missing cobbles and poor quality repairs

Street furniture

Many of the streets of this zone are narrow and have limited street furniture, but what does exist is often historic and an important contribution to the strong streetscape character:

- Handsome historic examples of wall-mounted street lanterns can be found on streets such as Merton Street and Brewer Street.
- Streets lamps are mostly of appropriate design and many are fixed to buildings, creating picturesque detail and reducing street-side clutter.
- Unsightly, excessive and out of date traffic control measures intrude into the historic character of some streetscapes, such as Oriel Square.



The character of Oriel Square is harmed by the unsightly traffic control measures

4.2.5 Green space

Public access to green spaces

Theme 25: green space

- The contradiction of Oxford city centre is that a large percentage of it consists of high quality green space, much of which is not freely accessible or only glimpsed in the occasional view. A high percentage of this is college lawns and gardens.
- These private spaces lend the value of their green to the streets and public spaces in glimpsed views and visible street canopies. In this way, college gardens play a vital role by supplying greenness, biodiversity, smells and sounds that soften the predominantly hard urban realm of the city centre.
- There are numerous examples, such as the Fellows' Garden at Exeter which creates a green backdrop to Radcliffe Square, the footpath to the meadows between Corpus Christi and Merton College, Christ Church's mature horse chestnut on St Aldate's and Queen's College's sycamore on the High Street, described by Thomas Sharp in *Oxford Replanned* (1948) as 'one of the most important in the world: without it this scene would suffer greatly'.
- Once inside a college, the gardens are very well tended, usually in the English garden tradition with herbaceous beds and green lawns and the atmosphere is green and tranquil. Changing traditions are enabling individual expression such as the naturalistic gardens at Corpus Christi.



Green glimpses of Exeter's Fellows' Garden from Radcliffe Square soften the streetscape

4.2.6 Buildings

Designations

Theme 13: colleges and quadrangles
Theme 14: materials
Theme 15: architectural details
Theme 17: postwar architecture

The architecture of the colleges is an exceptional grouping of internationally important quality, quantity and rarity.

Date

Most colleges are characterised by significant building phases from many different centuries. For example, at Christ Church:

- Sixteenth century — East, south and west ranges of Tom Quad
- Seventeenth century — North range of Tom Quad
- Eighteenth century — Peckwater Quad
- Nineteenth century — Meadow Buildings
- Twentieth century — Blue Boar Quad and Picture Gallery



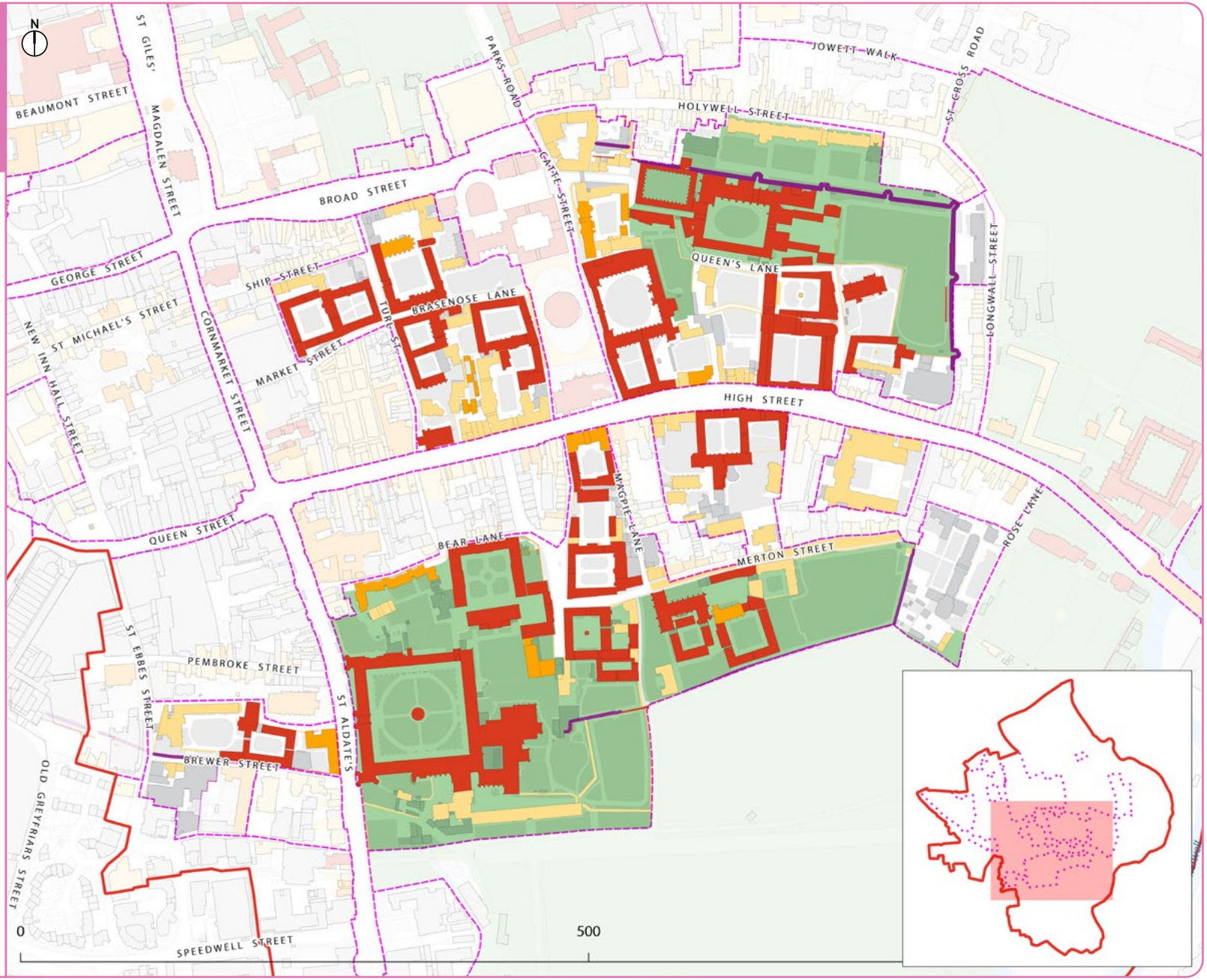
Christ Church contains buildings covering five centuries, including this Grade II* listed twentieth-century range along Blue Boar Lane

Designations
College Architecture

Sub-zone 1: Early foundations within the medieval walls

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- Grade I listed
- Grade II* listed
- Grade II listed
- Scheduled monument
- Registered parks and gardens



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The Quadrangle

- The medieval quadrangle has endured as the defining layout of college precincts. A principal quadrangle typically contains gateway, chapel, dining hall and library, plus accommodation for Fellows and students. Later quadrangles tend to be almost wholly residential. Each element is identifiable through its expressed architecture with many similarities between colleges:
  - the chapel has large (often Gothic) windows;
  - the hall is often similar but secondary to the chapel (for example at New College, where the hall and chapel are arranged back-to-back, but the hall windows are smaller);
  - the medieval library is on the first floor with small, regularly-spaced windows; and
  - the accommodation is characterised by the paired windows of 'sets', with a large study and small sleeping alcove.
- The different ways these elements are arranged around quadrangles gives each college its distinctive character.

Twentieth century

- Most colleges have at least one building or range erected since the First World War, to house the significant expansion in student numbers. Most were built on gardens and yards.
- Some colleges were sophisticated architectural patrons, who commissioned leading architects of the day. The best of these have been listed for their architectural interest, such as the Rhodes Buildings at Oriel College (1909–11 by Basil Champneys, Grade II*) and Staircases 16, 17 & 18 at Brasenose College (1961 by Powell and Moya, Grade II*).
- Twentieth century buildings may be an expression of the architectural style of the day or of technological innovation such as the use of structural concrete and the expressed structural frame. However they are frequently an expression of the architectural philosophy of the particular practice or architects and have been chosen by the college or its patron for that reason. A wide variety of architectural styles can be seen in buildings of this period. They tend to be the best examples of their type (collegiate architecture) both nationally and internationally and are given appropriate statutory recognition.

Twenty-first Century

- The use of particular architectural practices has continued into the twenty-first century work. Buildings of this period are usually the result of design competitions involving not only architects but also landscape architects, structural engineers and other team members. The environmental credentials of these buildings plays strongly in the mix both in terms of the building's performance but also the sourcing of materials and the methodologies employed. The demands for new buildings has been in order to update the existing facilities but also to provide new facilities for colleges as the student and fellow cohort demands. (Queens College–Library – Corpus– lecture theatre – Pembroke – new buildings). Designs have been highly inventive making optimum use of very small areas of land with increasing use of basement or semi-basement space.



Historic detail (e.g. pinnacles, oriel windows) and use of warm golden ashlar are defining characteristics of historic college buildings

Materials

- Warm golden ashlar limestone is one of the principal unifying elements of the college townscape. Most colleges were constructed of local oolitic Oxford stone (Wheatley or Headington) with Taynton dressings. By the mid-nineteenth century many buildings were suffering from severe decay and were re-faced in Bath or Clipsham stone (a Lincolnshire limestone).
- The palette expanded enormously in the twentieth century with non-local and newly developed materials, including Portland stone and concrete at Christ Church, exposed concrete frame and sheet glass at Corpus Christi (Magpie Lane block), copper roofing at Oriel College (Rhodes building extension) and buff brick at Queen's College (Carrodus Quad).
- The twenty-first century has seen a return to the use of more traditional materials now used in less conventional ways. For example, expensive stone, which was often used as a facing material, has now been hung on metal cladding frames. Sourcing materials has become more environmentally responsible and advances in materials technology has created greater efficiency in use and performance.

Details

- Historic detail (normally of functional origin) creates a joyfully rich texture, including pinnacles, gargoyles, oriels, etc.
- The best modern buildings are detailed just as carefully in order to create a similar aesthetic enjoyment. This includes the use of the expressed structural frame through the work of Powell and Moya in a number of colleges.
- Windows are hugely important to articulating and animating façades: mullioned (either original or nineteenth century recreations), timber sliding sashes (from c. 1700) and more recently sheet glass. The reflectivity of glass has a considerable impact on character and the setting of adjacent buildings.
- Sheet glass, where windows are a principal element of the building façade and the use of gaps between the buildings and building frames has become more common.

4.2.7 Positive contributors

Theme 14: materials
Theme 15: architectural details

- The majority of college buildings are listed, many at a high grade, reflecting their outstanding historic and architectural interest.
- Unlisted buildings that contribute to character typically use sympathetic materials and massing and have good detailing (e.g. New College Library (1939, Sir Hubert Worthington); the Berrow Foundation building at Lincoln College (2016, Stanton Williams)).
- Due to the constraints of their sites, most colleges within the medieval walled city have very limited space for new buildings. Some buildings are of lesser architectural interest, making an insignificant contribution to the street, the significant surroundings or simply fail to respect the value of the existing college buildings, (Pembroke College library – Martin 1974) abutting hard against east range of Old Quad.

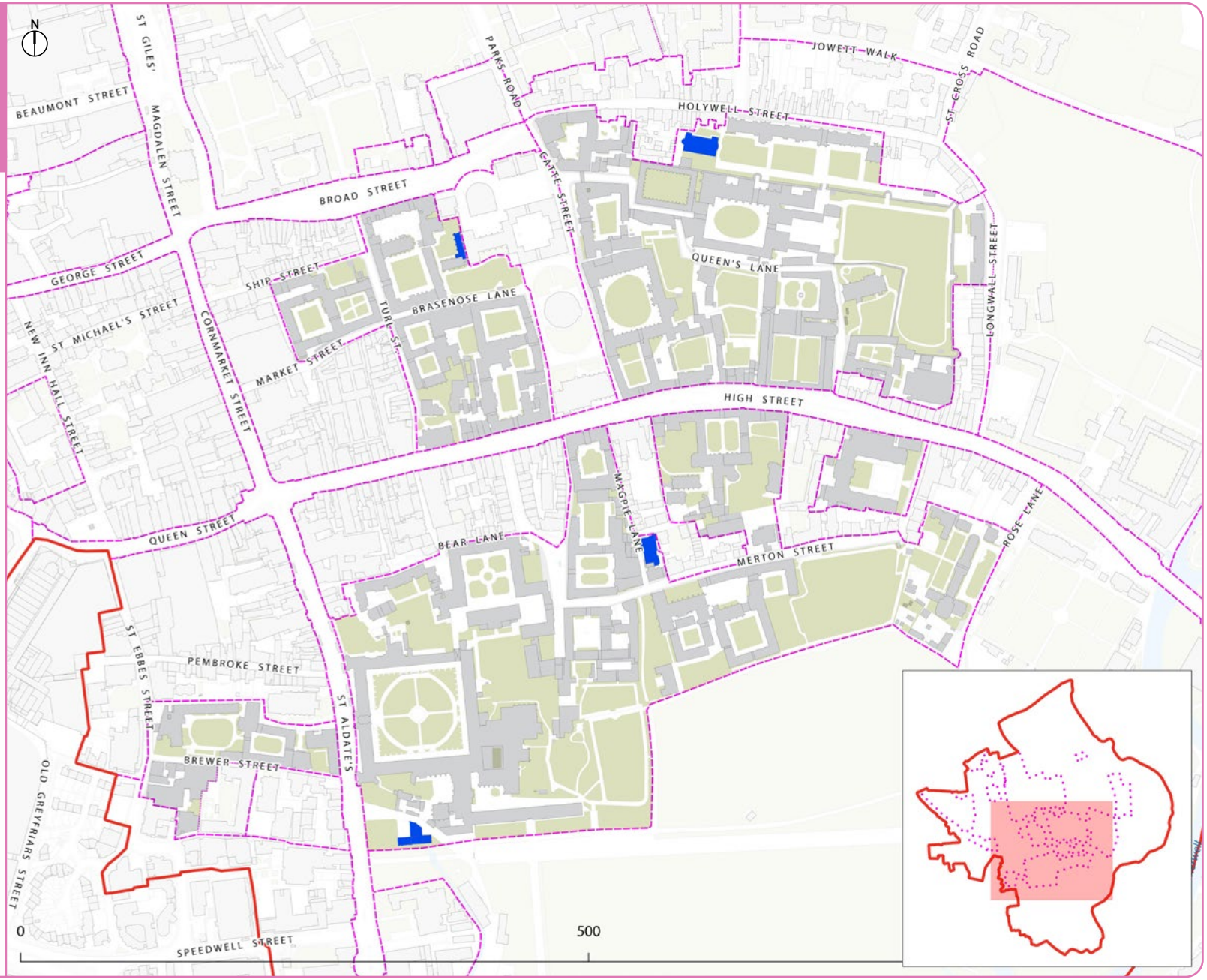
Positive contributors

College Architecture

Sub-zone 1: Early foundations within the medieval walls

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- Positive contributor (non-designated)



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Roofscape

College Architecture

Sub-zone 1: Early foundations within the medieval walls

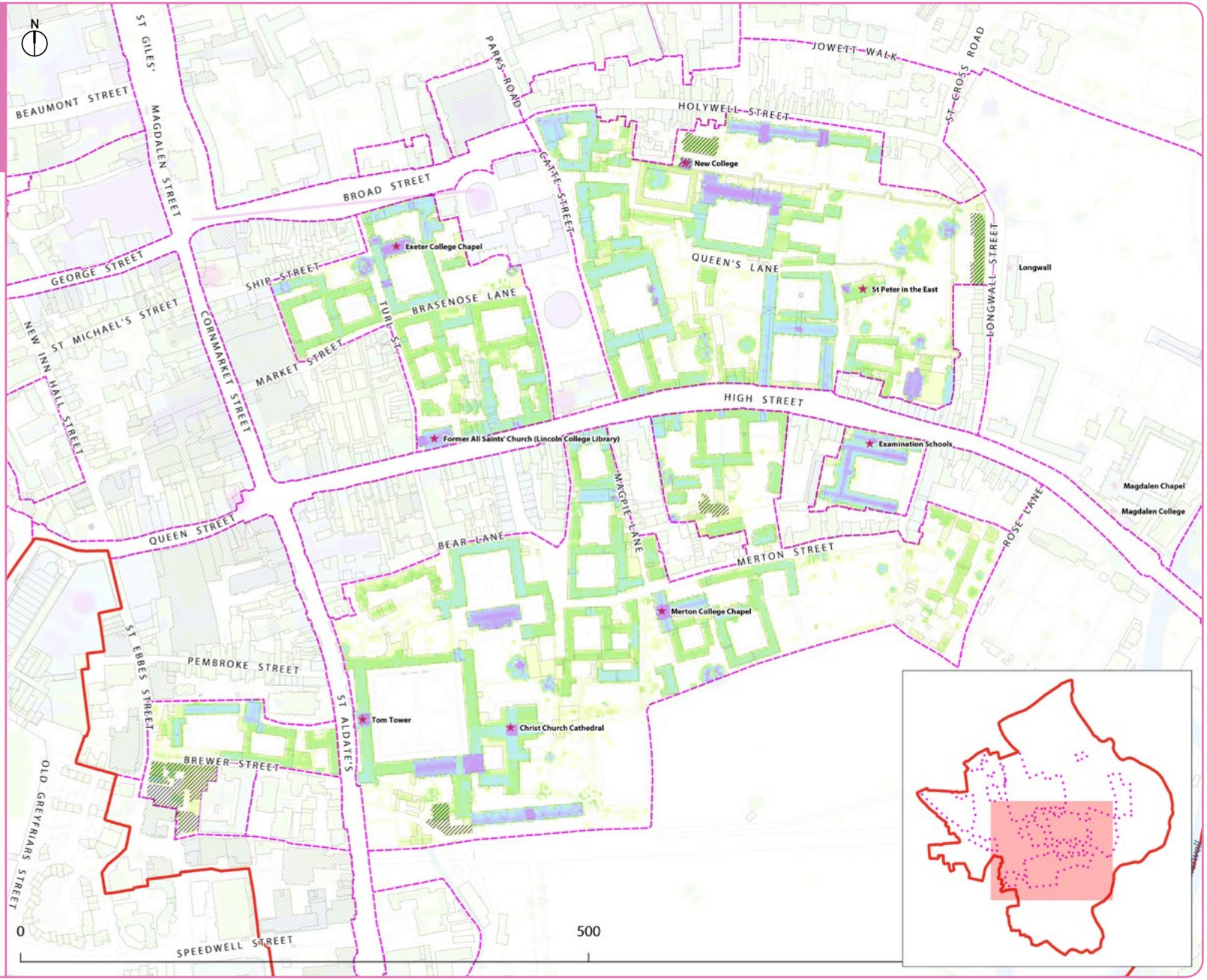
Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary

Building heights

- 0m
- 5m
- 10m
- 15m
- 20m
- Flat roofs
- Elevated panorama
- Designed public view
- Focal point
- Landmarks

Source: Building height data based on environment agency lidar DTM and DSM 2m



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4.2.8 Roofscape

Roofscape

Theme 21: roofscape, skyline and landmarks

Building heights

- College building heights are typically two to three storeys with dormers, punctuated by chapel towers (e.g. Merton) and gatehouses, which gives a focal point to the main elevation (e.g. Christ Church Tom Tower, New College gatehouse).
- Most medieval colleges buildings were raised a storey (e.g. New College Great Quadrangle) or had dormers added to increase the accommodation available. Lincoln's front quad is unusual in retaining its two storey medieval appearance.

Roofscape and skyline

- The roofscape of the colleges is one of the great glories of Oxford: the lively roofline punctuated with chimneys, gables and dormers and enlivened with crenellations.
- The spires and towers of the colleges are of great significance to the roofscape and skyline of Oxford, contributing greatly to its renowned and recognisable profile and rising above the collection of decorative finials, gables, dormers and parapets that adorn the college roofs .
- Roofs are generally pitched slate or tile, sometimes hidden behind crenellated parapets that reinforce the impression of defence.
- Some late medieval and sixteenth century buildings retain low pitch lead roofs behind parapets or balustrades e.g. Christ Church elevation to St Aldate's, Hertford College main elevation, Pembroke College chapel.



Unfolding views of Pembroke College, Brewer Street, with high boundary walls and glimpses of garden greenery



Christ Church Tom Tower is a defining landmark along St Aldate's

4.2.9 Views and landmarks

Roofscape
Landmarks
Views

Theme 21: roofscape, skyline and landmarks
Theme 22: views in the conservation area
Theme 27: setting of the conservation area

The colleges contain most of the fabled towers and steeples that are part of the identity of the city, and contribute so fundamentally to the skyline in long views from outside the city and close views within it.

Landmarks within the character zone

- All Saints Church (now Lincoln College library, Turl Street).
- Christ Church College Tom Tower, St Aldate's.
- Merton College Bell Tower, Merton Street.
- New College Chapel Tower, Holywell Street.
- Entrance to New College, Queens Lane.
- Exeter Chapel Spire and Fleche, Turl Street.

Landmarks outside the character zone

- Clarendon Building, Broad Street.
- Sheldonian Theatre, Broad Street.

Views

- **Unfolding views along streets:** such as New College Lane, that are characteristic of the distinctive medieval street patterns and the college quads. These combine long boundary walls and glimpses of garden greenery with dominant façades, often detailed with carving and with a gatehouse tower as a punctuation mark.
- The combination of formal college frontages with picturesque rendered townhouses creates the distinctive Oxford streetscape (e.g. along Holywell Street, the High Street and Oriel Square).
- **Glimpsed views:** Glimpsed views into the hidden world of colleges, through gateways and railings, and over walls. These are picturesque and illustrative of the two sides of the city centre: the public and the private.
- **Stop end views:** Views that are terminated by a landmark, such as Exeter Chapel Fleche at the east end of Ship Street, Lincoln Library at the south end of Turl Street and Tom Tower at the east end of Pembroke Square.



Exeter College fleche and All Souls College amongst the Oxford skyline (OCC)



New College Lane (OCC)

4.2.10 Movement and activity

Theme 26: tranquillity

Traffic

- The volume and nature of traffic can be harmful to the setting of several colleges in this zone. For example, Christ Church and Queen's College, because of the constant pressure of buses waiting at stops and queueing at traffic junctions.
- Conflict between traffic and pedestrians on some of the narrow streets leading from the High Street, for example Turl Street, where pavements are narrow and there is limited space for vehicles to pass.
- Parking inside colleges, such as New College or Corpus Christi, which can harm the character and appearance of colleges and the setting of their listed buildings, depending on the location and quantity of vehicles. This includes visible parking in the yards off the roads.

Cycling

- The main entrance to a college often attracts clusters of parked bicycles on the street – this gives the street an attractive sense of activity and is one of the characteristic sights of Oxford, but large numbers are an impediment to pedestrians on narrow pavements e.g. on Turl Street.
- disorganised cycle parking can also result in damage to historic building fabric when they are leaned against it.

Cultural activity

- Advertising boards for concerts, recitals and other events. These are iconic features outside colleges, but need careful management to ensure they do not negatively contribute to visual clutter.

Pedestrian

- Areas around the main entrance to a college tend to be busy with a regular footfall.
- Streets around the perimeter of colleges often lack activity because the buildings face inwards and there is limited footfall. This is particularly pronounced where townhouses have been absorbed into colleges and the front doors have been sealed up e.g. Holywell Street, Longwall Street and Pembroke Street.

4.2.11 Archaeology

Theme 12: archaeology

Oxford Archaeological Action Plan further detail and guidance

- The colleges occupy land that was once streets and town houses. This has both created an archaeological character of its own, and also to some degree preserved beneath gardens and paving remains of the earlier occupation of their sites. This land can remain undisturbed for centuries, preserving earlier urban deposits to an unusual degree.
- The below-ground archaeological potential of these areas to reveal evidence of the Saxon and medieval occupation that predated the colleges is considered to be very high. For example, a recent major excavation in the Provost's Garden at Queen's College uncovered a late-Saxon trackway and associated buildings. Elsewhere the well-preserved remains of fourteenth century town houses were identified below Peckwater Quad at Christ Church in 2003.
- Below ground remains including those of earlier college garden designs, structures and waste pits preserving artefactual and ecofactual evidence of college life are also of significant archaeological value.

4.3 Sub-zone 2: Early foundations outside the medieval walls

4.3.1 History

Medieval defences
Survival of medieval plot outlines
Salters Plan
1879 Ordnance Survey map

Theme 2: university
Theme 5: religion
Theme 13: colleges and quadrangles
Theme 17: postwar architecture

- Colleges outside the city walls tended to be monastic foundations set in extensive precincts, in contrast to those constrained within the bounds of the city walls. These include Gloucester College (c. 1283), Durham College (1286) and St Bernard's College (1437) that were re-founded following Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries as Worcester College (1714), Trinity College (1555) and St John's College (1555). Being situated outside the city walls gave these colleges a greater sense of seclusion from the town and allowed them to occupy larger sites with gardens and parks, often with symbolic meanings.
- There was a significant phase of expansion and rebuilding in extra-mural colleges during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries e.g. Wadham Front Quad (college founded 1610), St John's College Canterbury Quad (1631–36), Trinity College chapel (1691–94) and Garden Quad (1668–1728) and Worcester College hall, library and chapel (c. 1720–90).
- This continued in the Victorian period, as university reforms and an increase in the number of subjects studied led to a corresponding increase in undergraduates. Balliol College was substantially rebuilt in the nineteenth century including the chapel (Butterfield, 1856–57), the Broad Street range (Waterhouse, 1867–77) and Salvin's Buildings on St Giles (Salvin, 1852–53), while at Trinity College, the Front Quad and President's Lodgings (Jackson, 1883-87) were constructed.
- The generous sites that these colleges occupy have enabled more extensive on-site expansion in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries than colleges within the walls. For example, at St John's College, post-war buildings on the college site include: Dolphin Quad (Sir Edward Maufe, 1948); the Beehive Building (by Michael Powers of the Architects' Co-Partnership, 1958–60); Sir Thomas White building (Philip Dowson of Arup Associates, 1972–75); Garden Quadrangle (Sir Richard MacCormac of MacCormac, Jamieson and Prichard, 1991–94); Kendrew Quadrangle (Sir Richard MacCormac of MJP Architects, 2010); New Study Centre and Archive (Wright and Wright Architects, 2019).
- Worcester is unique in Oxford for its lack of nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings, but has also experienced a significant phase of post-war building on the college site including: Casson Building (Sir Hugh Casson, 1961); Wolfson Building (1971); Linbury Building (Maguire and Murray, 1991); Sainsbury Building (MacCormac, Jamieson and Prichard, 1983); Nash Building (2007); Sultan Nazrin Shah Centre (Niall McLaughlin Architects, 2017).



Views of Trinity College lawns provide a green backcloth to Parks Road

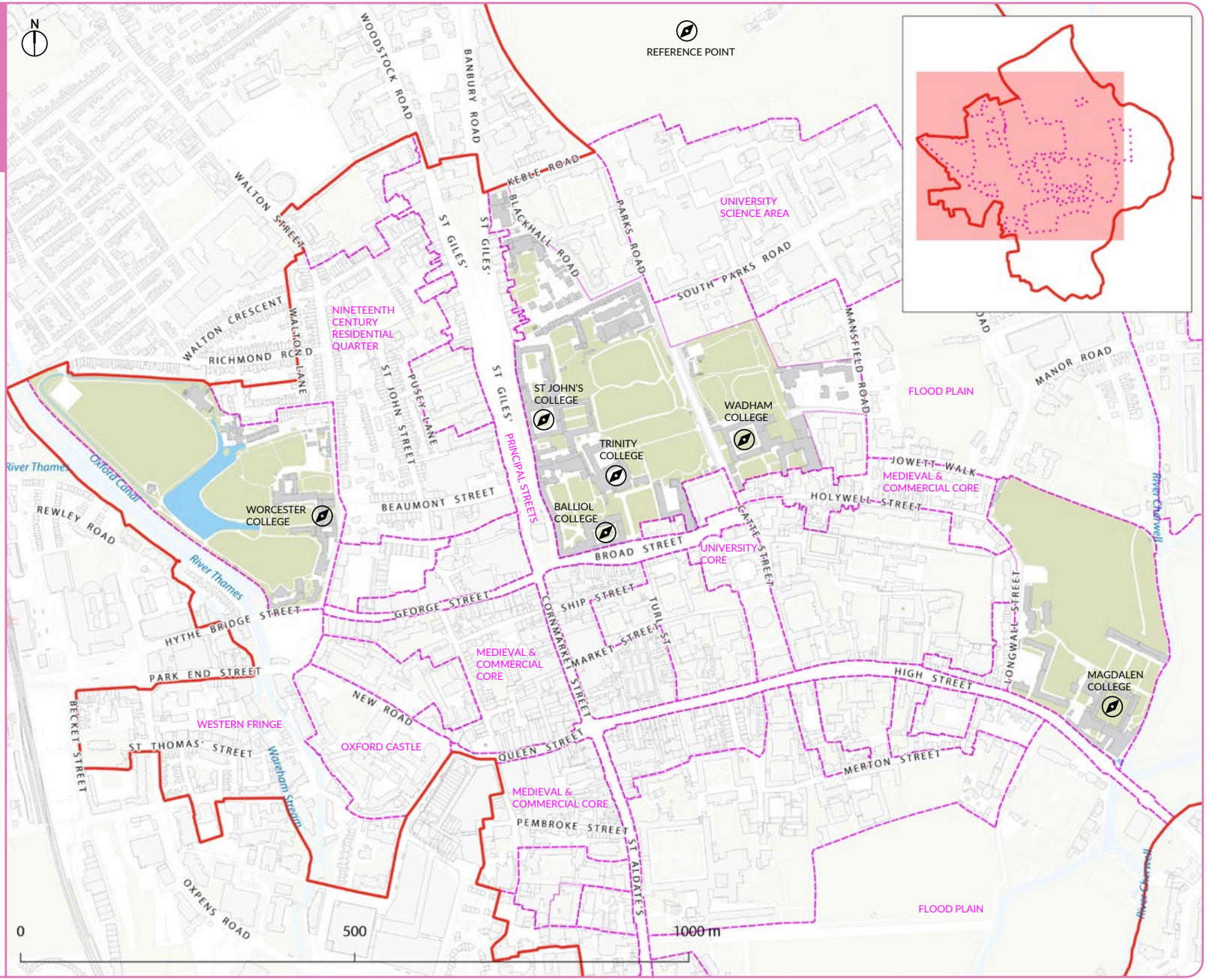
Overview

College Architecture

Sub-zone 2:
Early foundations outside the medieval walls

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- NAME: Neighbouring character zones
- Reference point



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4.3.2 Overview of character

College character; Historic urban characterisation

Theme 13: colleges and quadrangles

- Colleges founded outside the medieval walls ('extramural'), share many of the characteristics of the colleges within the walls, but occupy more extensive grounds with larger gardens and more open aspect (buildings set in grounds). Their sites are consequently less densely developed than colleges within the city walls. Key characteristics are:
  - An architectural set piece as the building entrance range (e.g. Worcester, Balliol, Wadham).
  - Imposing, institutional buildings with a formal principal frontage to the street, but otherwise facing inwards.
  - Clearly defined boundaries, often formed of high stone walls, with tightly controlled access.
  - Core functions set around an early front or main quad with later quads providing additional functions, such as libraries and accommodation based around staircases. More recent buildings may have a looser interpretation of this model.
  - Large plots, extensive gardens, with some lawn, extending to parkland and including specific planting such as orchards or woodland gardens. The simple green lawns are retained in the principal quad(s) with more extensive and elaborate gardens beyond.

4.3.3 Use and access

Public access to green spaces

Theme 2: university
Theme 5: religion
Theme 19: public space
Theme 11: living

- Colleges are educational and residential.
- All have a chapel with regular services which are open to the public.
- Most colleges offer some degree of access. Some on a daily or weekly basis, some with booked visits and some cultural events or celebrations.



The Sainsbury Building at Worcester College, which uses sympathetic massing and detailing in a modern idiom

4.3.4 Streets and townscape

Saxon and medieval streets; Public access to green spaces

Theme 18: street layout of the Saxon burh
Theme 19: public space
Theme 20: medieval plots

Street pattern and public spaces

- Colleges outside the walls address principal thoroughfares, offering a more generous setting than those within the walls. St Giles and Parks Road are wide streets and have mature street trees, creating an open and leafy streetscape. Parks Road is distinctive for its peaceful, green character, lined with college gardens with mature trees behind high stone walls. There are fewer small through-streets than in the town centre because of the extensive college grounds. Lamb and Flag Passage is a good example of a narrow lane outside the medieval walls.

Plots and building lines

- The larger plots offer the possibility of making a greater contribution to the presence of green streetscape through glimpsed views. Colleges are often set back from the street edge and fronted by lawns or planting behind low walls or railings e.g. Worcester, Magdalen or Wadham.
- Gardens are more easily perceived from the public realm thanks to large overhanging trees visible within areas of open space and giving a greater appreciation of open sky in views.
- The larger plots of the historic extramural colleges result in more open and green streetscape. Colleges are fronted by lawns or planting e.g. Worcester, Magdalen and Wadham. Trinity is unusual in the extent to which it is set back from the street in extensive lawns and gardens, with perimeter ironwork gates and railings instead of walls allowing generous views into the grounds from Broad Street and Parks Road, with a stop end view along Turl Street.
- Colleges have expanded in the twentieth century by colonizing adjoining domestic houses and plots, e.g. St John's on St Giles' and Wadham and New College on Holywell Street. This has had the effect in some locations of blurring the boundary between college and street.

Pavements and street materials

- Lamb and Flag passage is a notable surviving historic thoroughfare with a good survival of stone setts, York stone flags, and historic street lanterns.
- The majority of street surfaces and pavements in this zone are modern. There is a small stretch of York stone paving outside the entrances of St John's and stone setts to college driveways along St Giles and outside Worcester College lodge.

Street furniture

- There are tall and handsome streetlights along St Giles and Broad Street.
- There are historic street lanterns along Lamb and Flag passage, which reinforce its character as an earlier street pattern.
- Parks Road and Walton Street are lined with modern street lights, of less character.

4.3.5 Green space

Public access to green spaces

Theme 25: green space

- The distinct character of the historic extramural colleges comes from the amount of green space that surround the buildings and how the buildings are placed within that space. This brings a sense of space and leafy tranquillity to these areas. Magdalen and Worcester merge with the Cherwell and Isis flood plains respectively; St John's, Trinity and Wadham create an open and green backcloth to Broad Street and Parks Road.
- This green space makes an important contribution to views of buildings which can be seen across parkland or at the end of formal gardens, much as the "Country House" was seen, or in a woodland setting (the later buildings at St John's).
- These green spaces also bring biodiversity to the wider environment of the city, sounds (birdsong) movement and smells.

4.3.6 Buildings

Designations

Theme 13: colleges and quadrangles
Theme 14: materials
Theme 15: architectural details
Theme 17: postwar architecture

- The architecture of the colleges is an exceptional grouping of internationally important quality, quantity and rarity.

Date

- Most colleges are characterised by significant building phases from many different centuries. For example, at Magdalen College:
  - Fifteenth century — Chapel, cloister and bell tower
  - Sixteenth century — Third storey to cloister, east range fronting High Street
  - Seventeenth century — Kitchen Staircase, Grammar Hall
  - Eighteenth century — New Buildings
  - Nineteenth century — St Swithun's Quadrangle, President's Lodgings, High Street gate
  - Twentieth century — Longwall Quadrangle, Grove Buildings

The Quadrangle

- As with the intra-mural colleges, the medieval quadrangle has endured as the defining layout of college precincts. The different ways the traditional elements of the chapel, hall, library and accommodation are arranged around quadrangles gives each college its distinctive character.

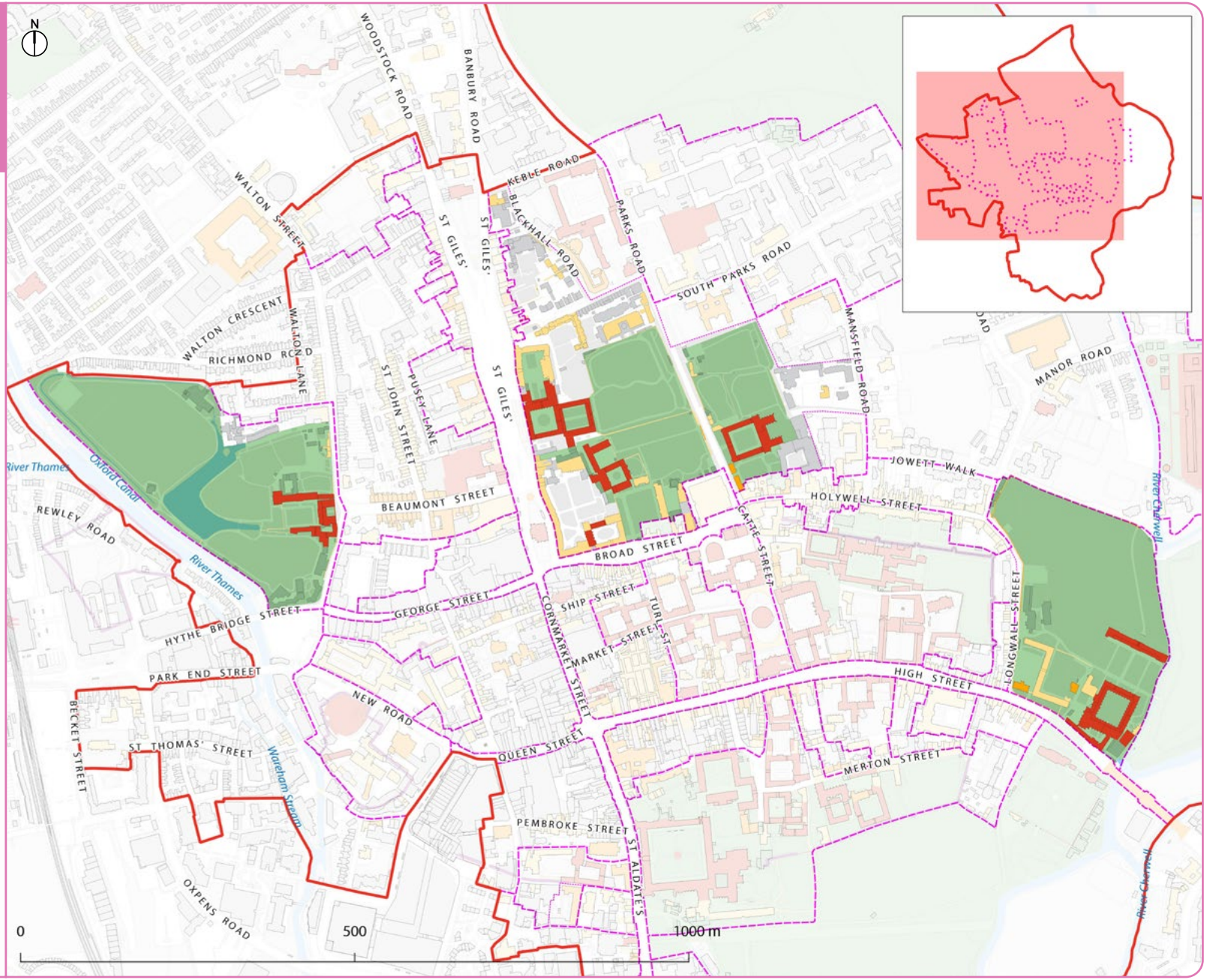
Designations

College Architecture

Sub-zone 2:
Early foundations outside the medieval walls

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- Grade I listed
- Grade II* listed
- Grade II listed
- Scheduled monument
- Registered parks and gardens



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Twentieth century

- Most colleges have at least one building or range erected since the First World War, to house the significant expansion in student numbers. Most have been built on gardens and yards.
- Some colleges were sophisticated architectural patrons, who commissioned leading architects of the day, such as Powell and Moya, Maguire and Murray, MacCormac Jamieson and Prichard and Architects Co Partnership. Each of whom developed their own identifiable approach to the, 'student room.'
- The best of these have been listed for their architectural interest, such as the Beehive Building (1958–60 by Michael Powers of the Architects' Co-Partnership, Grade II) and Sir Thomas White building (1972–75 by Philip Dowson of Arup Associates, Grade II) at St John's College and Dolphin Gate (Sir Hubert Worthington, 1948) at Trinity College.
- Twentieth-century buildings are as stylistically varied as the rest of the college corpus: neo-Georgian, Modern Movement, Brutalism, Post-Modernism, etc.

Twenty-first century

- The use of particular architectural practices has continued into the twenty-first century work. Buildings of this period are usually the result of design competitions involving not only architects but also landscape architects, structural engineers and other team members. The environmental credentials of these buildings plays strongly in the mix both in terms of the building's performance but also the sourcing of materials and the methodologies employed. The demands for new buildings has been in order to update the existing facilities but also to provide new facilities for colleges as the student and fellow cohort demands.

Materials

- Warm golden ashlar limestone is one of the principal unifying elements of the college townscape. Most colleges were constructed of local oolitic Oxford stone (Wheatley or Headington) with Taynton dressings. By the mid-nineteenth century many buildings were suffering from severe decay and were re-faced in Bath or Clipsham stone (a Lincolnshire limestone).
- The palette expanded enormously in the twentieth century with non-local and newly developed materials, including light brown brick, yellow brick and painted stucco at Worcester College and exposed reinforced concrete frame, sheet glass (Sir Thomas White building), and timber cladding (Kendrew Quad) at St John's.

Details

- Historic detail (normally of functional origin) creates a joyfully rich texture: pinnacles, gargoyles, oriels, etc.
- The best modern buildings are detailed in a different way, but with just as much care.
- Windows are hugely important to articulating and animating façades: mullioned (either original or nineteenth century recreations), timber sliding sashes (from c. 1700) and more recently sheet glass. The reflectivity of glass has a considerable impact on character and the setting of adjacent buildings.

4.3.7 Positive contributors

Theme 14: materials
Theme 15: architectural details
Theme 17: postwar architecture

- The majority of college buildings are listed, many at a high grade, reflecting their outstanding historic and architectural interest.
- Unlisted buildings that contribute to character typically use sympathetic materials and massing and have good detailing e.g. the Sainsbury Building at Worcester College (1983, MacCormac, Jamieson and Prichard); Grove Buildings at Magdalen College (1999, Porphyrios Associates); the Garden Quad at St John's College (1991–94, MacCormac, Jamieson and Prichard).

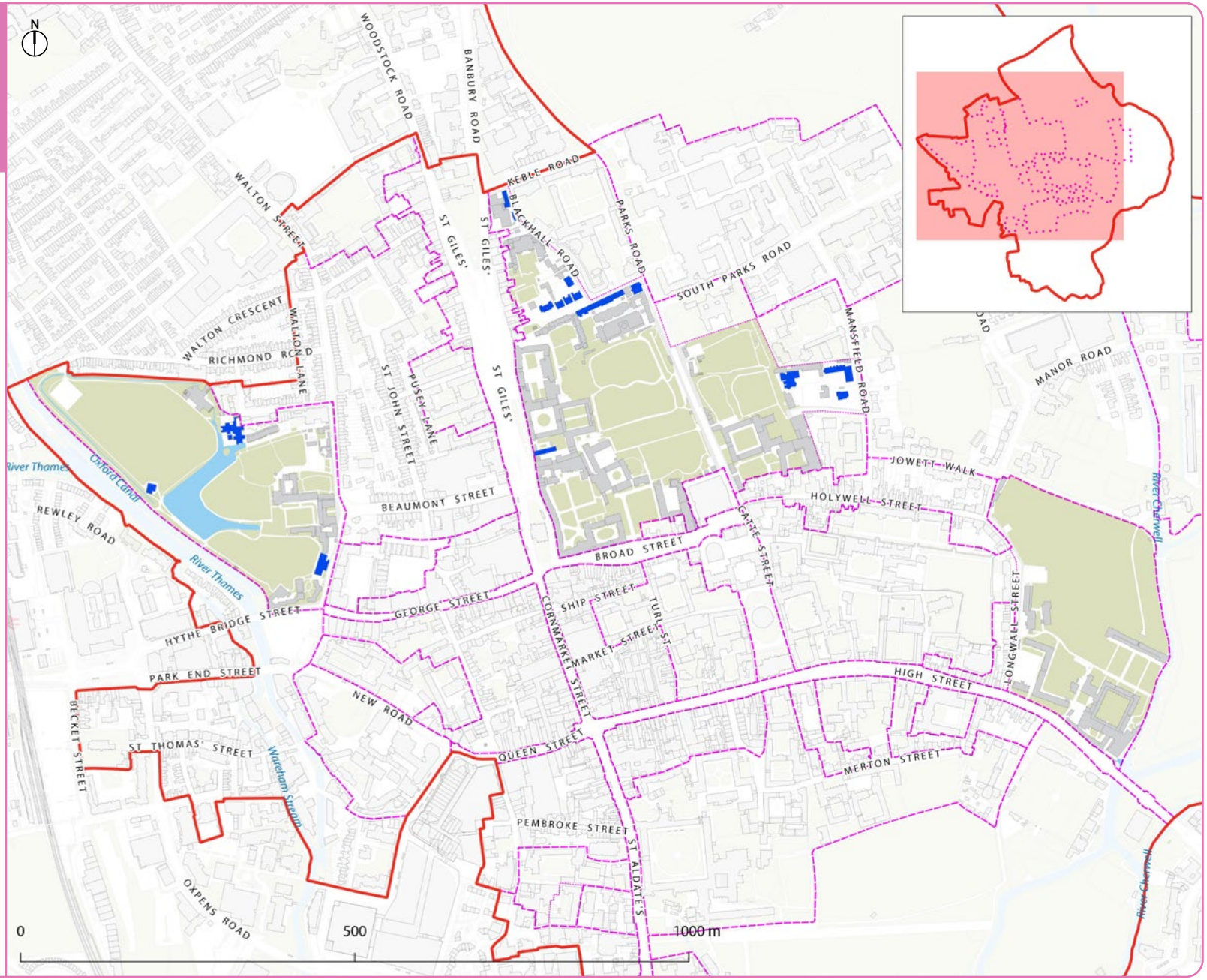
Positive contributors

College Architecture

Sub-zone 2:
Early foundations outside the medieval walls

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- Positive contributor (non-designated)



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4.3.8 Roofscape

Roofscape

Theme 21: roofscape, skyline and landmarks

Building heights

- College building heights outside the town walls are typically three to four storeys with dormers, with chapel towers (e.g. Magdalen, Trinity) and gatehouses, which provide punctuation and offer a focal point to the observer (e.g. Balliol, Wadham).
- Many older colleges buildings were raised a storey (e.g. Magdalen College cloister; Trinity College Garden Quad) or had dormers added to increase the accommodation available.

Roofscape and skyline

- The roofscape of the colleges is one of the great glories of Oxford: they create a lively roofline punctuated with chimneys, gables and dormers and enlivened with crenellations.
- The distinctly identifiable towers and spires that make such an important contribution to the skyline are significant elements within the broader category of roofscape. It is these elements that have provided the iconic subject matter for painting, poetry and prose throughout the history of the city.
- Roofs are generally lead or slate covered with the occasional use of stone slates providing a distinctive tone in longer views and pattern in closer views of them. The crenelated parapets reinforce the defensive architecture of the buildings.
- Individual seventeenth and eighteenth century set pieces display a classical architectural preference for more decorative, pierced or balustraded parapets which contribute to the complexity of the overall roofscape in views.
- Some seventeenth and eighteenth century buildings retain low pitch lead or slate roofs behind parapets or balustrades, adding a layer of complexity in views (e.g. Trinity College chapel; Magdalen College New Buildings).



The main range of Balliol facing Broad Street is four storeys, rising to five over the gatehouse



Magdalen College tower contributes greatly to Oxford's distinctive skyline

Roofscape

College Architecture

Sub-zone 2:
Early foundations outside the medieval walls

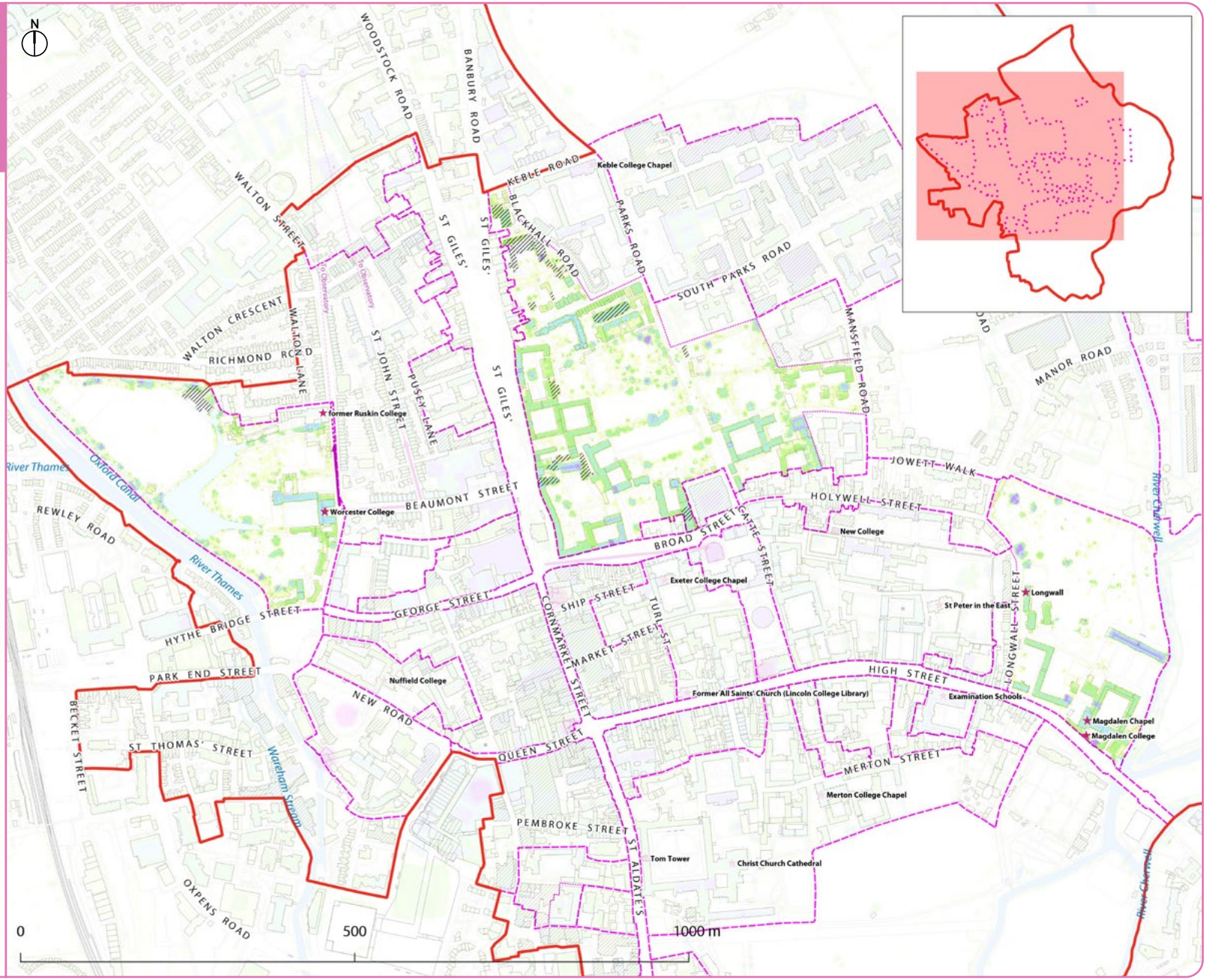
Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary

Building heights

- 0m
- 5m
- 10m
- 15m
- 20m
- Flat roofs
- Elevated panorama
- Designed public view
- Focal point
- Landmarks

Source: Building height data based on environment agency lidar DTM and DSM 2m



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4.3.9 Views and landmarks

Roofscape
Landmarks
Views

Theme 21: roofscape, skyline and landmarks
Theme 22: views in the conservation area
Theme 27: setting of the conservation area

The colleges contain most of the fabled towers and steeples that are part of the identity of the city, and contribute so fundamentally to the skyline in long views from outside the city and close views within it.

Landmarks within the character zone (queries in red)

- Magdalen College Bell Tower, The High Street
- Magdalen College library (former chapel), the High Street
- St. John's Kendrew Quad, entrance from St. Giles
- Trinity College chapel, Broad Street
- Trinity College, Parks Road view through the gate
- Worcester College back lodge, Worcester Street
- Worcester College main range, Walton Street



Glimpse view into St John's College from St Giles'

Views

- **Unfolding views along streets:** These combine long, high, stone boundary walls and glimpses of garden greenery. Clearer views of specimen trees are possible within the college gardens and grounds, with architectural set pieces such as Wadham's main front on Parks Road. The combination of formal college frontages with picturesque rendered townhouses creates the distinctive Oxford streetscape (e.g. along Broad Street and Holywell Street).
- **Vistas to landmarks:** views towards buildings which were designed to be focal points in the streetscape, such as Worcester College terminating the view along Beaumont Street, views of Magdalen College tower along the High Street, or views north along Turl Street towards Trinity College Chapel.
- **Glimpsed views:** Glimpsed views into the hidden world of colleges, through gateways and railings, and over walls. These are picturesque and illustrative of the public versus the private as they entice the observer with a sense of the gardens and open spaces behind the walls and through the gates. These include the view of St. John's Kendrew Quadrangle from St. Giles, the view inside Wadham College from Parks Road or the view through Trinity College gates also from Parks Road.

4.3.10 Movement and activity

Theme 26: tranquillity

Traffic

- The setting of several colleges is harmed by the volume of traffic. For example traffic queuing at junctions, e.g. outside Worcester College on the junction of Walton Street and Beaumont Street; car and coach parking on St Giles and Magdalen Street outside St John's College and Balliol.

Cycling

- The main entrance to a college often attracts clusters of parked bicycles on the street – this gives the street an attractive sense of activity and is one of the characteristic sights of Oxford, but large numbers can be an impediment to pedestrians on pavements e.g. outside Worcester College.

Pedestrian

- Areas around the main entrance to a college tend to be busy with a regular footfall.
- The High Street, Broad Street and St Giles are very busy with pedestrians, sometimes spilling into the road because of narrow pavements.
- Streets around the perimeter of colleges often lack activity because the buildings face inwards and there is limited footfall. This can add to the tranquil character of some streets such as Parks Road.

Cultural activity

- Advertising boards for concerts, recitals, and other events. These are iconic features outside colleges, but need careful management to ensure they do not negatively contribute to visual clutter.

4.3.11 Archaeology

Theme 12: archaeology

Oxford Archaeological Action Plan further detail and guidance

- Some colleges occupy land that was once fields on the outskirts of the town or formerly occupied by medieval religious institutions for example Magdalen College which occupies the site of St John's Hospital, Wadham College which is located over the remains of the Austin Friary and Christ Church which occupies the site of St Frideswide's Priory.
- This has both created an archaeological character of its own, and also preserved beneath quads and gardens remains of the earlier occupation of their sites. This land can remain undisturbed for centuries, preserving earlier urban deposits to an unusual degree.
- Therefore the below-ground archaeological potential of these areas to reveal evidence of the pre-historic, Saxon and medieval occupation that predated the colleges is considered to be very high.
- For example, in 2008 a major excavation on the site of the new Kendrew Quad at St John's College uncovered part of a large pre-historic henge monument along with later Viking burials.



Magdalen College occupies spacious grounds which were previously the site of St John's Hospital



St John's Kendrew Quad, the site of a major excavation which uncovered a pre-historic henge monument and Viking burials

4.4 Sub-zone 3: Modern foundations from the nineteenth-century onwards

4.4.1 History

Medieval defences
Survival of medieval plot outlines
Salters Plan
1879 Ordnance Survey map

Theme 2: university
Theme 5: religion
Theme 13: colleges and quadrangles
Theme 17: postwar architecture

Modern college foundations

- The nineteenth century witnessed a new wave of college foundations, beginning with Keble College (founded 1870). Keble was ground-breaking both architecturally, in the use of polychromatic brickwork rather than ashlar, and in layout, as it pioneered accommodation on a corridor plan, rather than the traditional Oxford staircase plan form.
- New foundations responded to the growth in student numbers, but also reflected social and religious changes. For example, religious foundations such as Manchester College (now Harris Manchester) and Mansfield College were established in response to the relaxation of Anglican dominance of the University; colleges for women were founded, including Lady Margaret Hall and Somerville; Nuffield, St Cross and Linacre were founded to cater specifically for graduate students.
- Late nineteenth and twentieth century foundations were typically inserted into the expanding city, such as Nuffield College and Somerville College, and therefore occupy constrained plots with little opportunity for further expansion. Some colleges took over existing buildings and adapted them for college use, such as St Peter's College and Linacre.
- St Catherine's is an exception in that it was built as the relocation of an existing, early twentieth century foundation on an open, green field site at the eastern edge of the historic settlement of Holywell (later subsumed into the city by its nineteenth century onward expansion). It does however present a modernist interpretation of the quadrangle with the geometric formality of green space evident within the central 'quad' as well as used to provide a distinctive setting for the designed entrance to the College.
- Many modern colleges have added post-war accommodation blocks in response to the expansion in student numbers during the twentieth century, including Keble, Somerville and St Peter's.
- The early twenty-first century has seen a further phase of building (e.g. Somerville, Radcliffe Observatory Quarter buildings, 2011).



St Catherine's College is a modern interpretation of the traditional Oxford quadrangle

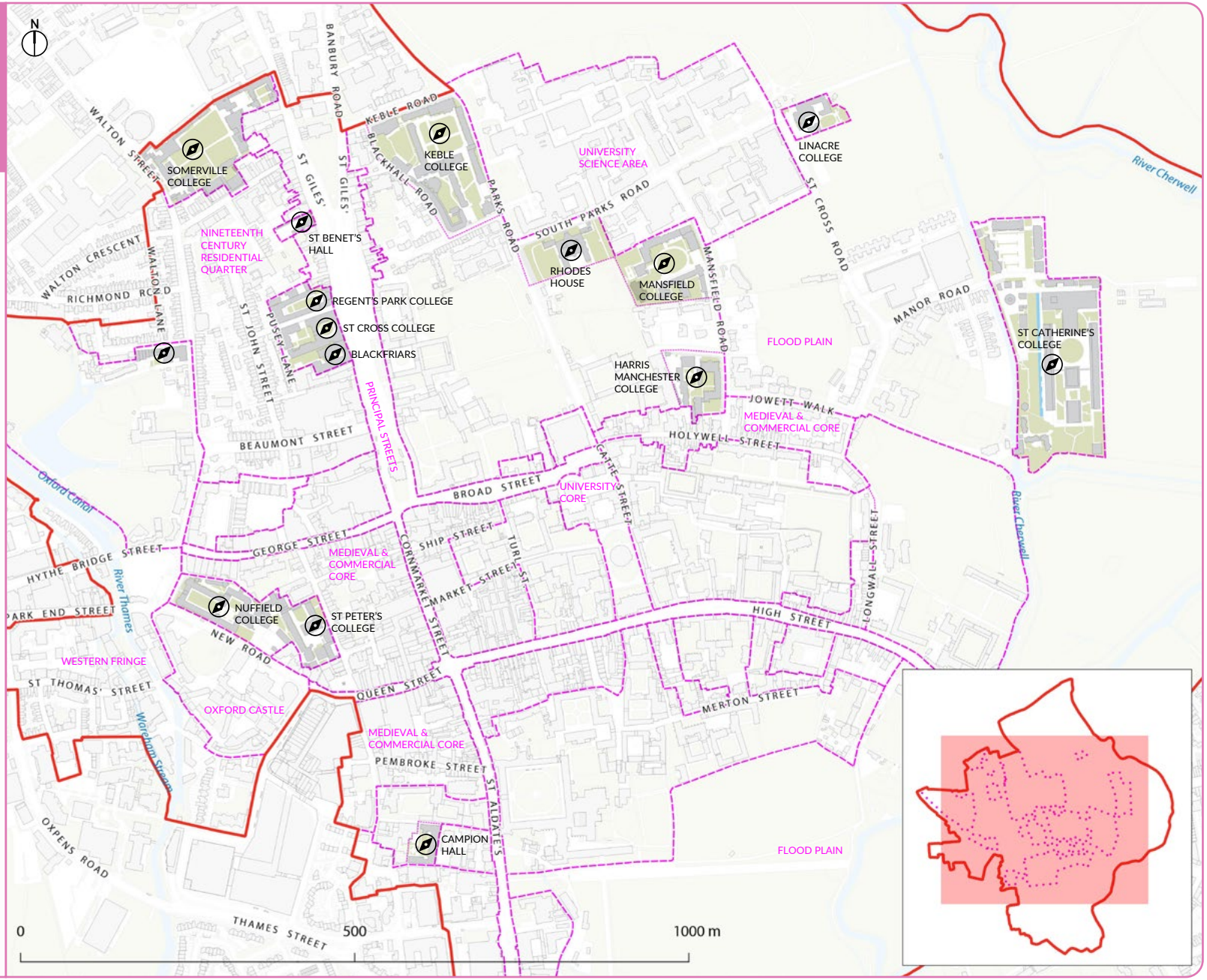
Overview

College Architecture

Sub-zone 3:
Modern foundations from the mid C19th onwards

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- NAME: Neighbouring character zones
- Reference point



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4.4.2 Overview of character

College character; Historic urban characterisation

Theme 13: colleges and quadrangles

- More recent colleges foundations have been inserted into the expanding city. Purpose-built colleges have generally followed the Oxford quadrangle plan, such as Keble, Nuffield and St Catherine's, adapting it to modern requirements.
- Several modern foundations occupied buildings and sites which were originally designed for another purpose, such as Linacre (occupied Cherwell Edge, a former house) and St Peter's (occupied buildings including former church of St Peter-le-Bailey, former Rectory and former Canal House).
- Characteristics include:
  - Modern colleges tend to occupy compact sites with limited space for further development.
  - They display a wide range of architectural styles and materials with greater freedom of expression and less dominance of the classical styles.
  - Inward looking behind clearly defined boundaries, with controlled access.
  - The quadrangle is less rigidly followed and has been more freely interpreted in the later colleges, making careful use of the available space.
  - Buildings are set around lawns or courtyards; their gardens and grounds are generally more restricted than the older colleges.
  - Buildings include use as conference venues and for concerts and other events.



Keble College - greater freedom of expression (OCC)

4.4.3 Use and access

Public access to green spaces

Theme 2: university
Theme 5: religion
Theme 19: public space
Theme 11: living

- Colleges are educational and residential.
- Almost all have a chapel with regular services which are open to the public (although St Catherine's college was built without a chapel, reflecting the secular post-war social trend).
- Religious foundations, such as Campion Hall (Jesuit), Blackfriars (Dominican friary) and St Benet's Hall (Benedictine) also house residential religious communities.
- Most colleges offer some controlled public access at set times, including when used as a conference venue and for other events.



St Peter's College took over and adapted existing buildings, including this Georgian former Rectory

4.4.4 Streets and townscape

Saxon and medieval streets; Public access to green spaces

Theme 18: street layout of the Saxon burh
Theme 19: public space
Theme 20: medieval plots

Street pattern and public spaces

- Modern college foundations have been inserted into the existing street pattern. For example, a very early landscape feature surviving in the form of Bulwarks Lane, itself a surviving medieval street and cutting through the middle of the St. Peter's College estate.
- There is a scarcity of public space in this zone, but college gardens supply green glimpses.

Plots and building lines

- Purpose-built colleges such as Keble and Nuffield, and religious foundations such as Campion Hall and Blackfriars, continue the medieval college tradition of defensive perimeters with inward-looking buildings and walls enclosing gardens and yards.
- Colleges which have taken over existing sites are often more permeable, such as St Peter's College on New Inn Hall Street combining buildings and spaces of different ages and resulting in unplanned and inherited edge conditions.
- Several colleges have colonised formerly domestic houses (e.g. St Benet's Hall on St Giles; Linacre on St Cross Road), blurring the boundary between town and gown.

Pavements and street materials

- Street materials are mainly new and appropriate for the ages and styles of the college they provide a setting for.
- Some historic materials survive in alleyways and streets off the principal streets and on lanes by colleges:
  - York stone paving and stone sets in Bulwark's Lane between St Peter's and Nuffield Colleges
  - Some surviving stone setts in Brewer Street by Campion Hall
  - Many streets have long sections of characteristic granite sett gutters

4.4.5 Green space

Public access to green spaces

Theme 25: green space

- These colleges generally have a lower proportion of green space because of the dense development on their sites. There are some exceptions: Keble has extensive lawns; St Catherine's has a green, semi-rural setting in the Cherwell flood plain; and there are glimpses into Nuffield's green lawns and pool in the lower quad.
- Some colleges buildings are set back from the street with an area of lawns or shrubs in front e.g. St Peter's, which helps to soften the streetscape.
- College gardens provide charm and pleasure to public streets, as glimpses through gates and railings and over walls, and in the form of overhanging trees. In these ways college gardens play a vital role by supplying greenness to soften the predominantly hard urban realm of the city centre.



Blackhall Street lacks animation and activity because the Keble college buildings turn their backs on the street

4.4.6 Buildings

Designations

Theme 13: colleges and quadrangles
Theme 14: materials
Theme 15: architectural details
Theme 17: postwar architecture

The Quadrangle

- In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the quadrangle was interpreted formally (Keble, Nuffield), or constructed informally by colonising and adapting existing buildings and developing a college around them (St Peter's, Somerville).

Twentieth century

- Most colleges have continued building and expanding during the twentieth century, where their sites enable this.
- Some colleges were sophisticated architectural patrons, who commissioned leading architects of the day. The best of these buildings have been listed for their architectural interest, such as the Emily Morris Building at St Peter's College (1935 by R Fielding Dodd with Sir Herbert Baker, Grade II) and the De Breyne and Hayward buildings at Keble College (1971-7 by Ahrends, Burton and Koralek, Grade II*). The De Breyne and Hayward buildings are high quality and innovative buildings, but they continue the college tradition of buildings facing away from the street into the college site, leading to a lack of animation along Blackhall Street.
- Gardens and landscapes of a modern design need to emphasise the significance of gardens – the ephemeral nature of gardens and landscape and therefore the importance of changing traditions. The different landscape traditions evident at St Catz and those now evident at St Peters College which follow a sustainable, naturalistic tradition, with prairie planting and drought tolerant plants
- Twentieth and twenty-first century buildings are as stylistically varied as the rest of the college corpus: neo-Georgian, Modern Movement, Brutalism, Post-Modernism, etc.

Materials

- Modern college foundations are characterised by the wide range of materials used on their sites.
- Keble College broke radically and controversially with the Oxford college tradition of building with golden limestone by using bright red brick with yellow and black banding. Other colleges followed suit, with red brick buildings constructed at Somerville and St Peter's.
- The palette expanded enormously in the twentieth century with non-local and newly developed materials, including concrete, yellow brick and large expanses of glazing at St Catherine's College, squared rubble stone at Rhodes House, exposed concrete frame and timber cladding at Somerville and board-marked concrete at St Peter's.
- In the twenty-first century stone has been used as an engineered material rather than in its traditional ashlar or rough-cut form.

Details

- The best of the modern college estate is carefully detailed, sometimes reinterpreting traditional Oxford college architecture in a new way (e.g. Keble's use of polychromatic brick; Nuffield's bookstack tower).
- Windows are important for articulating and animating façades: Nineteenth and twentieth century college buildings have a variety of window types, including metal casements at Keble College and Nuffield College, traditional timber sashes at Somerville (main elevation to St Giles') and sheet glazing (St Catherine's College). The reflectivity of glass has a considerable impact on character and the setting of adjacent buildings.
- In the twenty-first century, environmental performance has become a key consideration and a challenge for the colleges.



Keble College broke radically with the Oxford tradition in its use of polychromatic brickwork



Board-marked concrete used at St Peter's College Latner Building

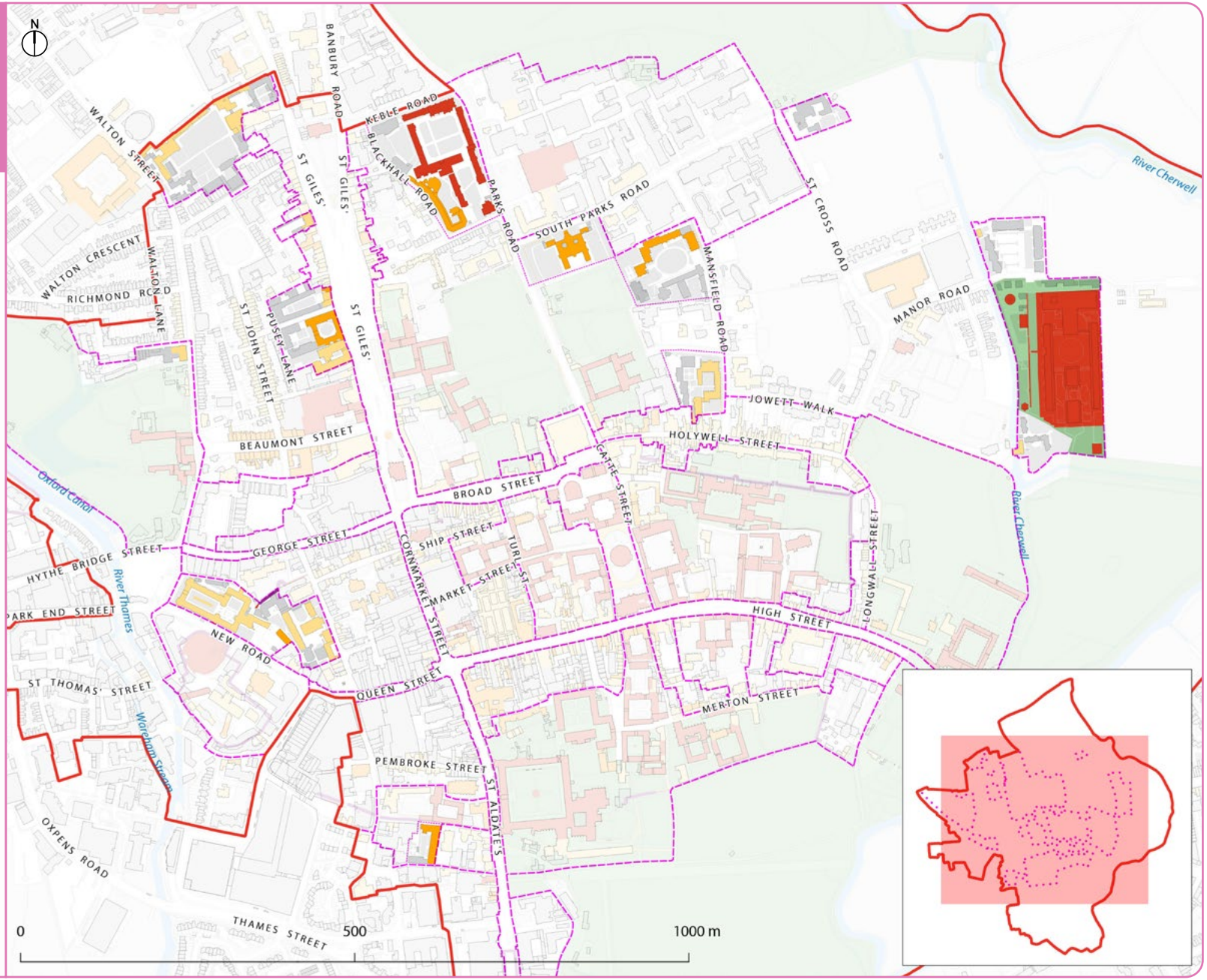
Designations

College Architecture

Sub-zone 3:
Modern foundations from the mid C19th onwards

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- Grade I listed
- Grade II* listed
- Grade II listed
- Scheduled monument
- Registered parks and gardens



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4.4.7 Positive contributors

Theme 14: materials
Theme 15: architectural details
Theme 17: postwar architecture

- Many college buildings have been listed, reflecting their architectural quality (e.g. Keble College: Butterfield, 1868–82, Grade I; Campion Hall: Lutyens, 1937, Grade II*; Nuffield College: Harrison, Barnes & Hubbard, 1949–60, Grade II; St Catherine's: Jacobsen, 1966, Grade I). But modern colleges contain a larger number of unlisted buildings than older foundations.
- Unlisted buildings that contribute to character typically use sympathetic materials and massing and have good detailing e.g. St Cross College West Quad (Niall McLaughlin Architects, 2017); St Peter's College Latner Building (which combines high quality board-marked concrete with a modernist interpretation of the oriel window).
- Environmentally responsive twenty-first century buildings such as the Perrodo Building (Design Engine Architects, 2018)



Nuffield College bookstack tower

4.4.8 Roofscape

Roofscape

Theme 21: roofscape, skyline and landmarks

Building heights

- Modern college domestic building heights are typically three to four storeys frequently articulated with dormers or plant.
- Their street presence is often more modest than the older colleges, but some have continued the tradition of a landmark focal point, e.g. Keble gatehouse; Nuffield bookstack tower; Harris Manchester clock tower.



Unfolding view down New Inn Hall Street, with St Peter's College on one side co-existing with the commercial townscape on the other

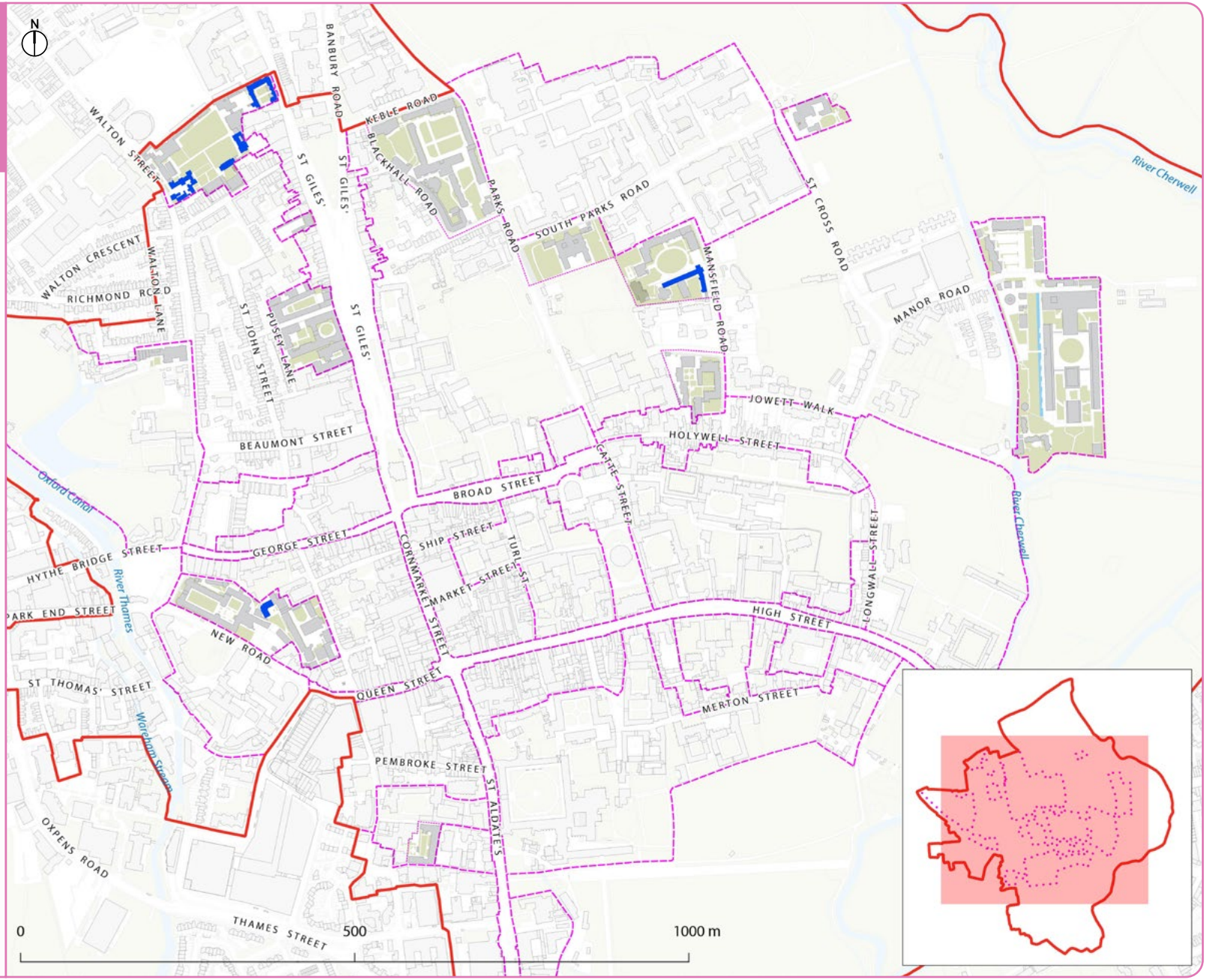
Positive contributors

College Architecture

Sub-zone 3:
Modern foundations from the mid C19th onwards

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- Positive contributor (non-designated)



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Roofscape and skyline

- The modern colleges generally have a traditional, pitched and tiled roofscape. Post-war buildings are more likely to have horizontal profiles and flat roofs, such as the de Breyne and Hayward buildings at Keble; the Wolfson and Margery Fry buildings at Somerville; and St Catherine's college, which has a starkly modernist roofline.
- In the twenty-first century, new interpretations of the traditional roofscape have been made such as Exeter College's Cohen Quad (Alison Brookes Architects).

4.4.9 Views and landmarks

- The modern colleges are generally less likely to contain landmark buildings, with the notable exception of Harrison's steeple at Nuffield, which forms a focal point at the gateway to the city centre from the station, and Keble's gatehouse and front range along Parks Road.

Landmarks within the character zone

- Keble College gatehouse and chapel, Parks Road
- Nuffield College, bookstack tower

Views

- **Unfolding views along streets:** such as New Inn Hall Street and Mansfield Street, where college buildings co-exist with the commercial and residential townscape.
- **Glimpsed views:** Glimpsed views into the hidden world of colleges, through gateways and railings, and over walls, such as at Nuffield, Keble and Harris Manchester. These are picturesque and illustrative of the two sides of the city centre: the public and the private.



Glimpsed view into the courtyard of Nuffield College (OCC)

Roofscape

College Architecture

Sub-zone 3:
Modern foundations from the mid C19th onwards

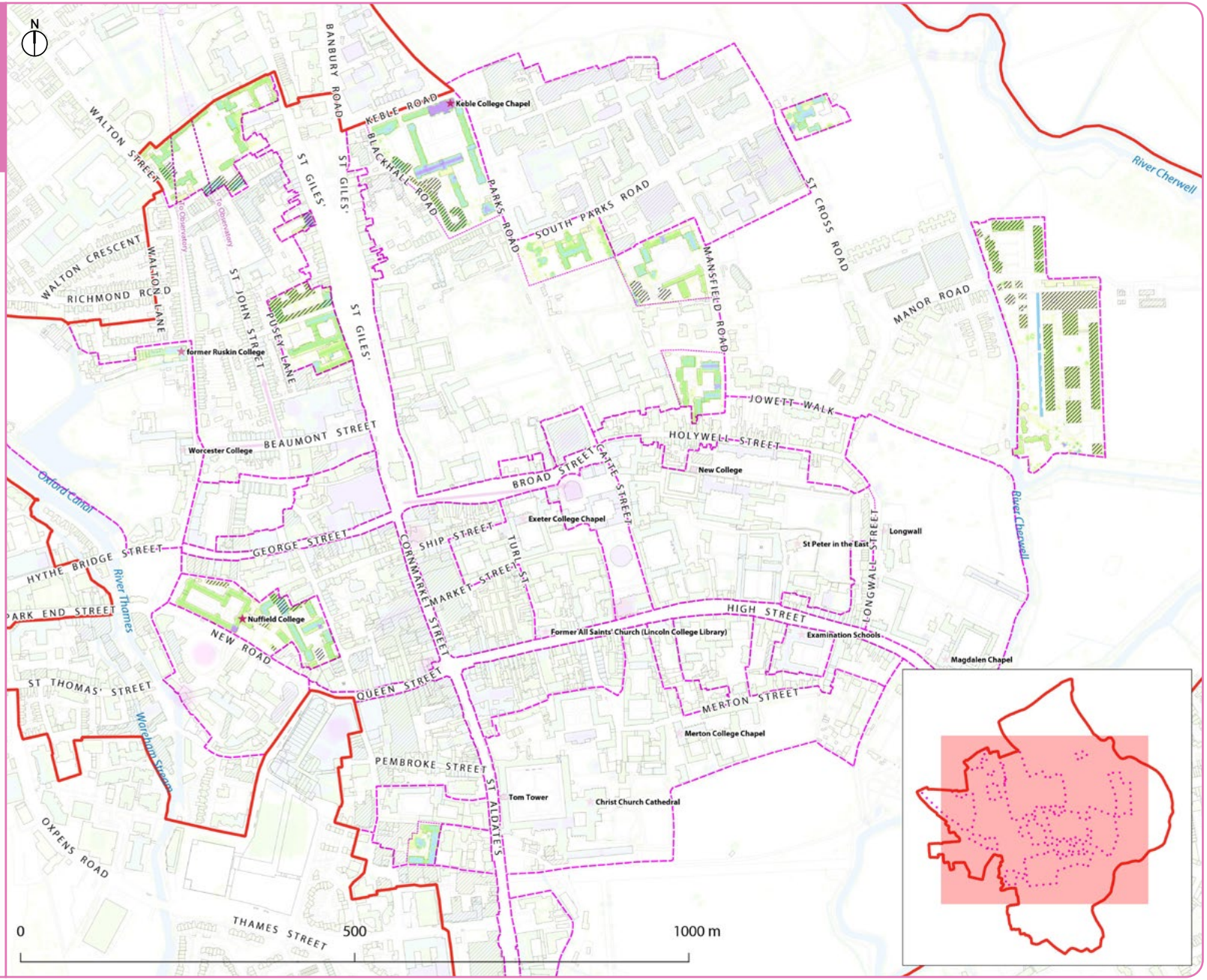
Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary

Building heights

- 0m
- 5m
- 10m
- 15m
- 20m
- Flat roofs
- Elevated panorama
- Designed public view
- Focal point
- Landmarks

Source: Building height data based on environment agency lidar DTM and DSM 2m



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4.4.10 Movement and activity

Theme 26: tranquillity

Traffic

- The setting of several colleges is harmed by the volume of traffic. For example, traffic queuing at junctions, e.g. outside Nuffield College and Rhodes House, deliveries along New Inn Hall Street and a sharp bend outside Linacre College.

Cycling

- The main entrance to a college often attracts clusters of parked bicycles on the street – while this gives the street an attractive sense of activity and is one of the characteristic sights of Oxford, large numbers are an impediment to pedestrians on narrow pavements as well as preventing full appreciation of several listed buildings e.g. on New Inn Hall Street outside St Peter's.

Pedestrian

- Areas around the main entrance to a college tend to be busy with a regular footfall. Pinch points include the north end of Parks Road by Keble, where there is a steady stream of pedestrians moving towards the Parks and very narrow pavements by the college's main entrance.
- Minor, secondary streets around the perimeter of colleges often lack activity because the buildings face inwards and there is limited footfall.
- Some colleges occupy secluded sites on the periphery that receive little passing traffic e.g. St Catherine's College.



Busy traffic queuing outside Nuffield College harms the setting of listed buildings

4.4.11 Archaeology

Theme 12: archaeology

Oxford Archaeological Action Plan further detail and guidance

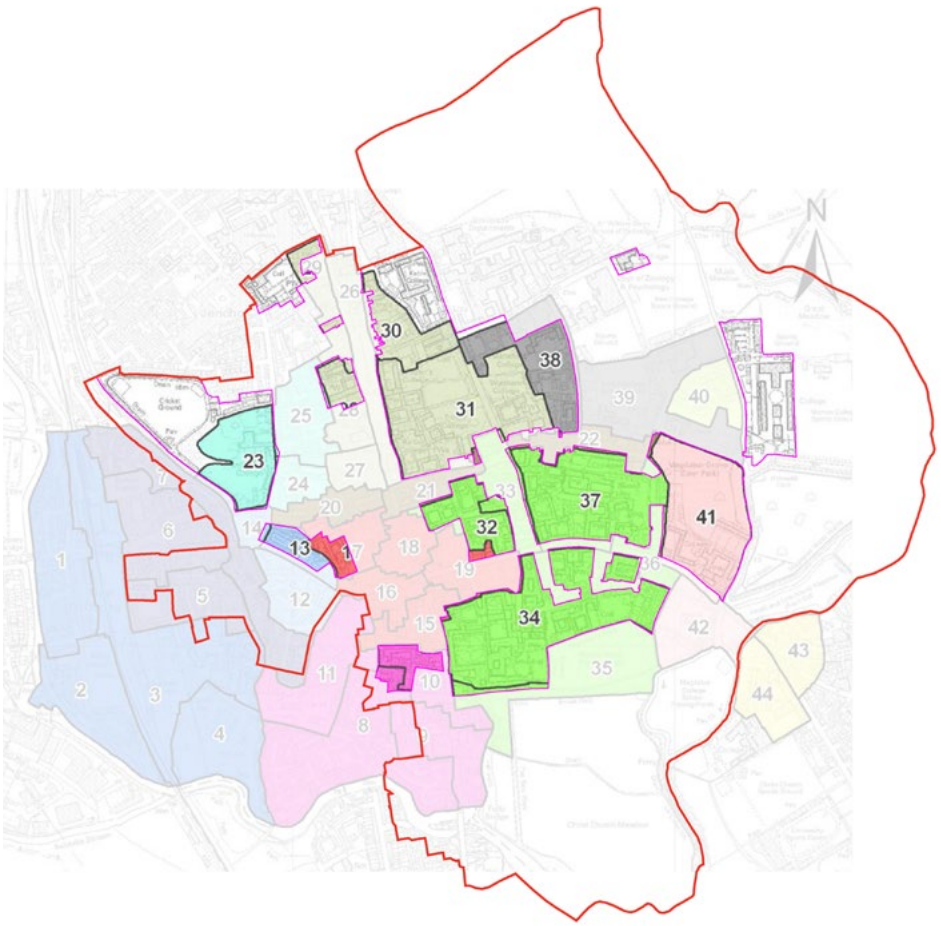
- The modern colleges were built upon land that was once streets and town houses, or open fields (e.g. Keble and St Catherine's), while Nuffield occupies the former canal basin.
- The more recent date of their architecture means that the grounds of modern college sites have sometimes experienced a greater degree of disturbance than many earlier colleges; nevertheless, undeveloped parts of the college sites are highly likely to preserve evidence of earlier occupation.
- Therefore the below-ground archaeological potential of these areas to reveal evidence of the pre-historic, Saxon, medieval and post-medieval occupation that predated the modern colleges is considered to be high. For example, twenty-first century excavations at Somerville College and Mansfield College have uncovered parts of the Royalist Civil War defences.



Surviving section of the Civil War defences in the garden of Rhodes House

4.5 Useful documents and further guidance

Refer to the following Historic Urban Character Assessments on the Oxford City Council website for more detailed accounts of the character zone. The keyplan shows their boundaries.



Sub-zone 1: Early foundations within the medieval walls

- HUCA 8 Thames Crossing and Floodplain: Thames Waterfront.
- HUCA 10 Thames Crossing: Colleges and University.
- HUCA 32 The Eastern Colleges: Turl Street Colleges.
- HUCA 34 The Eastern Colleges: South of the High Street.
- HUCA 37 The Eastern Colleges: North of the High Street.

Sub-zone 2: Early foundations outside the medieval walls

- HUCA 23 Worcester College and Gloucester Green: Worcester College.
- HUCA 30 St Giles': St John's College Expansion.
- HUCA 31 St Giles': Medieval Colleges.
- HUCA 41 The Eastern Suburb: Magdalen College.

Sub-zone 3: Modern foundations from the mid nineteenth century onwards

- HUCA 13 Castle and Periphery: Nuffield College.
- HUCA 17 City Centre Commercial Core: New Inn Hall Street.
- HUCA 28 St Giles': Ashmolean Museum and Colleges.
- HUCA 29 St Giles': Townhouses.
- HUCA 38 Holywell and Northeast Expansion: Mansfield Road.

Other useful documents include:

Oxford Heritage Walks Book 1: On foot from Oxford Castle to St Giles', Malcolm Graham 2013
Oxford Heritage Walks Book 2: On foot from Broad Street, Malcolm Graham 2014
Oxford Heritage Walks Book 3: On foot from Catte Street to Parson's Pleasure, Malcolm Graham 2015
Oxford Heritage Walks Book 4: On foot from Paradise Street to Sheepwash, Malcolm Graham 2016
See also section 9.0 of the Conservation Area Appraisal for a full list of useful sources and publications

Character Zone Assessment 5

University Core

Zone includes:

- The core buildings of the University, clustered around Radcliffe Square and Broad Street
- Includes the Bodleian Library, Radcliffe Camera, Old Ashmolean, Sheldonian Theatre, Clarendon building and St. Mary's Church



Oxford Central (City & University) **Conservation Area**



University Core Character Zone
Oxford Central (City & University) Conservation Area

The Conservation Area Appraisal divides the Conservation Area into nine character zones. This chapter contains a detailed analysis of one of these: the University Core Character Zone. It can be used to understand the history, character and appearance of this part of the Conservation Area, and to inform planning application and development proposals.

This Conservation Area Appraisal aims to promote and support developments that are in keeping with, or enhance, the character of the Central (City & University) Conservation Area. This section is concerned with the reasons for designation, defining the qualities that make up its special interest, character and appearance. It is not possible to describe every facet of the area that contributes positively to its character. The omission of any reference to a particular building, feature, space or positive contributor should not be taken to imply that it is of no interest. Additional positive contributors will be identified through the development management process.

Contents

5.1	An overview of character and special interest
5.2	A brief history
5.3	An analysis of character (considering use, street and townscape, green space, buildings, roofscape, landmarks and views, movement and activity, archaeology)
5.4	Further useful information

Icons

Throughout, icons direct you to relevant sections of the Conservation Area Appraisal and links to other relevant documents.

 relevant layers of the conservation area map / GIS mapping

 relevant character themes in the appraisal

 relevant sections in the appraisal

 suggestions for further reading

 information relevant for planning

 sources of further information

Maps

The maps below are extracts from the Conservation Area mapping set, which consists of layers of useful information ranging from archaeology and historic maps to green space, listed buildings and street materials. Please note that maps may not show the full extent of listed buildings and do not show curtilage-listed structures. If you are unsure if your building is listed check the National Heritage List for England and seek the advice of the City Council's Urban Design and Heritage Team.



The exceptional Jacobean tower over the main entrance to the Bodleian Library

5.1 Overview of character and significance

The buildings of the University of Oxford are amongst the most celebrated in the country. As a wealthy and sophisticated patron, the University commissioned magnificent monumental architecture that helps to define the very image of the city. Sir Nicolaus Pevsner wrote 'the area by the Radcliffe Camera and the Bodleian is unique in the world'.

The following aspects of the zone contribute positively to the character and appearance of the conservation area:

- the monumental nature of the core buildings of the University, which are an architectural expression of institutional status and pride.
- the use of warm golden limestone for the majority of buildings in this zone.
- its highly dynamic roofscape, which contributes to the iconic roofscape and skyline of the City.
- its exceptional townscape, especially around Radcliffe Square, including high quality landscaping and street furniture.
- buildings of exceptional individual architectural and historical interest.
- widespread public access.

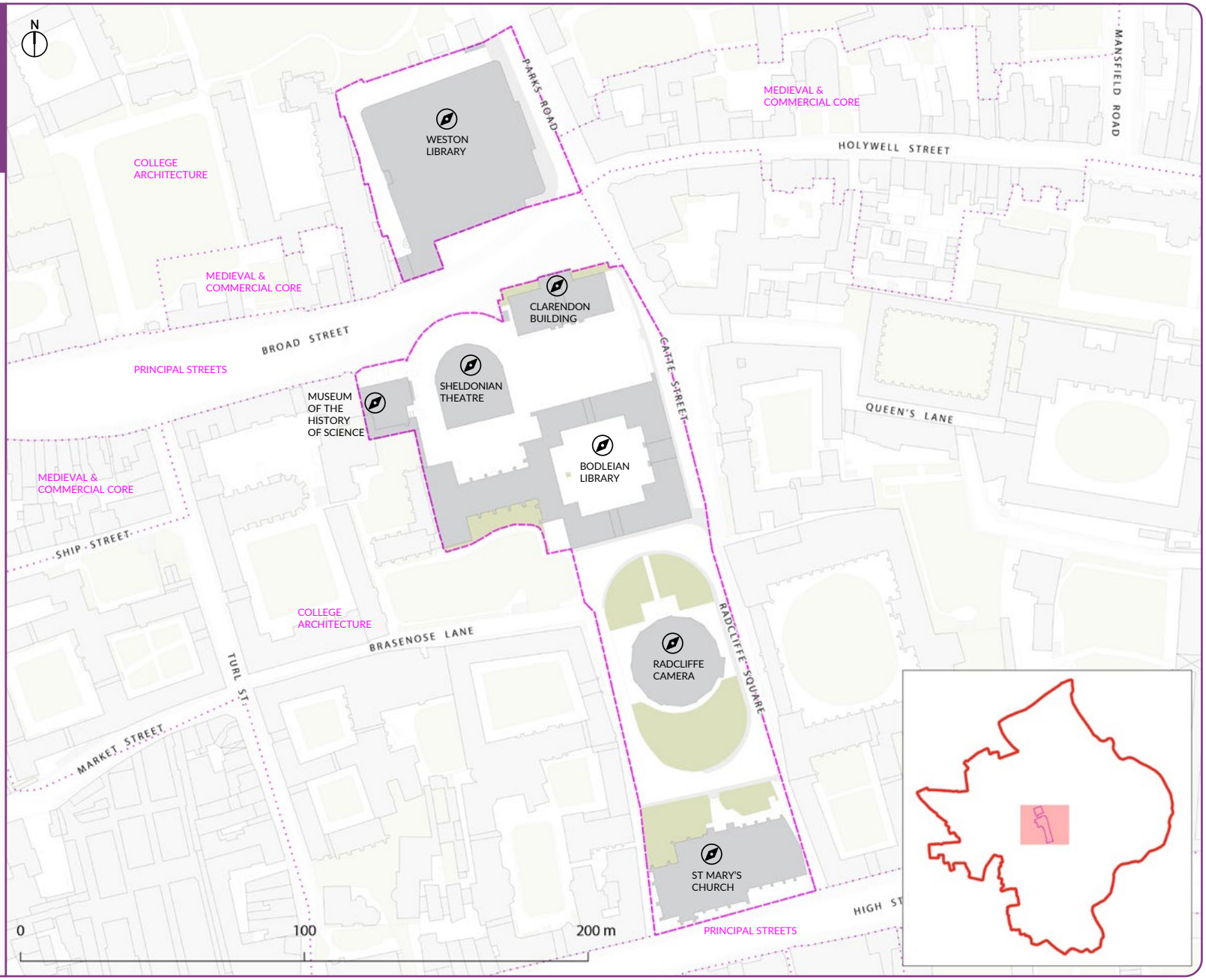
The principal aspects of the zone that harm its character and appearance are:

- crowding in some areas, particularly during the main tourist season, which can detract from the ability to appreciate exceptional architecture of the University Core.
- patching and poor quality repairs to street surfaces, particularly Radcliffe Square, which detracts aesthetically from the listed buildings' setting.
- although the amount of signage and advertising is minimal in this area, there is some that is inappropriate which poses a threat to the exceptional townscape of the character zone and the enjoyment of individual buildings within it.

Overview
University Core

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- NAME Neighbouring character zones
- Reference point



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5.2 History

5.2.1 Origins

- The church of St Mary the Virgin is first mentioned in the 11th century and may have been a gate church for the primary burh. Its current fabric is 13th and 14th century with later restorations. It has been the University church since the 13th century and is closely linked with John Henry Newman (vicar 1828-1843) and the 19th century Oxford Movement for religious reform.
- The University as a corporate identity emerged in the early thirteenth century; its earliest purpose-built structure was the Convocation House, built in the 1320s as a meeting space in a northern extension to St Mary's Church with a library above.
- Wealth was concentrated in the colleges and the University was reliant upon donors to fund major building projects. The area was the location for the bulk of the medieval university rooms where teaching was undertaken, and attracted artisans such as copyists and bookbinders to the surrounding streets.

5.2.2 Major projects

- Lack of finances delayed completion of the University's first major building project, the Divinity School, constructed c.1420–90. Plans were altered to incorporate a first floor library (Duke Humfrey's Library). This was the start of a gradual project to disentangle the University from the Church and to remove secular functions from St Mary's.
- The library was extended with supervision and funding from Thomas Bodley and the Schools Quadrangle of the Bodleian was completed in 1624.
- Other University buildings clustered north and south of the Bodleian are:
  - The Sheldonian Theatre, designed by Christopher Wren and commissioned to host ceremonial events.
  - The Old Ashmolean Building on Broad Street (now the Oxford Museum of the History of Science), built in 1683 to display the personal collection of Elias Ashmole.
  - The Clarendon Building, designed by Hawksmoor and completed in 1715 as a printing house for the University Press.
  - The Radcliffe Camera, a library designed by James Gibbs and opened in 1749.

5.2.3 Twentieth century

Expanding library collections prompted the construction of the New Bodleian Library on the site of shops and townhouses on the north side of Broad Street between 1937–40 to designs by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott. This reflected both the enormous increase in printed material in recent times and increasing subject specialisation.

The New Bodleian Library was internally remodelled by Wilkinson Eyre to increase public access and improve its relationship with its urban setting. It re-opened in 2015 as the Weston Library, with a new public entrance to Broad Street.



The Sheldonian Theatre, a monumental architectural expression of University status and pride

5.3 Character

5.3.1 Use and access

Historic urban characterisation

Theme 2: university
Theme 3: association with historical figures

The primary uses within this zone are institutional, educational, religious and ceremonial, reflecting the functions and traditions of the University. However, there are also other aspects catering to tourists and other visitors.

- St Mary's Church has public access to the vaults café in Convocation House; also the church lawn, church shop, internal heritage displays and paid access to the church tower.
- University buildings provide some public access, either free of charge (e.g. St Mary's Church; the Weston Library) or via a modest entrance fee (the Sheldonian Theatre).
- The Sheldonian Theatre hosts numerous public events and concerts.
- The Bodleian Library and Radcliffe Camera are publicly accessible to registered readers.
- The buildings have various shops and cafes which are open to the public.

5.3.2 Streets and townscape

The University Core zone includes some of the finest townscape in the conservation area. The architecture and setting of the cluster of buildings between St Mary's Church on the High Street and the Sheldonian Theatre and Clarendon Building on Broad Street is synonymous with Oxford and recognised worldwide as an icon of the City. The buildings align to create a view through the Clarendon Building and Bodleian quadrangle to the Radcliffe Camera, forming an exceptional unfolding vista. Every major approach hosts a notable view, particularly the glimpsed view from High Street down School Street and Catte Street.









University core buildings generally provide a greater level of public access than most colleges, while the libraries are accessible to registered readers

Street pattern

Saxon and medieval streets; Medieval plot boundaries

Theme 18: street layout

- Elements of the Saxon and medieval street network between the High Street and Broad Street survive, including Catte Street, School Street (now Radcliffe Square) and Brasenose Lane.
- Radcliffe Square, created in the eighteenth century, is a distinctive piece of formal town planning.
- The closeness and parallel nature of School Street and Catte Street may reflect the layout of the primary Saxon burh.

Public spaces

Theme 19: public space

- Pedestrianisation of Radcliffe Square and the streets around it is has made this area one the most important public spaces in the city.
- Places such as the steps of the Weston Library and the Sheldonian Theatre forecourt provide some of the few off-street locations in the city centre for locals and visitors to rest, linger and enjoy their surroundings.
- Other 'lingering' public or permissive spaces include the Bodleian Quad, Clarendon Quad, and St Mary's Churchyard.

Plots and building lines

Medieval plot boundaries; Building lines and gaps

Theme 20: medieval plots

- University buildings occupy large, formal plots, created by purchasing, amalgamating and thereby eradicating narrow medieval tenement plots.
- It is characteristic of University buildings that they are frequently set back from the street for architectural effect, within a forecourt defined by railings or balustrade walls. This is in marked contrast to colleges, retail and residential buildings, which are usually hard up against the pavement.

Pavements and street materials

Street materials

Theme 14: materials

- There is a good survival of historic street materials around University buildings in the central core: e.g. cobbles and paving around Radcliffe Square and the Sheldonian Theatre, and the modern interpretation of the medieval central street drain (kennel) on Brasenose Lane.
- These materials are highly important to the historic character and townscape texture of these areas.
- The eighteenth-century cobbled street surface of Radcliffe Square is listed at Grade II for its scenic value as a setting for the listed buildings.

Street furniture

- The University zone contains some of the few public benches in the city centre: in front of the Clarendon Building and in St Mary's Churchyard.
- High quality historic railings (e.g. Radcliffe Square) and historic street lamps, particularly the railings at the Radcliffe Camera, St Mary's, the Clarendon Building, Sheldonian and Old Ashmolean, contribute positively to the character of this zone.



The University Church of St Mary the Virgin, the location of the first purpose-built University spaces (OCC)

5.3.3 Green space

Public access to green spaces

Theme 25: green space

Accessible green space:

- The only area of public green space in this zone is the small churchyard of St Mary's. This includes mature trees that are an important green counterpoint to the otherwise hard streetscape of High Street. This is of considerable importance to the character and appreciation of the conservation area because public green space within the core is otherwise very limited.

Private green space:

- The lawns around the Radcliffe Camera provide a formal setting for the building. Their simplicity and formal nature enable the architectural detailing of the surrounding buildings to be better appreciated.



Benches outside the Clarendon Building provide some of the few public benches in the city centre



The Garden of the University Church of St Mary the Virgin, the only area of public green space in this zone



Historic street materials in Radcliffe Square, listed at Grade II

5.3.4 Buildings

Designations

Theme 14: materials
Theme 15: architectural details

The buildings of the University are amongst the most celebrated in Oxford, part of the image of the city. The monumental central cluster is of exceptional architectural and historic interest, including the Bodleian Library and works by nationally renowned architects: Christopher Wren (Sheldonian), Nicholas Hawksmoor (the Clarendon Building) and James Gibbs (Radcliffe Camera).

University buildings demonstrate the evolution of architectural style from the Gothic of the Middle Ages, through Classical, to the loose interpretation of twentieth century Neo-Georgian (Weston Library). Nevertheless, common characteristics can be identified:

- Formal, monumental buildings set apart from their surroundings on separate plots.
- Built of Oxford limestone.
- Functions that bring people together and normally allow some public access.



The Clarendon Building, a formal, monumental composition built of characteristic warm golden limestone

5.3.5 Positive contributors

Positive contributors

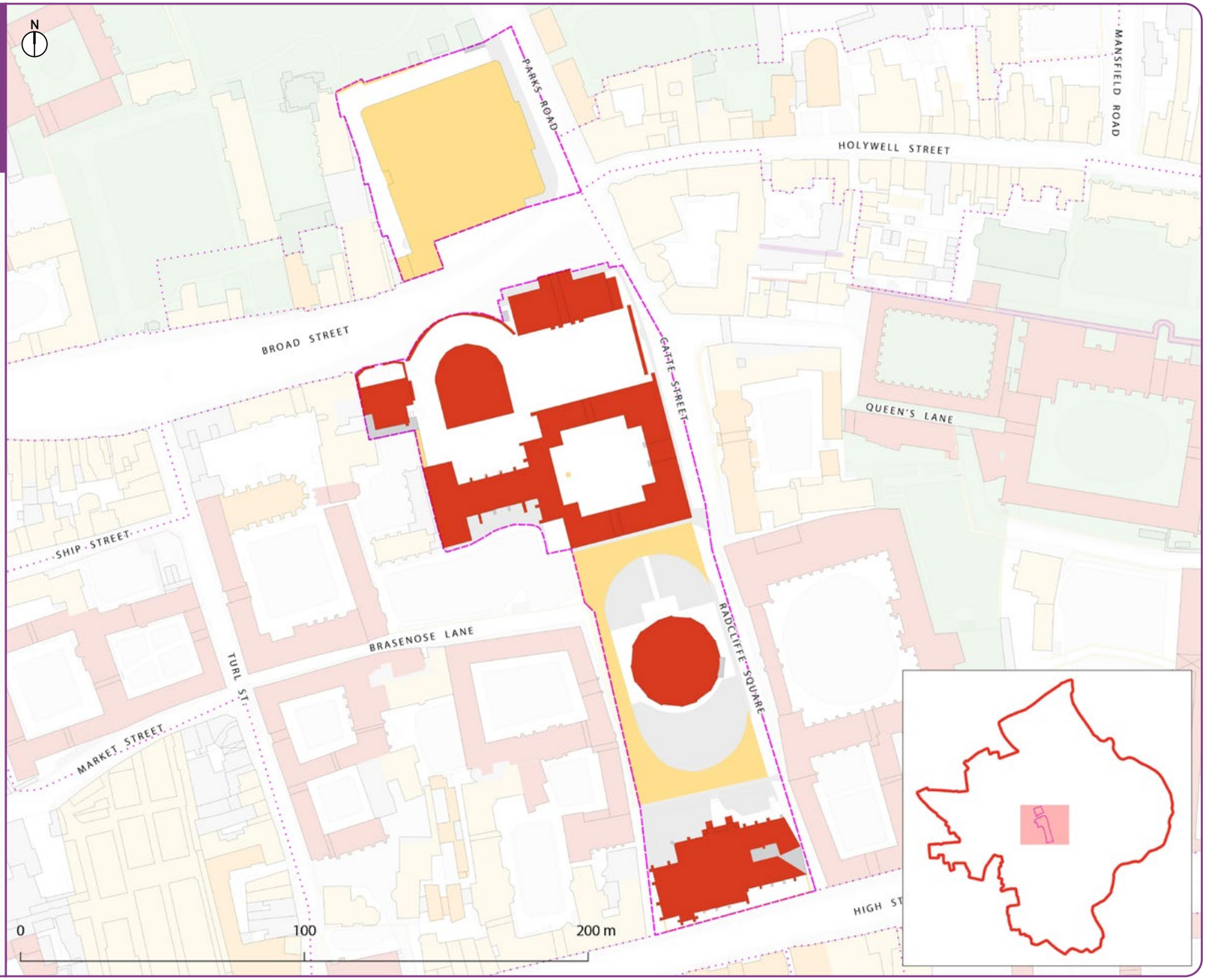
All the buildings in the University Core character zone are listed at Grade I, with the exception of the Weston Library (Grade II), reflecting their exceptional historic and architectural interest. There are however, a number of smaller features that are unlisted that contribute to the character and appearance of the character zone. These comprise the historic streetlamps in Radcliffe Square and the water pump adjacent to the western elevation of the University Church of St. Mary.



Designed vista through the Bodleian Library courtyard towards Radcliffe Camera

Designations
University Core

Key
- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- Grade I listed
- Grade II* listed
- Grade II listed



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5.3.6 Roofscape

Roofscape

Theme 21: roofscape, skyline and landmarks

Building heights

- Building heights are varied, but tend to have three or more storeys of generous dimensions, reflecting the functions of the buildings.
- The bookstack of the Weston Library rises higher but is set well back from the building's façade, lessening its impact.
- Buildings rise to higher focal points such as the tower of St Mary's Church, the gatehouse of the Bodleian Library and the dome of the Radcliffe Camera.

Roofscape and skyline

- It is characteristic of the monumental and symbolic role of University architecture that the buildings have dynamic roofscapes which make a major contribution to the iconic skyline of Oxford.
- Elements include spires (St Mary's Church), domes (Radcliffe Camera), towers (the Bodleian), cupolas (Sheldonian Theatre) and pediments (Clarendon Building).
- Crenellations, pinnacles, parapets, statuary, chimneys etc., provide texture and incident.
- More recent buildings, conceived in the Modernist movement, have quite different roofscapes; the Weston Library has a large expanse of flat roof with a starkly horizontal profile.

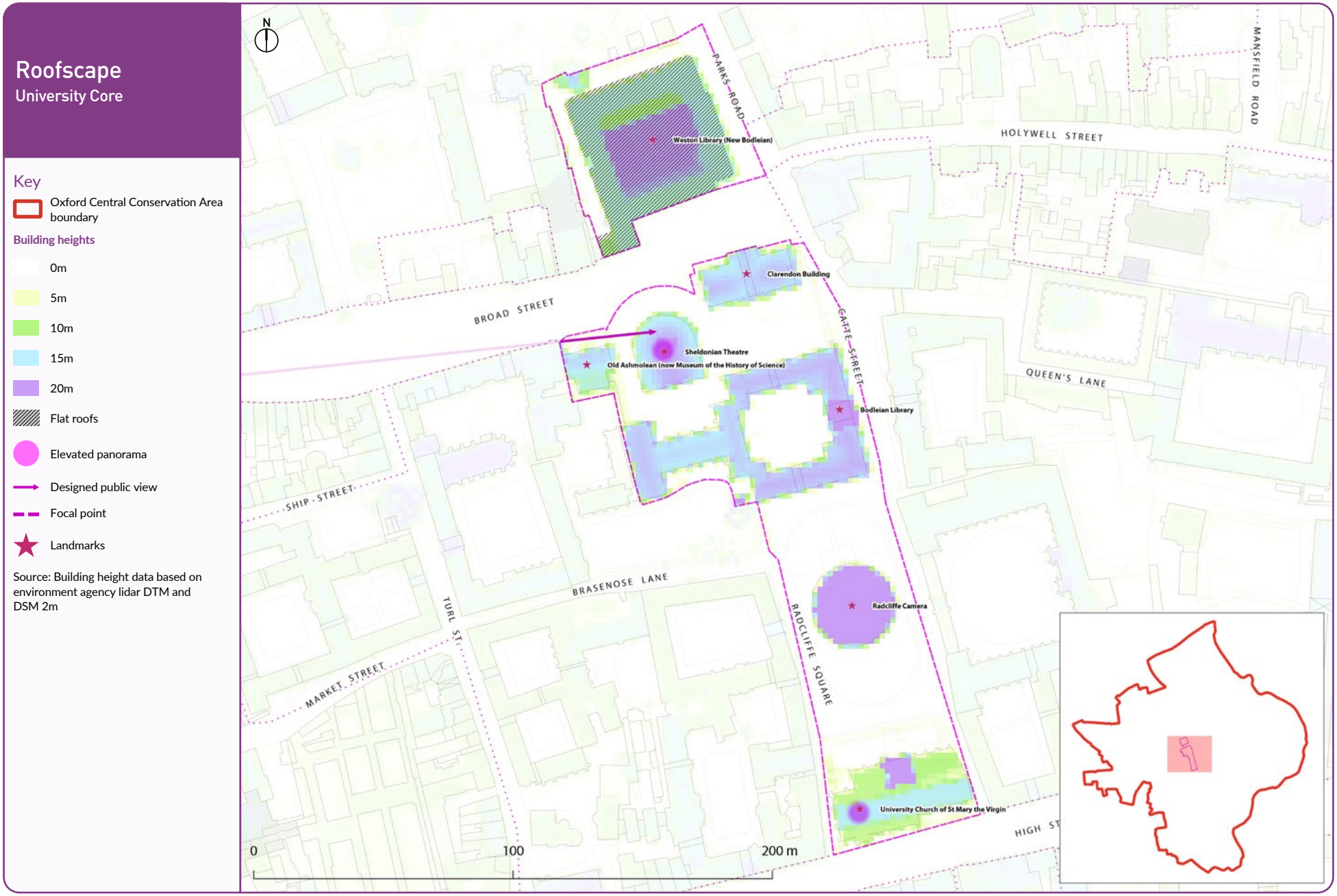


The horizontal roof profile of the Weston Library



The lively roofscape of the Clarendon Building and Sheldonian Theatre

Roofscape
University Core



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5.3.7 Landmarks

Roofscape

Theme 21: roofscape, skyline and landmarks
Theme 22: views in the conservation area
Theme 27: setting of the conservation area

By their very nature, almost every building in this character zone is a landmark. Additionally, the towers and spires of neighbouring colleges are prominent in the setting of many University buildings.

- Bodleian Library, Broad Street.
- Clarendon Building, Broad Street.
- Old Ashmolean (Museum of the History of Science), Broad Street.
- Radcliffe Camera, Radcliffe Square.
- Sheldonian Theatre, Broad Street.
- University Church of St Mary the Virgin, High Street.
- Weston Library (New Bodleian), Broad Street.

Landmarks outside the zone

- Indian Institute cupola, corner of Holywell Street.
- Hertford Bridge (bridge of sighs), Hertford College, New College Lane.
- The Hawksmoor Towers, All Souls College.
- All Saints College (now Lincoln College library, Turl Street).
- Exeter College spire and fleche.

5.3.8 Views

Public viewing panoramas

- This zone contains two of the elevated positions from which the public can view 360-degree panoramas of the city: the cupola of the Sheldonian Theatre, which appears to have been designed for this purpose, and the tower of St Mary's Church, which is the most popular elevated public viewing point in the city. It has superb views over the historic core of the University and colleges; this allows visitors to experience and appreciate the historical form and architectural character of central Oxford and understand its relationship to its landscape setting, something that is otherwise difficult in a dense and largely flat city centre.

Designed views

- In addition to the panoramic views provided from the Sheldonian cupola, the University created views of the Clarendon Building and the Sheldonian Theatre by demolishing houses in the middle of Broad Street in 1667.
- The view along Broad Street to these buildings is one of the most important in the city.
- The buildings have been aligned in such a way that there is a view from the front door of the Weston Library, through the portals of the Clarendon Building to the doorway into the Bodleian courtyard with a glimpse of the Radcliffe Camera beyond, forming an exceptional vista.

Unfolding and glimpsed views

- University buildings are the focus of many unfolding and glimpsed views in the Conservation Area, no more so than in the streets and spaces of the core group around the Radcliffe Camera. Here, the townscape and architecture are of such exceptional quality that every corner reveals another magnificent view.

5.3.9 Movement and activity

Theme 26: tranquillity

Traffic

- The central core is pedestrianised. There is some limited vehicle access to Broad Street.

Pedestrians

- The University buildings attract a high footfall because of their international fame and because they are open to the public.
- The courtyard of the Bodleian Library can become extremely crowded with tourist parties, creating conflicts with registered readers trying to use the library.
- Pedestrianisation of Radcliffe Square and the streets around it provides some of the capacity needed to handle this number of visitors, and a pleasant place to linger and take in the exceptional architecture.
- Pinch points, such as where Catte Street meets the High Street, can become extremely crowded with pedestrians.

5.3.10 Archaeology

Roofscape

Theme 21: roofscape, skyline and landmarks

- This character zone comprises a part of the Saxon burh and the medieval historic core encompassing the early focal points of the medieval University.
- Archaeological investigations over the last one hundred and twenty years have demonstrated the presence of well-preserved urban deposits of national importance in this area. Outside of the areas truncated by the construction of the University underground book stacks the zone encompasses parts of the Late Saxon and medieval defences, the remains of medieval tenements along Catte Street and Schools Street and the site of the Late Saxon and later medieval church University Church of St Mary's. The archaeological resource is complemented by the exceptional level of documentary information that survives about the town from the medieval period.
- The below-ground archaeological potential of the zone to reveal evidence of past occupation is considered to be high.



The tower of St Mary's Church provides an important public viewing point, offering superb views of the city centre

5.4 Useful documents and further guidance

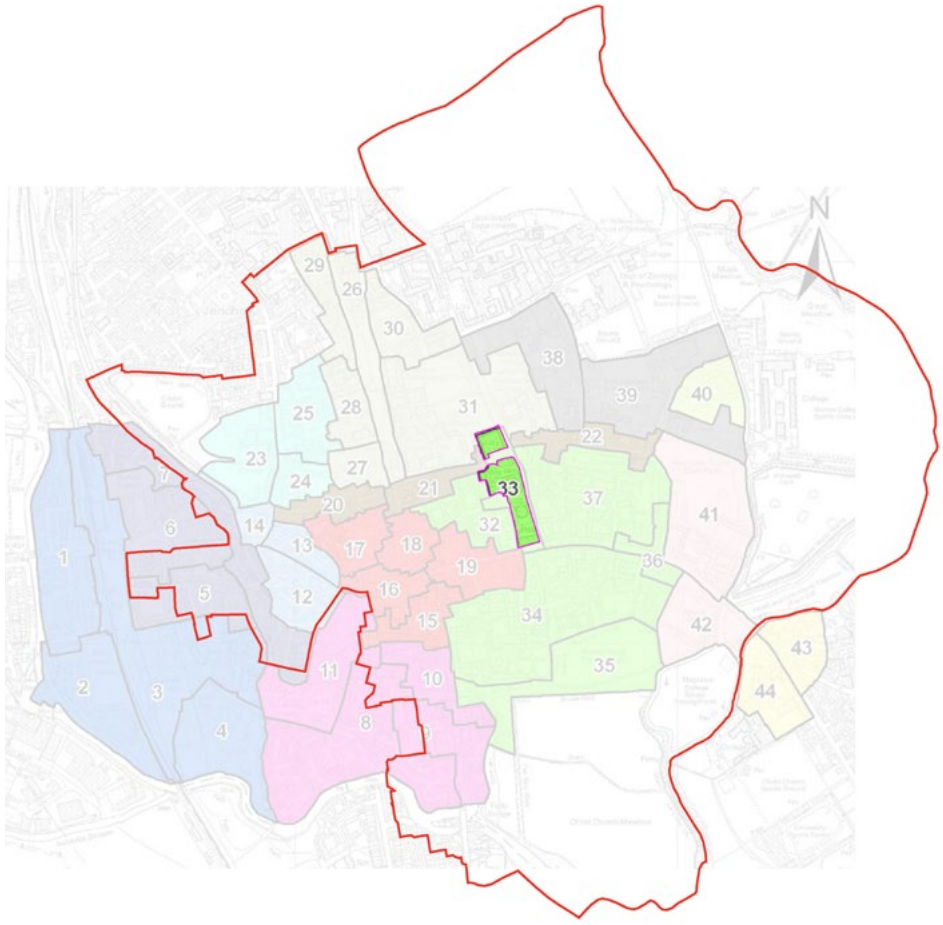
Refer to the following Historic Urban Character Assessments on the Oxford City Council website for detailed accounts of the character zone. The key plan shows their boundaries.

HUCA 33 The Eastern Colleges: University Buildings.

Other useful documents include:

Oxford Heritage Walks Book 1: On foot from Oxford Castle to St Giles', Malcolm Graham 2013

Oxford Heritage Walks Book 2: On foot from Broad Street, Malcolm Graham 2014



Character Zone Assessment 6

Western Fringe

Oxford Central (City & University) **Conservation Area**

Zone includes:

- Castle Mill Stream and the Oxford Canal
- St. Thomas Church and St. Thomas Street
- The Former Lion Brewery
- Gloucester Green





Western Fringe Character Zone
Oxford Central (City & University) Conservation Area

The Conservation Area Appraisal divides the Conservation Area into nine character zones. This chapter contains a detailed analysis of one of these: the Western Fringe Character Zone. It can be used to understand the history, character and appearance of this part of the Conservation Area, and to inform planning application and development proposals.

This Conservation Area Appraisal aims to promote and support developments that are in keeping with, or enhance, the character of the Central (City & University) Conservation Area. This section is concerned with the reasons for designation, defining the qualities that make up its special interest, character and appearance. It is not possible to describe every facet of the area that contributes positively to its character. The omission of any reference to a particular building, feature, space or positive contributor should not be taken to imply that it is of no interest. Additional positive contributors will be identified through the development management process.

Contents

6.1	An overview of character and special interest
6.2	A brief history
6.3	An analysis of character (considering use, street and townscape, green space, buildings, roofscape, landmarks and views, movement and activity, archaeology)
6.4	Further useful information

Icons

Throughout, icons direct you to relevant sections of the Conservation Area Appraisal and links to other relevant documents.

- relevant layers of the conservation area map / GIS mapping
- relevant character themes in the appraisal
- relevant sections in the appraisal
- suggestions for further reading
- information relevant for planning
- sources of further information

Maps

The maps below are extracts from the Conservation Area mapping set, which consists of layers of useful information ranging from archaeology and historic maps to green space, listed buildings and street materials. Please note that maps may not show the full extent of listed buildings and do not show curtilage-listed structures. If you are unsure if your building is listed check the National Heritage List for England and seek the advice of the City Council's Urban Design and Heritage Team.

6.1 Overview of character and significance

This character zone consists of the areas west and south-west of the city centre along the Castle Mill Stream, St Thomas' and the Oxford Canal. There were medieval abbeys here, and later waterside industry until the second half of the twentieth century. Pockets of post-medieval character survive, but most were swept away by comprehensive redevelopment in the 1960s and 1970s, to be replaced by largely unsuccessful structures of a quite different scale and grain.

The following aspects of the zone are of considerable historical, architectural, townscape or social significance and contribute positively to the character and appearance of the conservation area:

- Castle Mill Stream and the Oxford Canal – tranquil green public spaces isolated by trees from the sights and sounds of the city around them. A secretive quality quite different from the Isis and Cherwell.
- The intimate network of streets and paths weaving along and across the streams, with diverse building types and tree-lined banks, experienced as a sequence of glimpses and revealed views, often from small bridges.
- St Thomas', a medieval extra-mural suburb with a distinctive character formed of former industrial buildings and modest residential terraces, terminating in views of the medieval church.
- Surviving fragments of the religious houses that dominated here in the Middle Ages.
- Surviving buildings and fragments of fabric (e.g. walls) of the industries that lined the Castle Mill Stream for centuries.

The principal aspect of the zone that harms the character and appearance is:

- Fragmented historic character due to twentieth-century redevelopment; large scale plots that do not reflect the historic street patterns.
- Areas of lifeless frontage that contribute to an unfriendly environment for pedestrians.

Opportunities for enhancement within this character zone include:

- Better realising the potential of the green spaces along the canal and Castle Mill Stream, which is currently under-utilised, by opening up access through improved physical or visual links.
- Improving street lighting by the canal to reduce instances of anti-social behaviour and improve safety.
- Enlivening the area by making it more appealing to pedestrians.
- For new development to take inspiration from the industrial riverside character of the zone in terms of architectural design, massing, its relationship to the water, landscaping, etc.
- The redevelopment of Gloucester Green has delivered a public square which hosts a vibrant market and public events, but the space can feel divorced from the city centre and the public realm is a little tired, There is therefore opportunity to enhance this area.

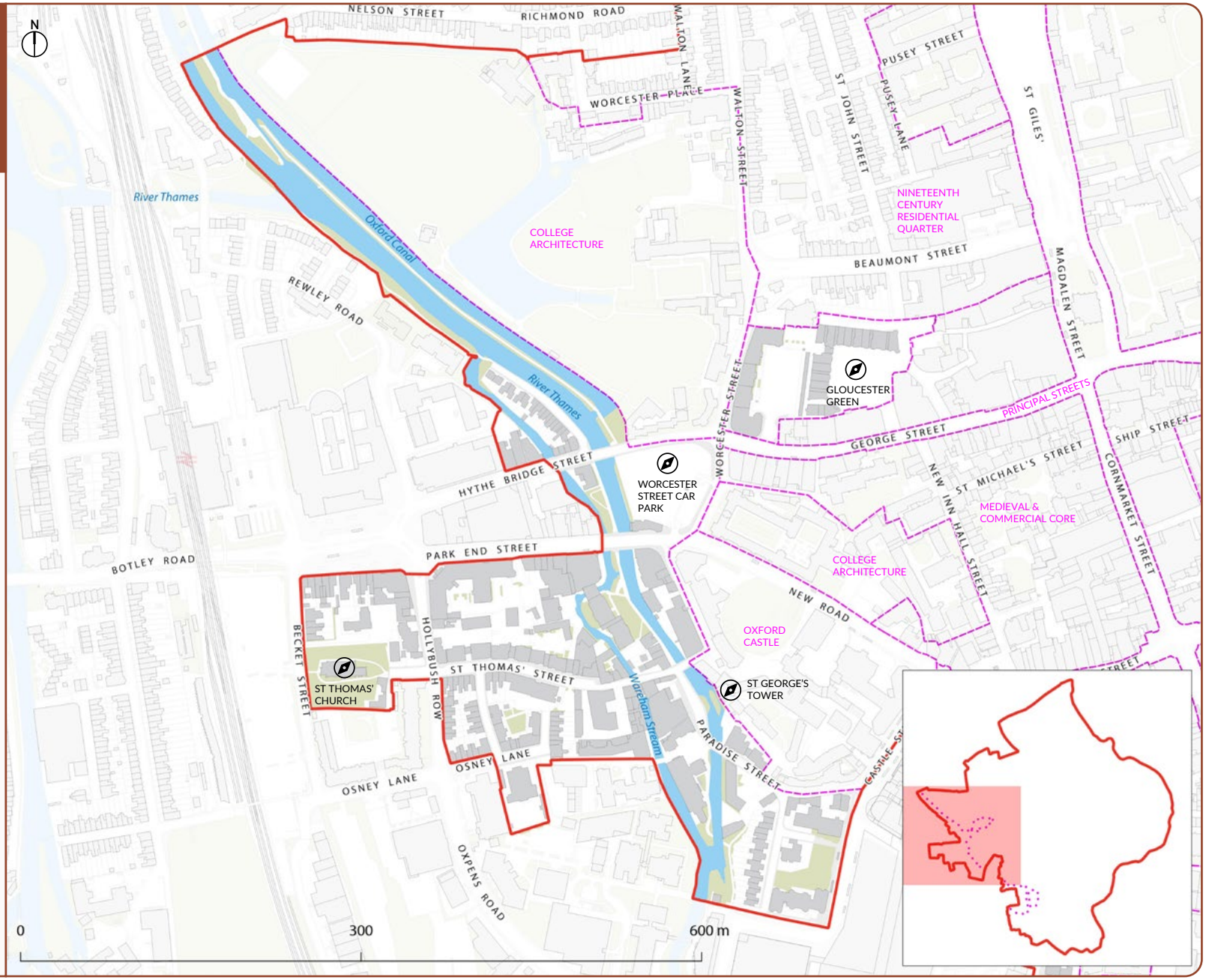


The Castle Mill Stream has a tranquil and secretive quality, with an intimate network of streets weaving across and along it

Overview
Western Fringe

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- NAME Neighbouring character zones
- Reference point

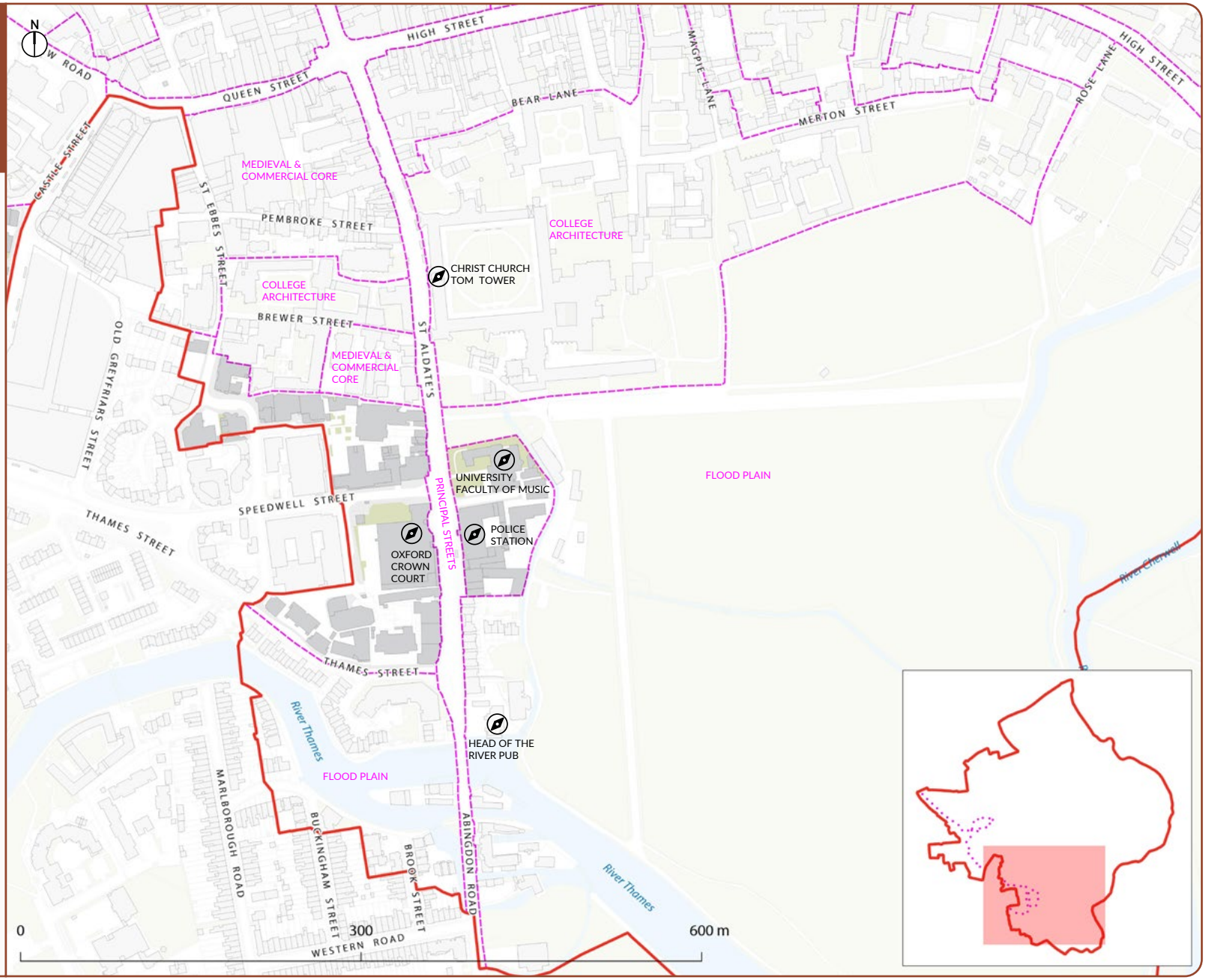


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Overview
Western Fringe

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- NAME: Neighbouring character zones
- Reference point



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6.2 History

6.2.1 Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman

- During these early periods, this area consisted of swamps and meadows in the Thames floodplain.

6.2.2 Saxons

- This character zone lies just outside the walls of the Saxon burh.
- The Castle Mill Stream has prehistoric roots and was modified in Saxon times. The Wareham Stream of the Thames was most likely a Norman Mill back channel to feed the Castle mill, hence its alternative name, the backstream. Osney Island was thus formed, between the Mill Stream and the main channel of the Thames.
- The southern section of the character zone spans the route to the Saxon river crossing, a causeway which may have prehistoric origins (now St Aldate's).

6.2.3 Normans and Middle Ages

- The construction of the Castle over the late Saxon street grid on the west side of the city centre separated the western fringe from the main body of the town.
- Religious houses dominated the area south and west of the walled city, including Osney Abbey (an Augustinian priory), Rewley Abbey to the north-west (a Cistercian foundation), The Friars of the Sack in Paradise Square (given to the Franciscans in the 14th Century) and the largest Dominican friary outside London in St Ebbe's.
- The suburb of St Thomas developed from the twelfth century around the direct route between Osney Abbey and Oxford Castle, with a ribbon of development laid out along St Thomas' Street leading toward the parish church.
- Industries dependent on the Thames for transport, power and water developed in this area including mills, fishing, breweries, tanneries and timber yards.

6.2.4 Improving communications: New Road, Oxford Canal, Great Western Railway

- The Dissolution of the Monasteries permanently scarred the western and southern suburbs, leading to a period of decline.
- The New Road, a turnpike road, was built 1769–70 to improve communication to the west.
- The Oxford Canal was completed in 1790, with the opening of a two-fingered basin (the site of current Worcester Street car park and Nuffield College).
- Gloucester Green was the site of the City Gaol (built 1789) and subsequently the cattle market.
- The arrival of the Great Western Railway in 1845 further accelerated development with rows of workers' terraces and industries such as the gas works and breweries; it also made this area an important point of arrival on the edge of the city for many travellers.

6.2.5 Residential and commercial development

- Breweries were established in the post-medieval period, attracted to the area by the streams.
- The St. Ebbes suburb was developed for housing in the early 19th Century eradicating this part of the street plan around Paradise Square.
- Attempts were made to improve working-class housing in the overcrowded and insanitary St Thomas's area with the construction of the Christ Church



Christ Church model dwellings on Osney Lane

Model Dwellings in 1866 in The Hamel, and brick cottages along Osney Lane.

- This area also attracted larger-scale commercial developments in the early twentieth century, such as the Cantay Depositories on Park End Street (a furniture warehouse built between 1894–1909) and the Cooper's Marmalade Factory in 1909.

6.2.6 Redevelopment since 1930

- The Oxford Canal basin was abandoned and Nuffield College was built after the War on the coal wharf; the remainder of the basin was filled in and is now used as a car park.
- The lower section of St Aldate's was transformed by the construction of the large Morris car showroom in 1932 (now the Oxford Crown Court), the neo-Georgian Police Station (1936), and Sir Hubert Worthington's new premises for St Catherine's Society (now the University Faculty of Music): large-scale ashlar buildings which replaced the narrow plots and courtyards lining St Aldate's.
- St Ebbe's was comprehensively redeveloped after World War II, with a new street plan and new large-scale commercial, institutional and residential buildings.
- There was significant post-war slum clearance and redevelopment in St Thomas' in the 1930s, although the area retains the core of its medieval street pattern and grain of development.
- Gloucester Green was redeveloped between 1987–90, creating a new bus station, shops, offices and flats with space for an open-air market.
- Since c.2000, there have been new residential schemes, especially along the Castle Mill Stream, on old industrial sites such as the former Lion Brewery.
- Westgate, a substantial shopping centre outside the conservation area but with significant impact on its character and views, was built in 1970–72 and extensively remodelled and extended between 2016–17.



St Thomas' retains its medieval street pattern and grain of development, despite significant post-war development



Worcester Street car park on the site of the former canal basin

6.3 Character

6.3.1 Use and access

Historic urban characterisation

Theme 1: contrasts and complexity
Theme 2: university
Theme 8: commerce and retail
Theme 9: civic administration

- This character zone contains a greater variety of uses than other parts of the conservation area.
- Predominant uses are: residential, commercial and institutional (including County Council offices, the Crown Court and the police station).
- Other functions include retail and the University.



Gloucester Green, an architecturally spirited recent development with a vibrant open-air market, but can feel tucked away from the city

6.3.2 Streets and townscape

Topography

Historic urban characterisation

- Gently rising from the Northmoor gravel terrace to the second gravel terrace on which the Saxon and medieval town was laid out.



Albion Place, part of the comprehensive post-war development of St Ebbe's with residential and commercial buildings

Street pattern

Saxon and medieval streets; medieval plot boundaries

Theme 18: street layout of the Saxon burh
Theme 24: waterways

- The Western Fringe character zone has more variety in its street pattern than any other:
  - Saxon and medieval thoroughfares: for example the gently winding St Thomas' Street, and St Aldate's, largely straight and wide.
  - Along the Wareham and Castle Mill Streams, intimate paths, streets and rows, weaving back and forth across multiple bridges. Some of these routes are believed to be Saxon or medieval in original, though they are little understood. Notable is Fisher Row, originally home to fishermen in sixteenth century, joined by bargemen in the seventeenth century and after that canal boatmen.
  - Post-war streets and roads, set out for road traffic on grids, with sweeping corners and wide pavements, for example west of St Aldate's. These bear little or no relationship to the historic street pattern which they replaced.

Public spaces

- There are limited public spaces in this part of the city and those that do exist are mostly recent creations.
- The largest is Gloucester Green, which hosts a vibrant market but can feel somewhat tucked away from the city centre. On non-market days it can be a peaceful space to sit, with benches and mature trees, although clusters of commercial dustbins by Worcester Street are a detracting feature.
- The canal paths and small green swathes are valuable public spaces.
- Paradise Square is a designed space.

Plots and building lines

Medieval plot boundaries; Building lines and gaps

Theme 20 medieval plots

- Along the Castle Mill Stream and in St Thomas' Street there are surviving narrow medieval plots that are of historic importance and significance because they create a dense grain in the townscape.
- Elsewhere on St Aldates and to its west, there are large plots created in the second half of the twentieth century that frequently bear little relationship to what they replaced. Remnants of important boundaries and post-medieval buildings do remain.
- The disparate character of the area prevents a definitive description of the building lines. The historic building line is often to the back of pavement, but some post-war developments are set back, sometimes with a poorly resolved relationship to the street.

Street materials and street furniture

Street materials

Theme 14: materials

- There are few survivals of historic street materials and furniture in this character zone; where they do survive, or have been reinstated, they contribute to the area's historic significance.
- St. Thomas Street- blue clay pavers and granite setts

6.3.3 Green space

This zone is unusual in that most of the green space is publicly accessible, and linear. Despite this, it tends not to be as obvious or well used as some other parts of the conservation area. Realising its potential would be an enhancement.

Public access to green spaces

Theme 25: green space

- The principal green spaces here are along the Wareham and Castle Mill Streams and the Oxford Canal. These have a very intimate and peaceful quality, defined by the relationship to the water and absence of vehicles.
- Green space along the streams consists of pockets and slips of trees and shrubs in combination with buildings, experienced on footpaths and crossing bridges.
- The canal towpaths are green, wooded and quiet, so that the rest of the city is all but invisible and inaudible. This is precious and fragile.
- The churchyard of St Thomas' provides a small area of publicly accessible green space.
- Paradise Square is one of the few relatively formal public green spaces in the city, and a tranquil haven in set within post-war blocks.



Industrial blue clay pavers and granite setts in St Thomas' contribute to its historic character



The Oxford Canal (left) and Castle Mill Stream (right) provide a peaceful green space



Paradise Square provides a welcome area of public space amongst the post-war blocks surrounding it

6.3.4 Buildings

Designations

Theme 14: materials
Theme 15: architectural details
Theme 7: a service economy
Theme 17: post-war architecture

Typologies

There is a distinctive mixture of building types, quite different to much of the conservation area:

- Surviving remnants of the historic extra-mural settlement of St Thomas', most notably St Thomas' Church, Vicarage and the former grammar school (Combe House).
- Former industrial buildings, e.g. the Lion Brewery (now residential apartments) and Malthouse (now University Estates Office).
- Model nineteenth-century social housing on Osney Lane and the Hamel.
- Late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century commercial buildings, such as the Cooper's Marmalade Factory and the Cantay Depositories.
- Civic buildings (predominantly twentieth-century), such as the Crown Court, County Council offices and Police Station.
- Bridges (low, small, often with iron components) and canal infrastructure.
- Post-war residential development.



The Crown Court, part of a cluster of civic buildings in the south part of St Aldate's

Materials

- In this zone brick is the predominant historic material – a red brick until the middle of the nineteenth century, and thereafter including buffs. From the second half of the century bricks are no longer handmade.
- Surviving pre-Victorian buildings including St Thomas' Church, Lodge and Combe House are constructed of limestone; this was also the material of choice for 1930s development along St Aldate's, including the Crown Court (former Morris showroom), Police Court and Oxford Faculty of Music buildings. The use of limestone for these twentieth-century buildings provides a sense of continuity with the college and civic buildings further along St. Aldates which are also of limestone.
- Post-war buildings use many materials, including concrete frames and panels, and more recently a variety of cladding materials, including a revival of brick.



Surviving late-Victorian terraced housing along Osney Lane in red brick

6.3.5 Positive contributors

Positive contributors

- The uses and typologies of the buildings within the Western Fringe Character Zone are very varied, and this is also true of those unlisted buildings and structures that combine positively to the character and appearance of the zone.
- Much of the zone's traditional housing and surviving nineteenth and twentieth-century buildings and structures contribute positively to its character, illustrating its industrial history and the transformative impact of transport innovations (the canal and subsequently the railway) on this part of the city.
- There are a number of fine examples of Victorian and early twentieth century unlisted buildings within the character zone. One example is the late-Victorian commercial terrace on the south side of Frideswide Square, which is well preserved, including some original shopfronts, and has a lively roofline with a characterful central turret.
- Another is St Thomas's School on Osney Lane, an attractive polychrome brick building with railings with Art Nouveau detailing.
- The former Morris showrooms, Police Station and Faculty of Music, form a cluster of limestone buildings along St Aldate's and reflect the area's commercial, civic and institutional development in the 1930s.
- Whilst much of the twentieth-century development within the character zone is unsympathetic, there are some successful examples that contribute positively to the character and appearance of the area such as the University Catholic Chaplaincy, which harmonises successfully with surrounding buildings in Rose lane through the sympathetic use of brick and its stepped design.
- Where historic surfaces have survived or are reinstated they contribute positively to the character of the area, such as the blue clay pavers and granite setts on St. Thomas' Street, Tidmarsh Lane and Paradise Street.



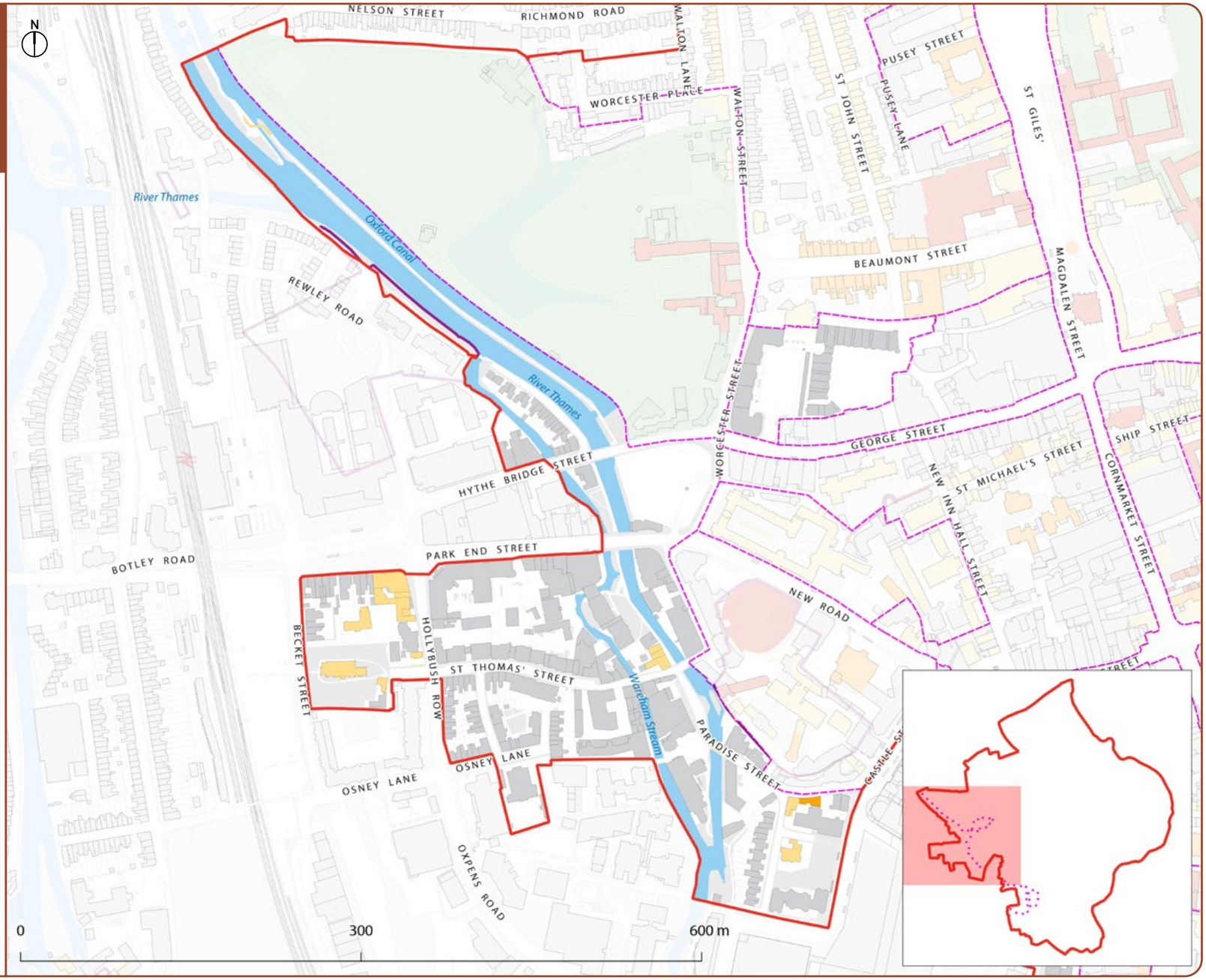
St Thomas' School on Osney Lane is a characterful design in polychromatic brick



Surviving fragments of Oxford's industrial past, including the former Lion Brewery

Designations
Western Fringe

Key
- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- Grade I listed
- Grade II* listed
- Grade II listed
- Scheduled monument
- Registered parks and gardens

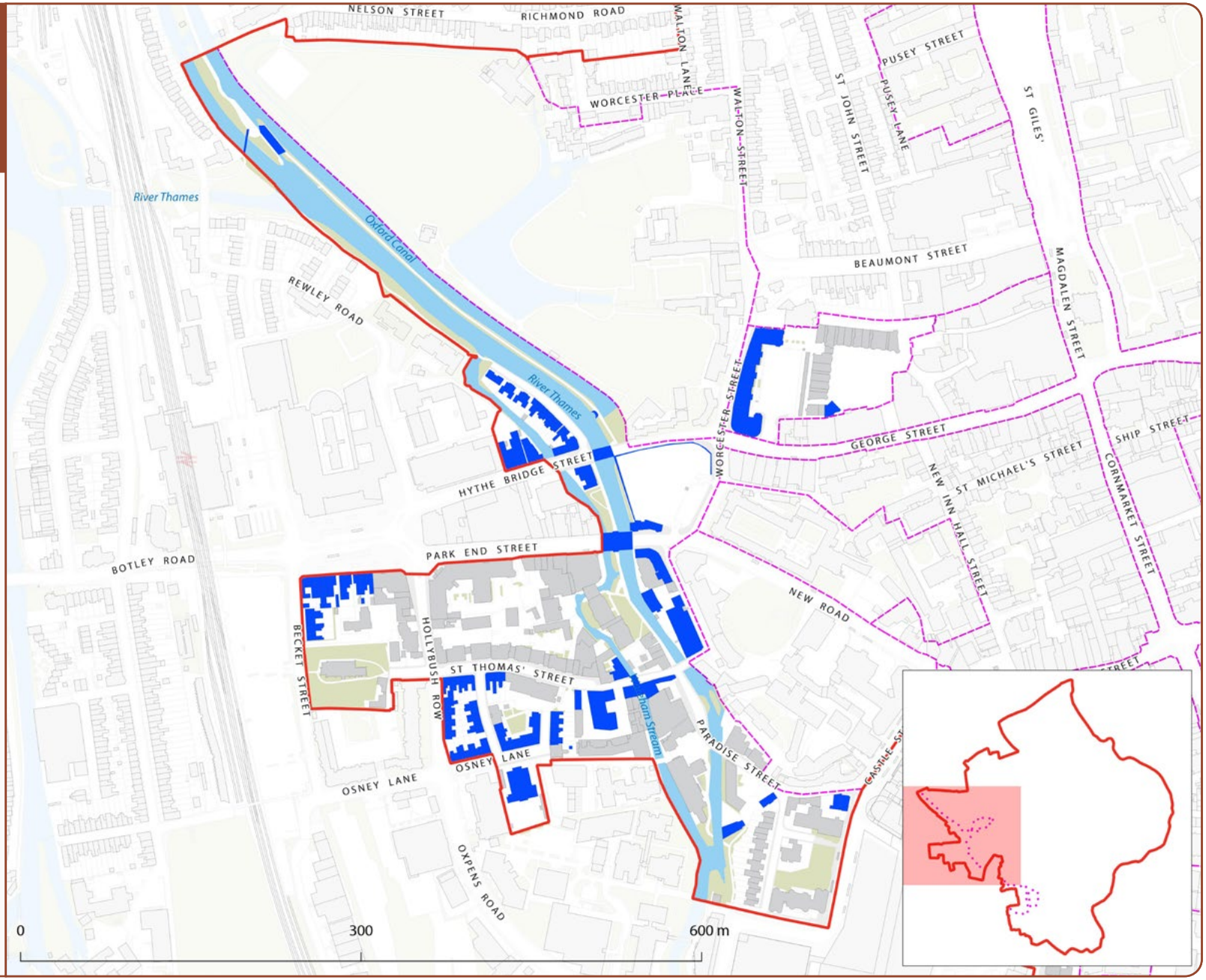


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Positive contributors
Western Fringe

Key

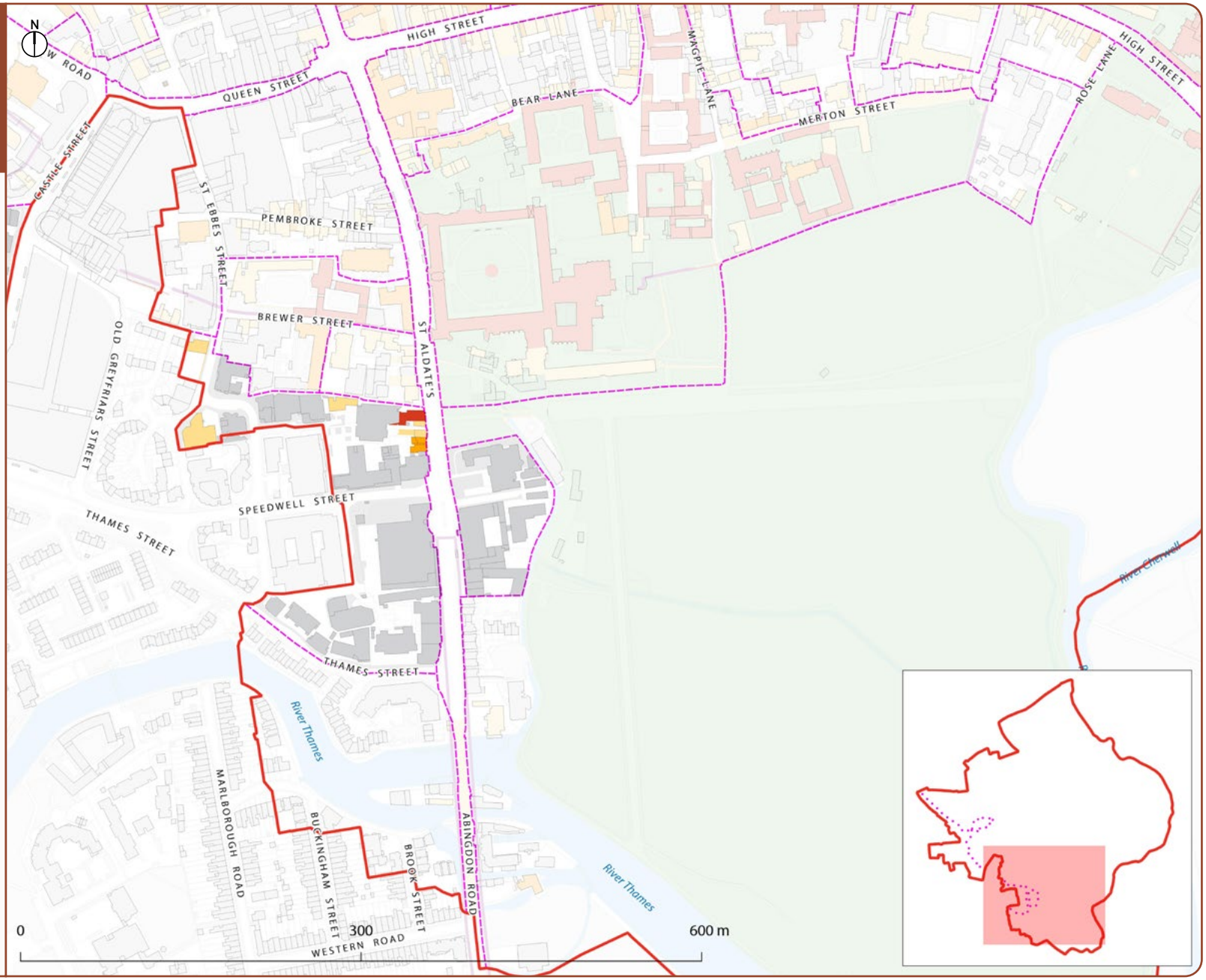
- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- Positive contributor (non-designated)



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Designations
Western Fringe

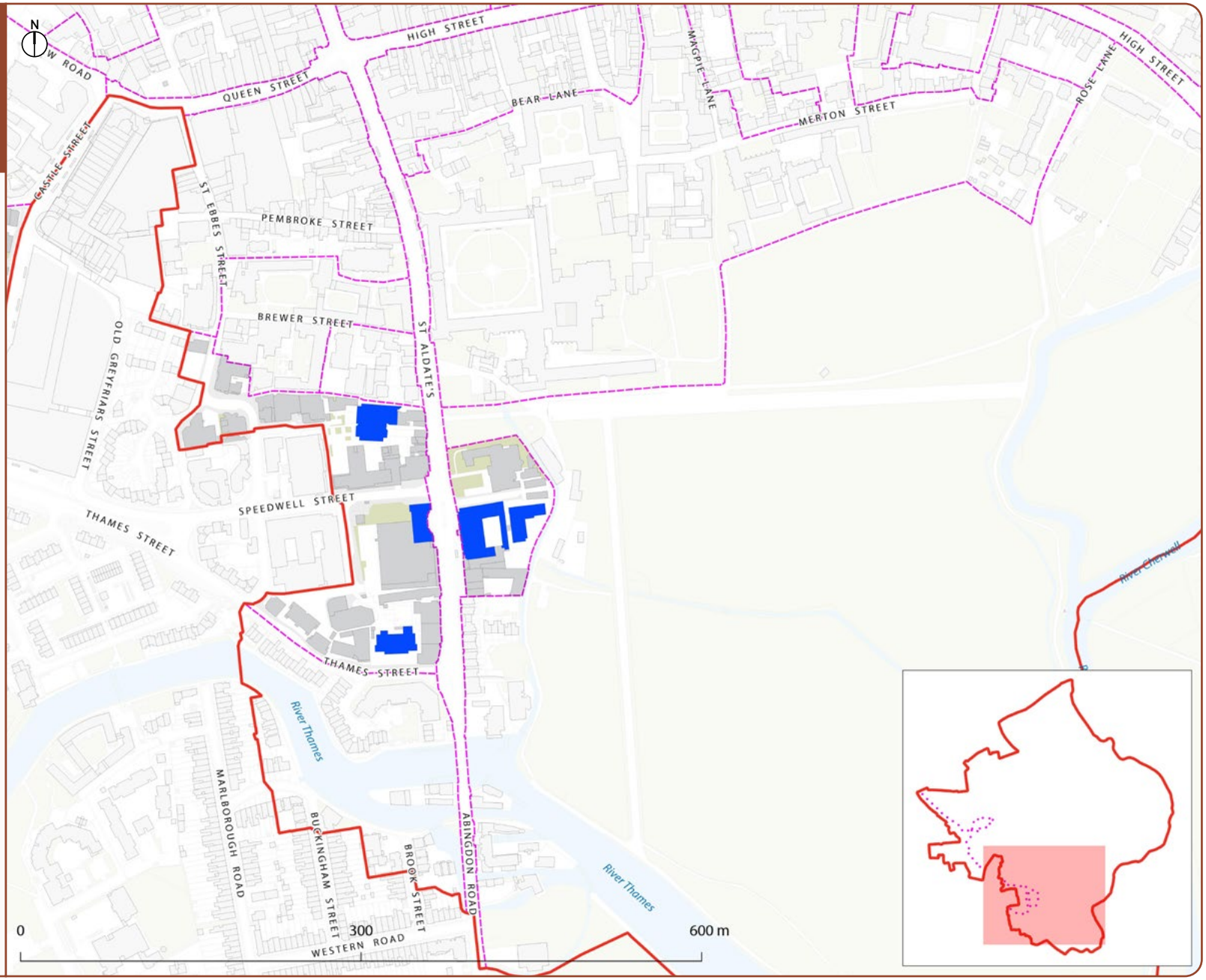
Key
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Positive contributors
Western Fringe

Key
- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- Positive contributors (non-designated)



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6.3.6 Roofscape

Roofscape

Theme 21: roofscape, skyline and landmarks

Building heights

- Historically, buildings in this zone were largely two to three storeys, though industrial building such as breweries might have higher brewing towers and chimneys.
- Post-war redevelopment is typically four storeys.

Roofscape and skyline

- Traditional roofscapes have pitched roofs and chimneys, creating a lively skyline.
- Post-war development is normally characterised by flat roofs without vertical accents, which does not result in a varied or lively roofscape or skyline.
- Historic industrial chimneys such as those at the Jam Factory and Lion Brewery pop up in street and roof level views, helping to reinforce the area's former industrial character.

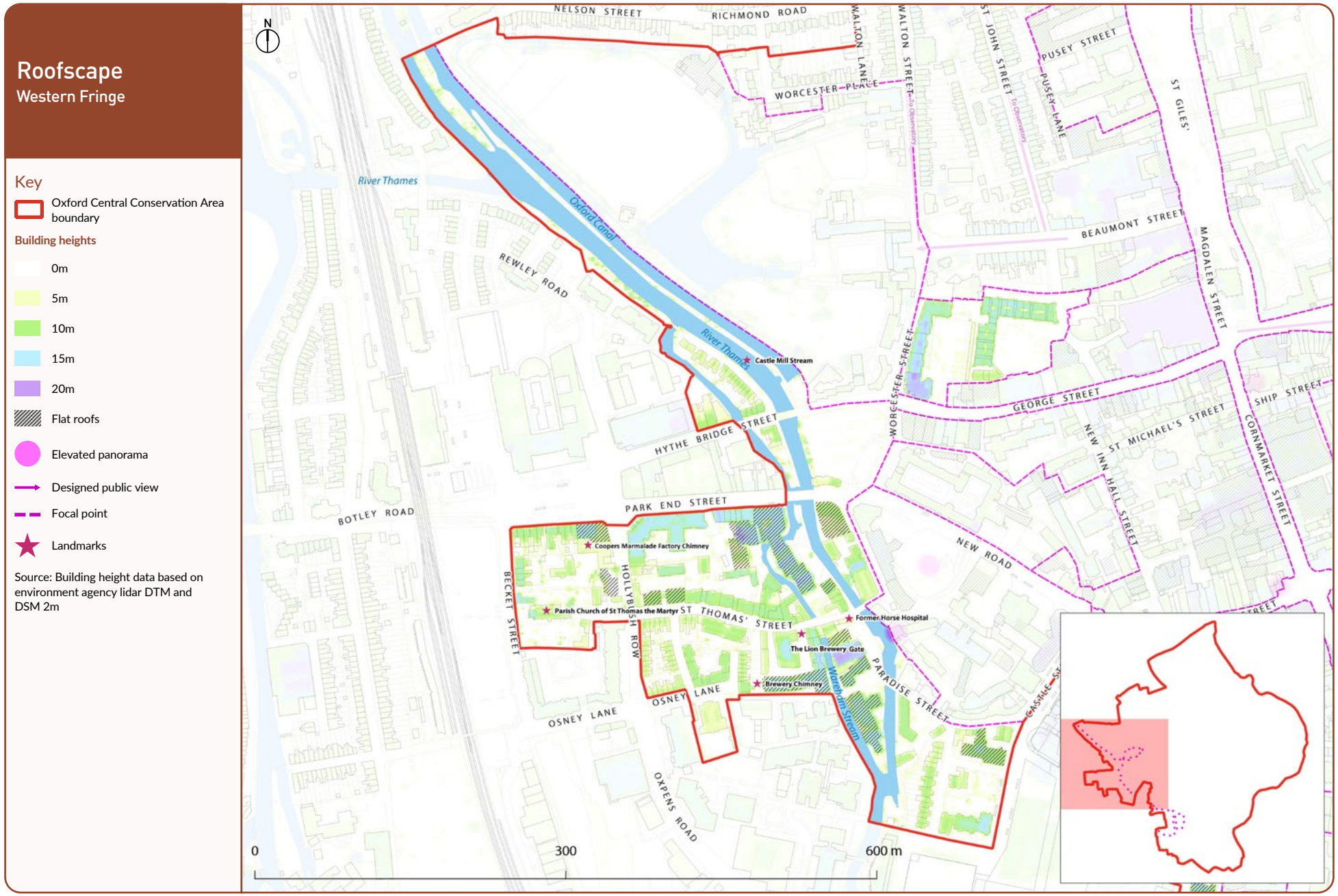


The University Catholic Chaplaincy harmonises successfully with surrounding buildings in Rose Lane through its sympathetic use of brick and stepped-out design



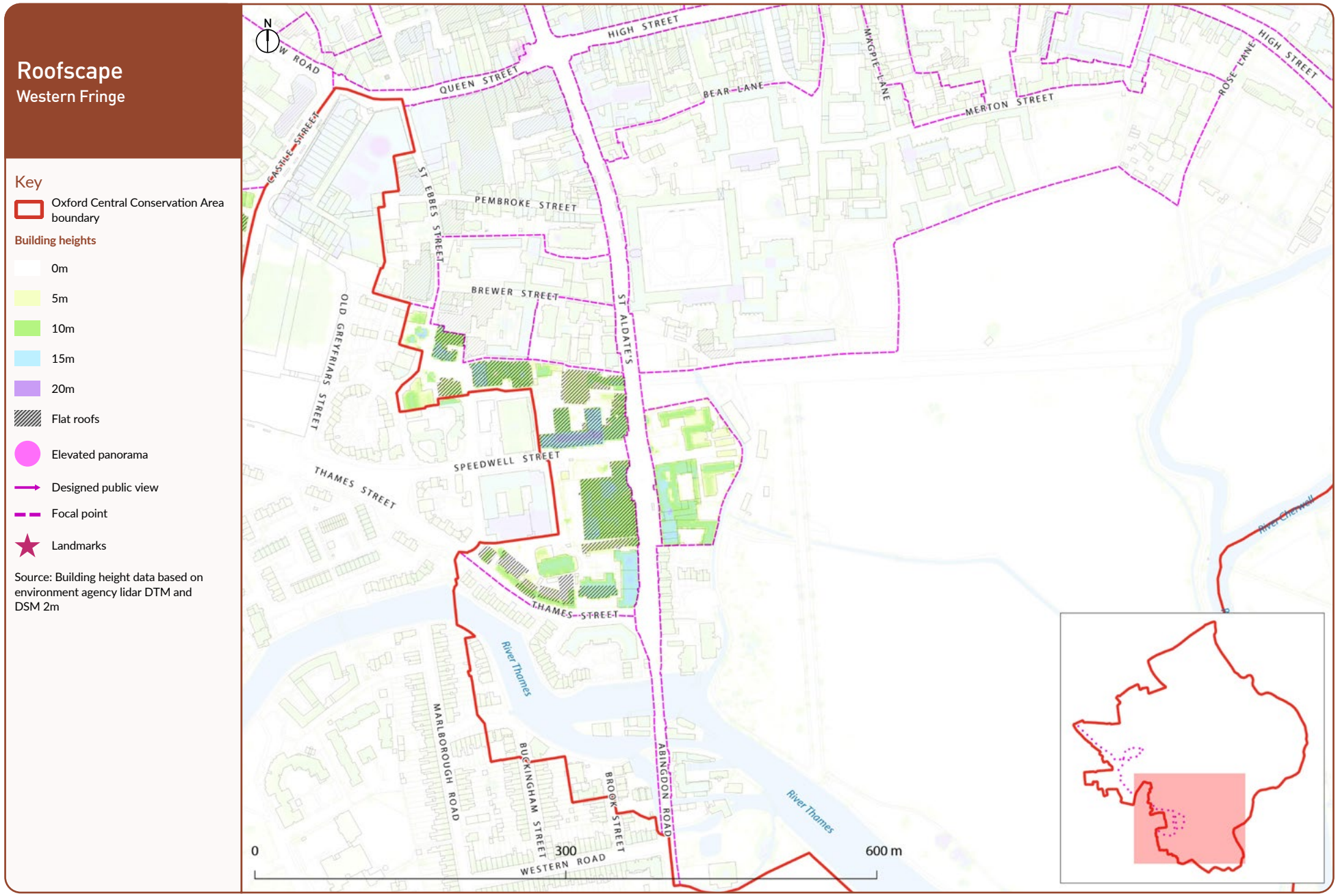
Large scale post-war development at the south end of St Aldate's has eradicated its historic character

Roofscape
Western Fringe



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Roofscape
Western Fringe



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6.3.7 Landmarks



Roofscape



Theme 21: roofscape, skyline and landmarks
Theme 22: views in the conservation area
Theme 27: setting of the conservation area

Landmarks within the character zone

- Castle Mill Stream and bridges.
- Oxford Canal.
- Former Horse hospital, St Thomas' Street.
- Lion Brewery chimney, St Thomas' Street.
- Lion Brewery Gate, St Thomas' Street.
- Cooper's Marmalade Factory chimney (now the Jam Factory), Park End Street.
- St Thomas' Church, Becket Street.

Landmarks outside the character zone

- Tom Tower, Christ Church College.
- Town Hall, St. Aldates
- Castle motte, Oxford Castle.
- St George's Tower, Oxford Castle.
- County Hall, New Road.
- Nuffield College, New Road.
- Folly Bridge over the Thames, Abingdon Road.
- Said Business School Tower, Frideswide Square

6.3.8 Views

- Unfolding and glimpsed views along the footpaths, alleys and little streets beside the streams and the canal are charming and reveal the very different character of this part of the character area.
- The numerous bridges provide excellent vantage points.
- Views up St Aldate's: frame the landmark buildings towards the northern end of the street, such as Tom Tower and the Town Hall.
- Unfolding views down St Thomas' Encapsulate the distinctive character of St Thomas': former industrial buildings and modest residential terraces, terminating in views of the medieval church.
- Glimpsed views: of St George's Tower from St Thomas' Street.

6.3.9 Movement and activity



Theme 26: tranquillity

Traffic

- The volume of traffic on streets in this zone varies. Some have low levels of traffic whereas others, such as Thames Street and St Aldate's are very busy.
- There is a steady stream of buses entering and exiting the bus station by Gloucester Green.
- Park End Street and Frideswide Square is busy with traffic, especially buses, coming into the city centre from the west, and cars heading towards the Westgate Centre from the west of the city.

Cycling and Pedestrian

- This zone contains attractive paths, especially along the streams and the canal, although pedestrians can come into conflict with swift-moving cycles along the relatively narrow canal towpath.
- Walking many streets is pleasant because of the low traffic levels.
- Frideswide Square and Hythe Bridge Street see high volumes of pedestrian and cyclists as part of the main route between the train station and the city centre. The latter can become very congested, due to sections of narrow pavements where the road crosses the river.

Activity

- Most of the streets in this zone are very quiet, and many of the post-war interventions have inactive frontages which can make the streetscape feel lifeless.
- There are a range of evening economy uses located in this area, this leads to significant numbers of people in the adjacent public spaces late into the night.

6.3.10 Archaeology

Theme 12: archaeology

Oxford Archaeological Action Plan further detail and guidance

- This character zone comprises parts of the medieval suburb of St Thomas and has been well-studied archaeologically, demonstrating good preservation of medieval and post-medieval remains despite later impacts from post-medieval brewery complexes and localised modern re-development.
- The area along the Castle Mill Stream is rich in archaeological evidence for industrial uses and processes and river-borne trade since the Middle Ages.
- Notable assets within the zone include the site of the Bronze Age (Beaker period) activity area at the Hamel, buried palaeochannels of the Thames and later man-made alterations to these water courses, the medieval church of St Thomas the Martyr, the site of the Friars of the Sack, parts of the Castle bailey ditch, the site of the Castle mill, parts of the Royalist Civil War defences, post-medieval brewery complexes and tenements plots associated with settlement from at least the Norman period onwards and including distinctive post-medieval river and canal boating communities.
- The site of Rewley Abbey partly adjoins this zone and has been investigated since the 1960s; this has yielded significant information about this important monastic foundation.
- The below-ground archaeological potential of the zone to reveal evidence of past occupation is considered to be fairly high.



The historic suburb of St Thomas' has a good preservation of medieval and post-medieval remains



Surviving fragment of Rewley Abbey by the Oxford Canal, an important monastic foundation

6.4 Useful documents and further guidance

Refer to the following Historic Urban Character Assessments on the Oxford City Council website for detailed accounts of the character zone. The key plan shows their boundaries.

- HUCA 3 Osney Island: Transport and Business.
- HUCA 5 The Western Suburb: Residential.
- HUCA 6 The Western Suburb: Factories and Offices
- HUCA 7 The Western Suburb: Castle Mill Stream and Fisher Row.
- HUCA 8 Thames Crossing and Floodplain: Thames Waterfront.
- HUCA 9 Thames Crossing and Floodplain: St Aldate's.
- HUCA 10 Thames Crossing and Floodplain: Colleges and University.
- HUCA 11 Thames Crossing and Floodplain: Westgate Centre.
- HUCA 14 Castle and Periphery: Former Canal Basin.
- HUCA 24 Worcester College and Gloucester Green: Gloucester Green.
- HUCA 27 St Giles': Western Frontage Commercial.

Other useful documents include:

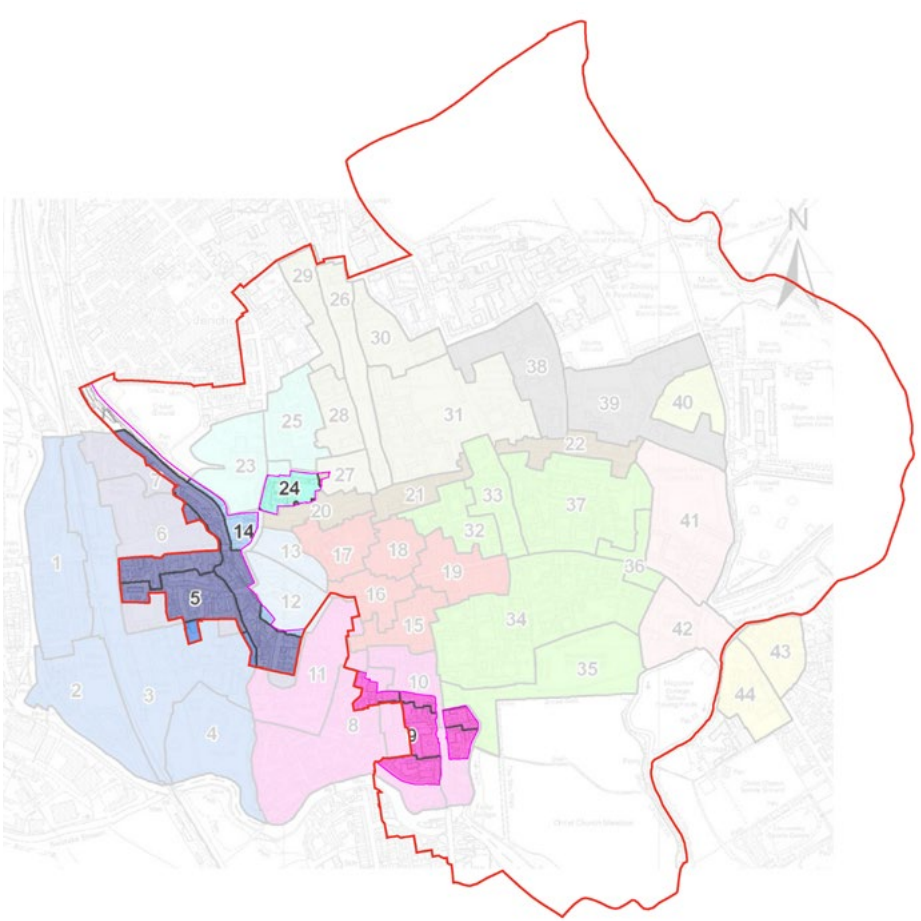
A study of the historic built environment of the West End of Oxford, Oxfordshire Buildings Record, January 2006

Castle, Canal, College, Oxford Preservation Trust, Oxfordshire County Council and Nuffield College, 2007

Oxford Heritage Walks Book 4: On foot from Paradise Street to Sheepwash, Malcolm Graham, 2016

Oxford's Working Past – walking tours of Victorian and Edwardian industrial buildings, Liz Woolley, 2013

West Oxford Character Statement and Heritage Assets Survey: Part 1 St Ebbe's Suburb and Osney Island, Oxford City Council, 2013



Character Zone Assessment 7

Nineteenth-century Residential Quarter

Oxford Central (City & University) **Conservation Area**

Zone includes:

- Beaumont Street, St John Street and Beaumont Buildings
- Little Clarendon Street and Wellington Square
- Walton Street, Walton Lane, Worcester Place





Nineteenth-century Residential Quarter Character Zone
Oxford Central (City & University) Conservation Area

The Conservation Area Appraisal divides the Conservation Area into nine character zones. This chapter contains a detailed analysis of one of these: the Nineteenth-century Residential Quarter Character Zone. It can be used to understand the history, character and appearance of this part of the Conservation Area, and to inform planning application and development proposals.

This Conservation Area Appraisal aims to promote and support developments that are in keeping with, or enhance, the character of the Central (City & University) Conservation Area. This section is concerned with the reasons for designation, defining the qualities that make up its special interest, character and appearance. It is not possible to describe every facet of the area that contributes positively to its character. The omission of any reference to a particular building, feature, space or positive contributor should not be taken to imply that it is of no interest. Additional positive contributors will be identified through the development management process.

Contents

7.1	An overview of character and special interest
7.2	A brief history
7.3	An analysis of character (considering use, street and townscape, green space, buildings, roofscape, landmarks and views, movement and activity, archaeology)
7.4	Further useful information

Icons

Throughout, icons direct you to relevant sections of the Conservation Area Appraisal and links to other relevant documents.

- relevant layers of the conservation area map / GIS mapping
- relevant character themes in the appraisal
- relevant sections in the appraisal
- suggestions for further reading
- information relevant for planning
- sources of further information

Maps

The maps below are extracts from the Conservation Area mapping set, which consists of layers of useful information ranging from archaeology and historic maps to green space, listed buildings and street materials. Please note that maps may not show the full extent of listed buildings and do not show curtilage-listed structures. If you are unsure if your building is listed check the National Heritage List for England and seek the advice of the City Council's Urban Design and Heritage Team.

7.1 Overview of character and significance

This area north of the medieval city and west of St Giles' was not extensively developed until the early nineteenth century, when St John's College laid out Beaumont Street and St John Street behind handsome Bath stone façades, with Walton Street and Beaumont Buildings as secondary streets. Development continued with the Ashmolean Museum, the Randolph Hotel and Wellington Square. The planned Georgian streets are unique in Oxford, and today are mixed with post-war University buildings to create a distinctive character.

The following aspects of the zone are of considerable historical, architectural, townscape or social significance and contribute positively to the character and appearance of the conservation area:

- The mixture of calm and handsome residential streets and their modest mews, combined with the University presence, which gives this zone its distinctive character.
- Little Clarendon Street, with its independent businesses in modest nineteenth- and twentieth-century buildings, which is valued as a small local social and commercial hub.
- The Oxford Playhouse and Ashmolean Museum on Beaumont Street, which are cultural destinations that contribute strongly to the character and dynamism of the area.
- The Randolph Hotel, which brings a note of Gothic exuberance to the otherwise calm and classical streetscape in this area.

Some aspects of the character zone harm the character and appearance of the area:

- Inactive frontages of post-war University buildings.
- Change of use from residential to professional and institutional, which undermines historic character.
- Loss of historic architectural detailing including historic ironwork, railings and timber doors.
- The weight of through-traffic on Beaumont Street and Walton Street



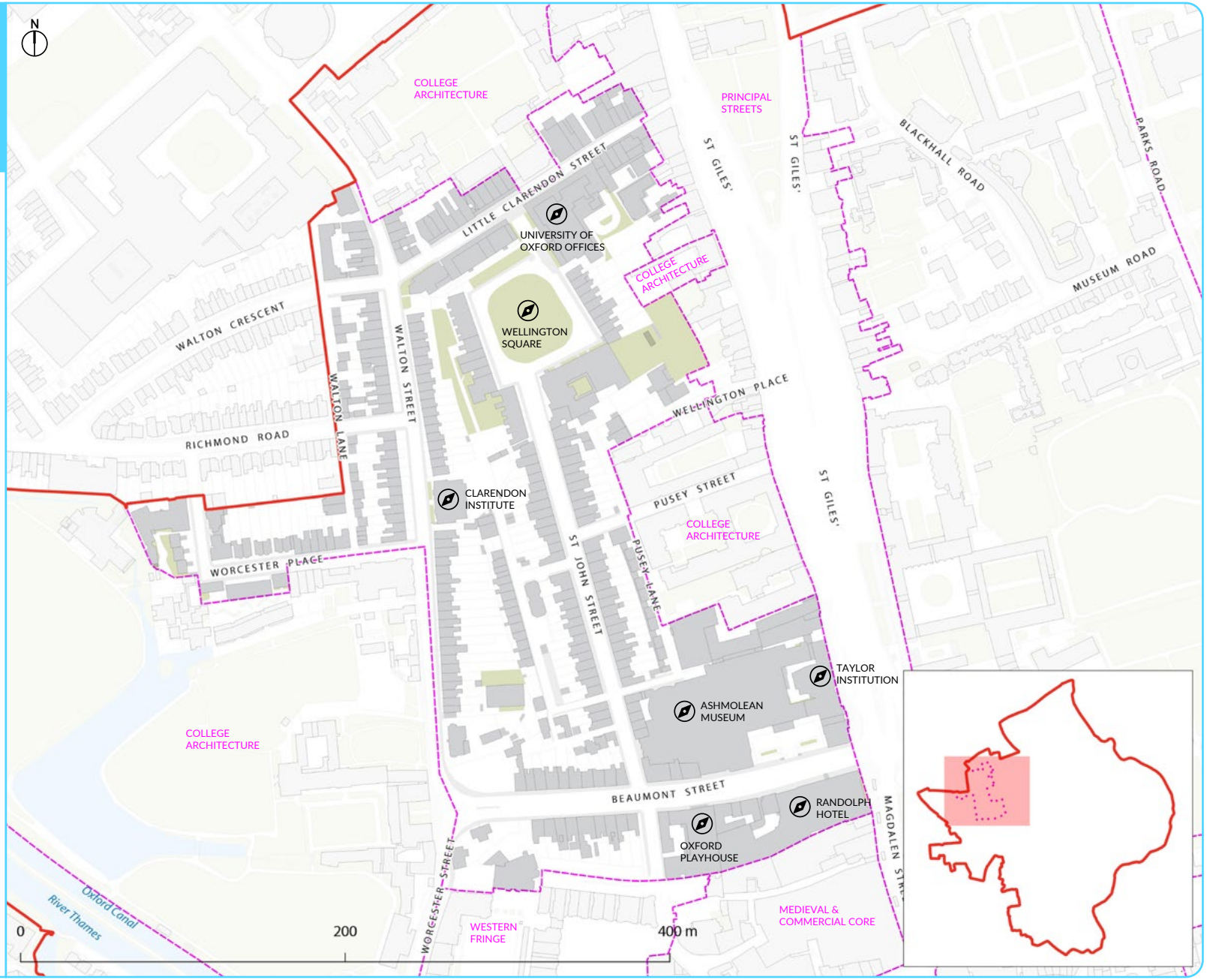
Well preserved Victorian residential terrace on Walton Street

Overview

Nineteenth-century Residential Quarter

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- NAME Neighbouring character zones
- Reference point



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7.2 History

7.2.1 Middle Ages

- During the medieval - early modern period, the land making up this character zone was part of the parish of St Mary Magdalen.
- The land to the west of the suburb lining St Giles' was occupied from the early twelfth century by the walled precinct of the royal residence of Beaumont Palace (used en route to the royal hunting lodge at Woodstock).
- Beaumont Palace was later granted to the Carmelite White Friars (the last fragments were demolished in the early nineteenth century).

7.2.2 Georgian development

- Post medieval development began with the erection of a workhouse on part of the Palace site, but started in earnest when Beaumont Street and St John Street were laid out as a planned development between 1822–37 on land owned by St John's College. Speculative developers bought plots, but their plans had to be approved by the college, ensuring a consistency of front façade design and materials.
- At the same time, more modest brick-built terraces were laid out by St John's College along Beaumont Buildings and the west side of Walton Street for 'superior artisans'. Houses on Walton Street were provided with small front gardens, as the college anticipated that likely owners would want to be able to grow things for themselves.
- All the houses in Beaumont Street, St John Street and Walton Street were provided with back lanes or mews with coach houses or cart sheds.

7.2.3 Victorian growth

- Expanding collections prompted the construction in 1841-45 of a new Ashmolean Museum on Beaumont Street to designs by C. R. Cockerell. The Building is now listed at Grade I.
- North of St John Street a larger Workhouse was built, but the site was sold in the 1860s to the University, which undertook the speculative development of Wellington Square (completed 1874) and the east side of Walton Street.
- The Randolph Hotel was completed in 1864 on a site opposite the Ashmolean Museum in an exuberant pointed Gothic style to designs by William Wilkinson, who also designed many buildings in North Oxford.
- Beyond, Little Clarendon Street emerged haphazardly as modest local shopping district, the north side mostly completed by 1850.

7.2.4 University replanning

- The Oxford Playhouse was inserted into the south side of Beaumont Street in 1938 on land leased by St John's College, sensitively designed in Bath Stone by Edward Maufe to harmonise with the surrounding terraces.
- When the 99-year leases around Wellington Square fell in, the University commissioned Sir Leslie Martin to prepare a masterplan for the comprehensive redevelopment of the area.
- The first phase comprising the University Offices and graduate accommodation on the north side of Wellington Square was completed in 1974, but the remainder was not implemented.
- University development continued in the early twenty-first century with the construction of the Sackler Library in 2001, designed by Adam Architecture as a research library for Classics and Archaeology. This was tucked behind the Ashmolean Museum and the terraces on the east side of St John Street.



Ashmolean Museum by C. R. Cockerell, 1841-45

7.3 Character

7.3.1 Use and access

1876 1st Edition OS; Historic urban characterisation

Theme 11: living

- Although designed as a residential quarter, over the last century and especially since the Second World War the character of the area has become increasingly institutional, especially around Wellington Square, which has been largely colonised by University departments e.g. Rewley House (the Department of Continuing Education) on the south side of the square.
- Residential use continues in Walton Street and Beaumont Buildings, but many houses on Beaumont Street have been turned over to professional or institutional use. Beaumont Street also hosts important cultural, education and leisure uses, such as the Oxford Playhouse, Ashmolean Museum, Taylor Institution and Sackler Library, and the Randolph Hotel.
- There is historic commercial use along Little Clarendon Street.



Shops and restaurants along Little Clarendon Street



University buildings on the south side of Little Clarendon Street. Only part of Sir Leslie Martin's comprehensive masterplan was realised.

7.3.2 Streets and townscape

Topography

Topography

Theme 23: topography and geology

- Largely flat, on the top of the terrace on which Oxford is built.

Street pattern

Building lines and gaps; Saxon and medieval streets; 1876 1st Edition OS

- Unusually for the Conservation Area, a number of the streets in this character zone are planned and straight. Combined with the flat topography and development close to or on the pavement line, in streets such as Beaumont Street and St John Street, the resultant character is highly urban and enclosed.
- Part of the early nineteenth-century development is another distinctive characteristic: mews, which are rare in Oxford. They are characterised by modest garages and service buildings lining quiet streets. Some of these garages are increasingly being replaced with small mews houses, which is eroding the rear service yard character.
- Wellington Square is the only planned residential square in the conservation area, and unique in the city.
- Pavements are fairly narrow, especially along Little Clarendon Street where there is a fairly high footfall and pedestrians frequently spill into the street.

Plots and building line

Medieval plot boundaries; Building lines and gaps; 1876 1st Edition OS

- Plot sizes in the character zone are mostly small and regular, reflecting their nineteenth-century residential origins.
- This footprint is interrupted at the east end of Beaumont Street where plots have been amalgamated to create the larger-scale developments of the Ashmolean Museum and Randolph Hotel, and at the north end of Wellington Square for late twentieth-century developments for the University.
- Beaumont Street and St John Street are tightly built against the back of the pavement. The Ashmolean Museum breaks the prevailing building line: the main range of the building is set back for architectural effect behind a generous forecourt bounded by a balustraded stone plinth.
- In Wellington Square and the east side of Walton Street properties are set back behind a shallow area with railings. Plots are mostly enclosed either by dwarf brick walls or railings.
- Houses on the west side of Walton Street are unusual in the conservation area for having small front gardens, bounded by railings set on dwarf brick walls.
- High stone walls enclose private college spaces at Worcester College along Walton Street and at St Cross College along Pusey Lane and Pusey Street.

Pavements and street materials

Street materials

Theme 14: materials

- Street materials are mostly modern with tarmac roads and concrete pavers or tarmac pavements, some in relatively poor condition.
- There is some survival of older materials, notably surviving stone setts on the mews lanes of Walton Lane and Pusey Lane, York stone paving on St John Street, iron kerbs in St John Street, and red granite setts at the corner of Pusey Lane.
- Some of these streets have been poorly patched with tarmac, e.g. on Pusey Lane, harming their historic character.
- There is a good survival of cast iron cellar grilles on St John Street.
- Some roads retain stone setts as gutters and there may be more surviving under later road surfaces.

Street furniture

- Street lights are mostly modern and of a variety of designs, including traditional lantern-style standards and modern columns.
- There are some surviving historic lamp standards in Wellington Square produced by the Eagle ironworks (Lucy & Co.) and Dean and Co.
- Some lanterns are attached to buildings, reducing street clutter and forming an attractive feature.

7.3.3 Green space

Public access to green spaces

Theme 25: green space

- There are very few public spaces: the most significant is the University-owned gardens in Wellington Square, which are open to the public during daylight hours, and the Ashmolean forecourt, which provides welcome off-street benches where the public can rest and linger.
- Houses on west side of Walton Street are unique in the conservation area in having front gardens, which provide an attractive green setting for the modest terraces.
- Most of the nineteenth-century houses are built up to the street line, but the townscape is frequently softened by glimpses of planting and trees in private gardens, such as the garden of 24 Beaumont Street on the corner with Walton Street.
- Several mature trees provide important softening to the streetscape, for example, at the corner of Walton Street and Little Clarendon Street, and between Little Clarendon Street and Wellington Square.
- Some streets are too narrow for street trees, and they would be unsuitable for the highly ordered and architectural character of St John Street and Beaumont Street.



Walton Street front gardens that are unique in the conservation area



Wellington Square gardens, one of the few areas of publicly accessible green space in this part of the city centre

7.3.4 Buildings

Designations; 1876 1st Edition OS

Theme 14: materials
Theme 15: architectural details
Theme 17: post-war architecture

Terraced housing

- The characteristic building type in the character zone is terraced housing, which display a variety of materials depending on the date and status of the street: Bath stone facing is used on the primary streets, Beaumont Street and St John Street, with red brick with variegated brick details on secondary streets such as the early nineteenth-century terraces on Walton Street and Beaumont Buildings.
- Victorian buildings, such as those around Wellington Square, typically use buff brick with stone dressings, with bay windows giving variety to the front elevations.
- Painted render is also used on terraces at the south end of Walton Street.

Public buildings

- This zone also contains public buildings which occupy larger sites and are often more dominant in the streetscape:
  - The Ashmolean Museum and Taylor Institution, built of Bath Stone with Portland Stone pilasters to harmonise with the surrounding terraces, is one of the most important examples of museum architecture of the nineteenth century.
  - The characterful Randolph Hotel introduces an exuberant Gothic flourish to this zone, with lively details including oriels, bays, gables, dormers, prominent chimneys and cast iron balconies.
- Later infill buildings are more restrained:
  - The Oxford Playhouse has an unassuming façade of Bath stone which was sensitively designed to harmonise with the surrounding terraces.
  - The Sackler Library was constructed of Bath stone and designed in a Classical style sympathetic to the Georgian terraces and adjacent Ashmolean Museum.

Architectural details

- There is generally a good survival of historic features, including timber sash windows, timber doors and doorcases, fanlights and cast iron boot-scrapers along St John Street and handsome cast iron balconies along Beaumont Street and Walton Street.
- Evidence of window shutters of various types, both external blinds or shutters and internal shutters particularly on St John Street are of exceptional interest where evidence of these survives. Particularly unusual are examples of upward external sash shutters, located in a box under the sill, with sash cords to pulleys.
- There is also a good survival of historic railings along Walton Street, some of which may be original to the development of the street. Some handsome examples of Victorian cast iron railings survive, especially to houses around Wellington Square.
- Modern iron railings in an appropriate design have been installed around the central garden in Wellington Square.
- Little Clarendon Street also retains some interesting traditional shopfronts.

Post-war University buildings

- The concrete framed modernist buildings constructed north of Wellington Square by the University, to Leslie Martin's masterplan.
- Reflecting the era, function and architectural philosophy in which they were conceived, they introduced a new scale, a new emphasis on horizontally, new forms of planning via deck access, new materials in the predominant use of concrete, and a new flat, roofscape without chimneys.
- The colonnades along Little Clarendon Street provide a sense of intimacy to the streetscape and as such make an important contribution to the character of this part of the area.

7.3.5 Positive contributors

Positive contributors

The majority of unlisted buildings within this character zone make a positive contribution to the character of the zone because of their age, use, materials and scale.

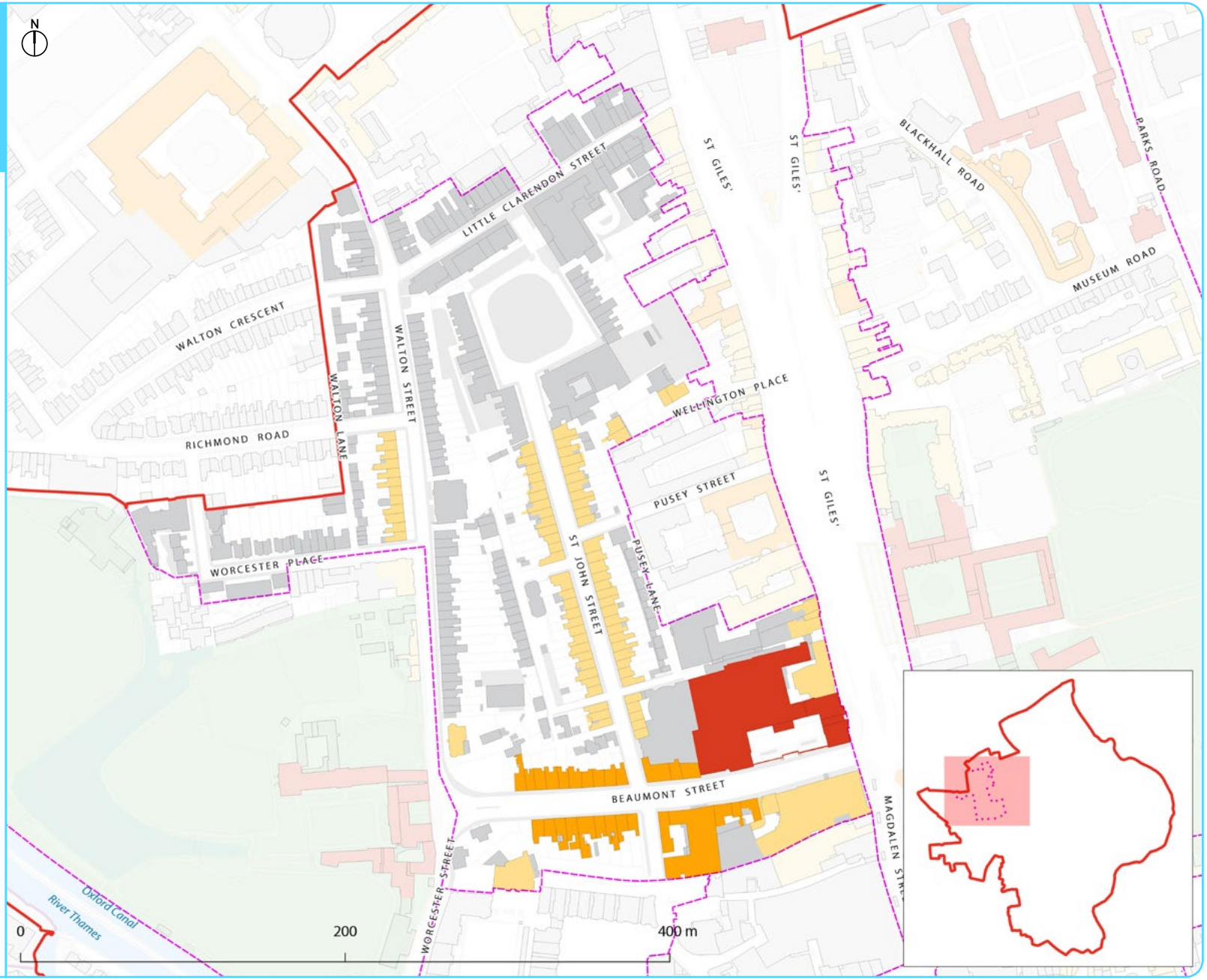
- Wellington Square is a rare example of a garden square in Oxford and is enclosed on two sides by three storey Victorian terraces, articulated in buff brick and stone dressings. Although largely in university use, the residential appearance of the terraces contribute to the character of the zone.
- Rewley House holds the third side of Wellington Square, with gables and bays facing the road, also in the Victorian gothic style.
- Walton Street is lined by nineteenth-century terraces ranging from two to three storeys in brick or render. The rhythm of frontages, divided by brick chimneys, and the strong building line give consistency and formality to the street.
- The Clarendon Insitute an attractive Victorian landmark on Walton Street of red brick, stone and shaped gables which breaks the regularity of the terraces.
- Away from the main routes, Beaumont Buildings and Worcester Place are attractive examples of Victorian terraces designed for artisans and workers, featuring a regular fenestration and patterned brickwork.
- Shops on Little Clarendon Street give an intimate scale to the street at two to three storeys, with some sensitively designed shopfronts and a lively roofscape of gables and pitches.
- Throughout the character zone, historic streetlamps and street materials enhance the appearance of the zone and aid interpretation of the historic buildings in their setting.



The Clarendon Institute, an attractive Victorian landmark on Walton Street

Designations
Nineteenth-century Residential Quarter

Key
- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- Grade I listed
- Grade II* listed
- Grade II listed
- Scheduled monument
- Registered parks and gardens



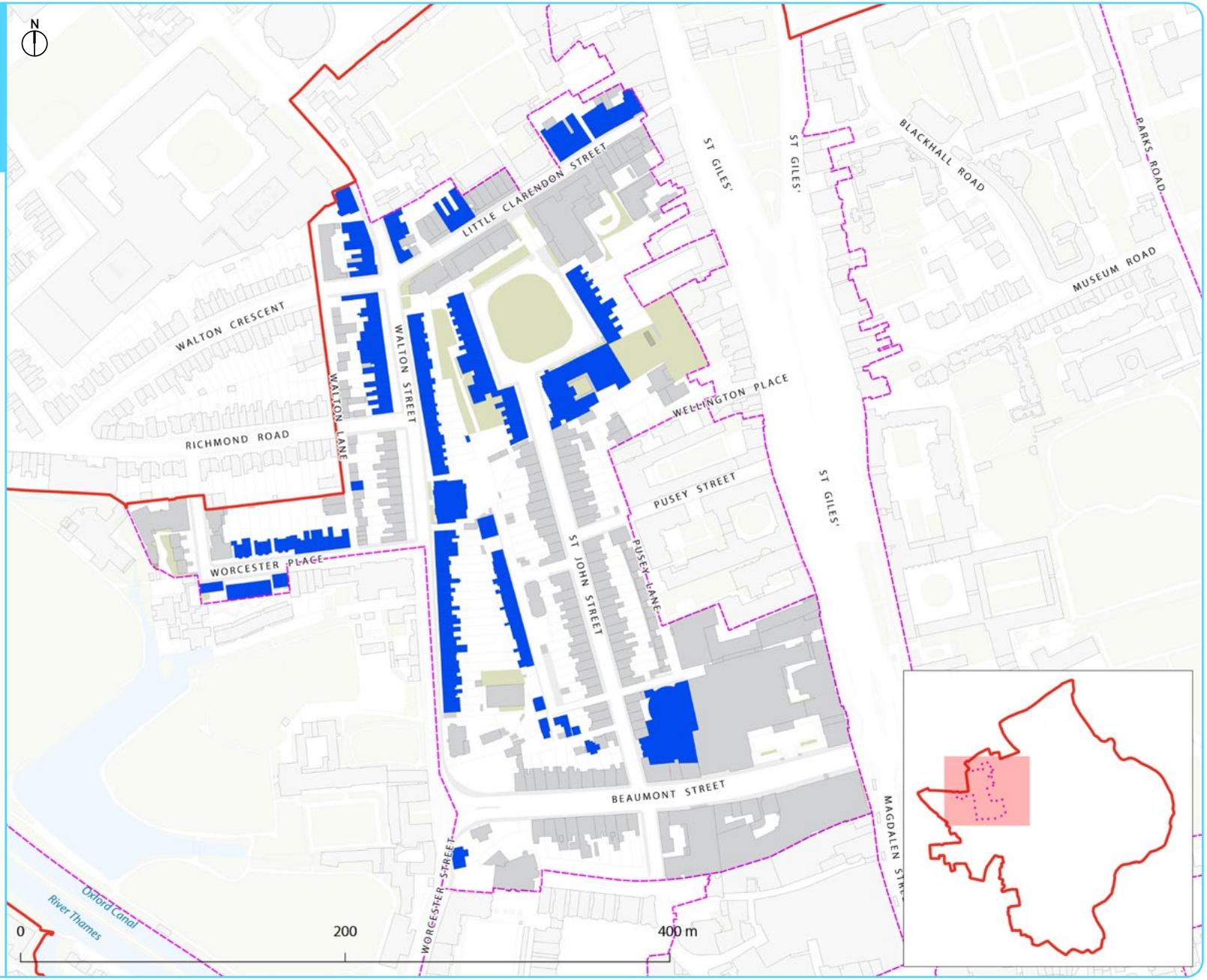
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Positive contributors

Nineteenth-century Residential Quarter

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- Positive contributors (non-designated)



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7.3.6 Roofscape

Roofscape

Theme 21: roofscape, skyline and landmarks

Building heights

- Building heights range from two to three storeys in most streets, often with dormers above. Many terraces also have basements.
- Public buildings such as the Ashmolean Museum have storey heights of generous dimensions, reflecting their function.
- Mews streets are a contrastingly modest with single storey garage buildings, sometimes with flats over.

Roofscape and skyline

- There is a lively and varied treatment of roofscape across the character zone.
- Common characteristics include pitched roofs (slate and tile), dormers and gables, and chimneys.
- The terraces in Beaumont Street, St John's Street, Walton Street and Wellington Square are unusual for the conservation area because they were mostly designed to have a uniform appearance, with roofs punctuated by a regular rhythm of party walls and chimney stacks.
- The exceptions to the prevailing character are the post-war buildings along Little Clarendon Street with long flat roof profiles.



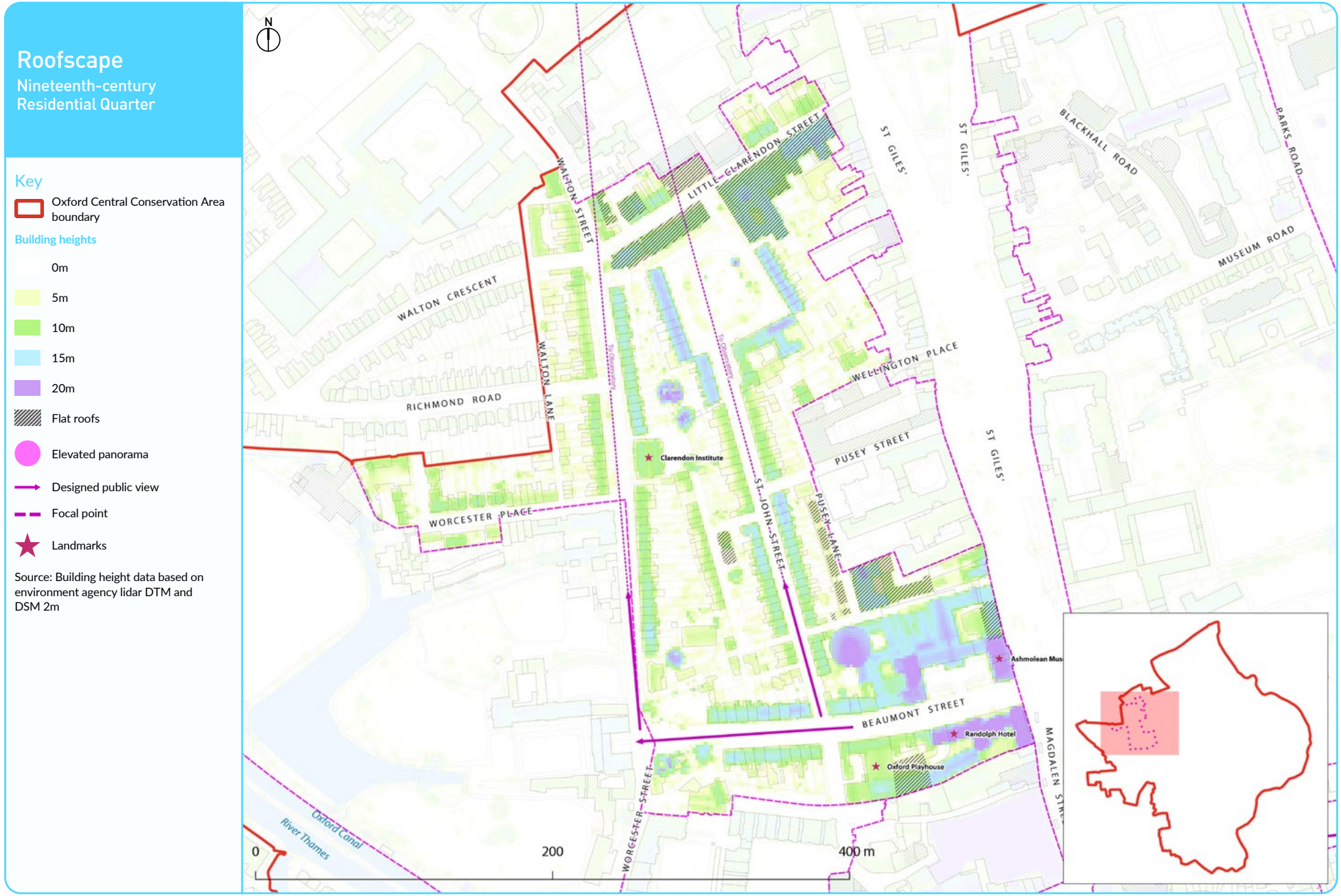
Varied roofscape along Worcester Place



Regular roofscape on the terraced houses of Wellington Square

Roofscape

Nineteenth-century Residential Quarter



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7.3.7 Landmarks

Roofscape

Theme 21: roofscape, skyline and landmarks
Theme 22: views in the conservation area
Theme 27: setting of the conservation area

Landmarks within the character zone

- The Clarendon Institute, Walton Street.
- The Ashmolean Museum, Beaumont Street.
- Randolph Hotel, Beaumont Street.
- Oxford Playhouse, Beaumont Street.

Landmarks outside the character zone

- Former Ruskin College (now Exeter College's Cohen Quadrangle), Walton Street.
- Wesley Memorial Methodist Church, New Inn Hall Street.
- Worcester College, Walton Street.
- Martyrs' Memorial, St Giles'.

7.3.8 Views

Designed views:

- The character zone is unusual in the conservation area for containing several streets with designed views.
- Beaumont Street was laid out to frame the front of Worcester College to the west.
- St John Street was aligned to terminate with a view of the Observatory to the north (now partially obscured by mature trees in Wellington Square and buildings on the north side of Wellington Square and Little Clarendon Street).
- There is also a designed view of the Observatory turret from the south end of Walton Street; the height of houses in Walton Street was restricted to ensure that the view of the meridian line between the Observatory and Worcester College was uninterrupted.

Unfolding views:

- Experienced progressing northward along Walton Street and continuing into the adjacent Jericho Conservation Area.

7.3.9 Movement and activity

Theme 26: tranquillity

Traffic

- The character of streets is affected by whether or not they form a through-route for traffic. Beaumont Street and Walton Street are heavily trafficked with queuing vehicles, which is harmful to their character and appearance and the setting of the listed buildings lining the streets.
- The setting of the Ashmolean Museum is harmed by the weight of traffic on the adjoining streets, including waiting buses and coaches.
- Little Clarendon Street is one-way but has a regular stream of traffic moving along it. Other streets, such as the mews, are quieter access roads.
- Most streets have controlled street parking but the streetscape is not overly dominated by parked cars.

Pedestrians and cycling

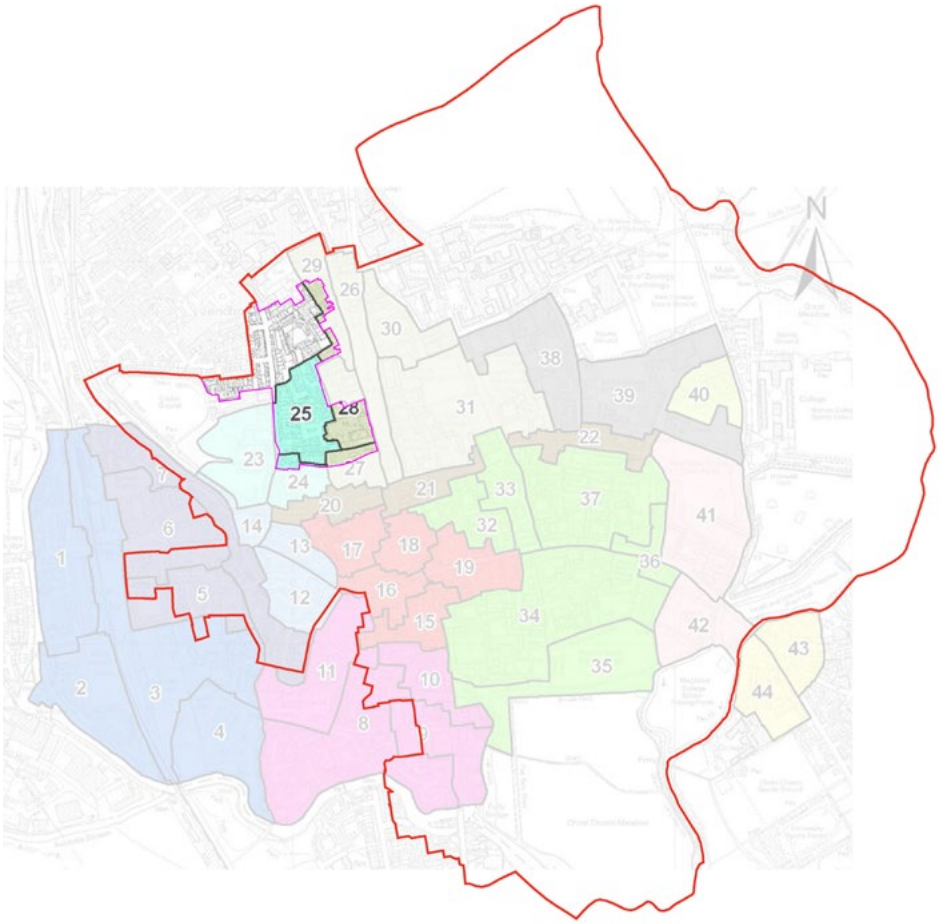
- There is a regular flow of pedestrians along most of the streets, although Wellington Square is noticeably quieter.
- There are numerous parked cycles but these are mostly in dedicated racks and do not impact on the pedestrian realm.

7.3.10 Archaeology

Theme 12: archaeology

Oxford Archaeological Action Plan further detail and guidance

- This character zone has the potential to preserve deposits relating to the extra-mural development of this area from medieval times, including evidence of the royal Beaumont Palace, subsequent monastic development and the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century workhouses.
- There may also be remains relating to the extensive Civil War defences that were constructed in this area.
- The below-ground archaeological potential of the zone is therefore considered to be high.



7.4 Useful documents and further guidance

Refer to the following Historic Urban Character Assessments on the Oxford City Council website for detailed accounts of the character zone. The key plan shows their boundaries.

- HUCA 24 Worcester College and Gloucester Green: Gloucester Green.
- HUCA 25 Worcester College and Gloucester Green: Beaumont Street and St John Street.
- HUCA 27 St Giles': Western Frontage Commercial.
- HUCA 28 St Giles': Ashmolean Museum and Colleges.
- HUCA 29 St Giles': Townhouses.

Other useful documents include:

Oxford Heritage Walks Book 1: On foot from Oxford Castle to St Giles', Malcolm Graham 2013

'Building on the Beaumonts: an Example of Early 19th-Century Housing Development' by A. Osmond in *Oxoniensia* XLIX (1984) pp. 301–326

North Oxford, Tanis Hinchcliffe (pub. Yale University Press, 1992)

Character Zone Assessment 8

University Science Area

Oxford Central (City & University) **Conservation Area**

Zone includes:

- The University Museum of Natural History
- Rhodes House
- The Dunn School of Pathology
- The Radcliffe Science Library





University Science Area Character Zone
Oxford Central (City & University) Conservation Area

The Conservation Area Appraisal divides the Conservation Area into nine character zones. This chapter contains a detailed analysis of one of these: the University Science Area Character Zone. It can be used to understand the history, character and appearance of this part of the Conservation Area, and to inform planning application and development proposals.

This Conservation Area Appraisal aims to promote and support developments that are in keeping with, or enhance, the character of the Central (City & University) Conservation Area. This section is concerned with the reasons for designation, defining the qualities that make up its special interest, character and appearance. It is not possible to describe every facet of the area that contributes positively to its character. The omission of any reference to a particular building, feature, space or positive contributor should not be taken to imply that it is of no interest. Additional positive contributors will be identified through the development management process.

Contents

8.1	An overview of character and special interest
8.2	A brief history
8.3	An analysis of character (considering use, street and townscape, green space, buildings, roofscape, landmarks and views, movement and activity, archaeology)
8.4	Further useful information

Icons

Throughout, icons direct you to relevant sections of the Conservation Area Appraisal and links to other relevant documents.


relevant layers of the conservation area map / GIS mapping


relevant character themes in the appraisal


relevant sections in the appraisal


suggestions for further reading


information relevant for planning


sources of further information

Maps

The maps below are extracts from the Conservation Area mapping set, which consists of layers of useful information ranging from archaeology and historic maps to green space, listed buildings and street materials. Please note that maps may not show the full extent of listed buildings and do not show curtilage-listed structures. If you are unsure if your building is listed check the National Heritage List for England and seek the advice of the City Council's Urban Design and Heritage Team.

8.1 Overview of character and significance

The University Science Area developed around the University Museum from the late-nineteenth century and is historically significant as the location for many important scientific discoveries. Its distinctive character as a self-contained campus is formed of large, densely clustered institutional buildings, occupying substantial plots. It contains buildings of a wide range of styles and materials, reflecting its piecemeal development over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The following aspects of the zone contribute positively to the character and appearance of the conservation area:

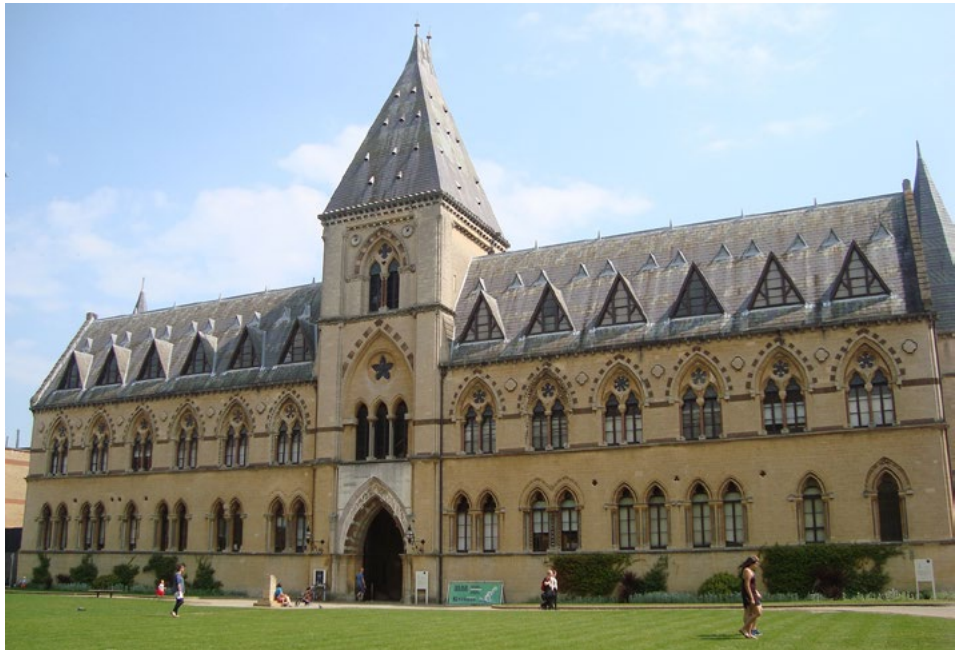
- The functional character and history of the area as a scientific campus of the world renowned University of Oxford is of special interest.
- The University Museum forms the core of the zone; it is a seminal building of the Gothic Revival and its roofscape is visible in long views from the city centre and the University Parks.
- Large, imposing institutional buildings along South Parks Road, which exhibit a wide range of twentieth and twenty-first century architectural styles and materials.
- The two substantial surviving Victorian villas on south side of South Parks Road, significant as the last survivors of the substantial Victorian and Edwardian villas which previously lined the road.
- The University Parks once covered the majority of the area and is an important backdrop to the buildings on the north side of South Parks Road
- A unique street pattern created through functional adaptation

The principal aspects of the zone that harm character and appearance are:

- Poorly designed plant equipment.
- Buildings whose materials, massing, architectural quality or contribution to townscape is not of comparable quality to other scientific buildings within the zone, including the buildings lining the south side of South Parks Road, which are overscaled and relate poorly to the street.
- The weight of traffic along Parks Road and South Parks Road detracts from the setting of the buildings.
- Unplanned/ad hoc use of spaces around buildings over time with poor quality public realms that impacts negatively on the setting of listed buildings.
- Infill buildings and extensions to older buildings on back plots that lack architectural interest.
- The narrowing of the pavement on the south side of Parks Road together with the interruption of the pavement on the north side by a series of crossovers, which makes it more challenging for pedestrians.

Opportunities for enhancement within the character zone include:

- The provision of further street trees, and improved management of the existing street trees which contribute positively to the character and appearance of the zone. This includes consideration of appropriate space and ground conditions for existing trees, and to allow for succession planting.
- Improving the spaces around and between buildings to define coherent boundaries and separation, to aid movement through the area.



The University Museum of Natural History forms the core of the Science Area

Overview
University Science Area

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- NAME Neighbouring character zones
- Reference point



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8.2 History

8.2.1 Prehistory

- Significant archaeological remains located near the Science Area include a late Neolithic henge at St John's College and a Bronze Age barrow in the University Parks.

8.2.2 University Museum

- The area remained fields and parkland on the edge of the city until the mid-Victorian period.
- University reform and academic development prompted the University to buy a large tract of land from Merton for the construction of a new scientific University Museum as a focus of scientific teaching.
- The building was completed in 1860 to designs by Benjamin Woodward, while the remainder of the land was laid out as the University Parks in the 1860s.
- Scientific departments were originally accommodated within the Museum complex, but there was soon pressure for more facilities, initially clustered around the Museum: the Clarendon Laboratory (1868), with the Old Observatory (Charles Barry Junior, 1875) set further back into the University Parks.

8.2.3 Expansion of Science quarter

- As the study of science at the University became more formalised in the early twentieth century, several substantial buildings and laboratories were constructed on the north side of South Parks Road: T G Jackson's Science Library (1901, Grade II listed) and Electrical Laboratory (1910), the Dyson Perrins Chemistry Laboratory (Paul Waterhouse, 1916, Grade II listed), and the neo-Georgian school of Pathology (E P Warren, 1926).
- Nine acres of the University Parks were allocated for expansion of the science area in 1924, and a masterplan by Southwell & Griffiths in 1934 led to comprehensive development on north side of South Parks Road, completed in 1950s.
- The architectural practice of Lanchester and Lodge were responsible for the majority of these buildings including Physical Chemistry (1939–40) and Inorganic Chemistry (1954–60) on South Parks Road, and the New Clarendon Laboratory (1948) and Physiology building (1949-53) at the north of the Science Quarter site.
- By the 1960s, the boundaries of the Science Quarter on the north side of South Parks Road had reached their present extent.
- Concerns about the construction of several tall buildings in the Science Area and the Keble Road triangle to the north-west led the City Council to draw up height guidelines for future buildings in 1962 to preserve the city's skyline, limiting the height of new development.
- Since then, further piecemeal development and infill buildings have densified the site.

8.2.4 South side of South Parks Road

- The south side of South Parks Road was lined with substantial Victorian brick villas set in detached plots and constructed from the 1860s onwards.
- Expansion of the science area south of the road began in the 1960s with the monumental Zoology and Psychology building (the now demolished Tinbergen Building) by Sir Leslie Martin, completed in 1970.
- All but two of the remaining Victorian villas lining the road were subsequently cleared to accommodate additional science buildings. A group of architecturally non-descript but for purpose buildings were erected in the urban block to the west of the Tinbergen site.

8.2.5 Twenty-first century development

- Development in the Science Area has continued in the first decades of the twenty-first century, with the new Biochemistry building by Hawkins\Brown winning a RIBA Regional Award in 2009.
- The Earth Sciences Building by Wilkinson Eyre opened in 2010.
- The new Beecroft Building (Department of Physics) designed by Hawkins\ Brown opened on a site opposite Keble College Chapel in 2018.
- Most recently, construction has begun on the Life and Mind Building on the site of the old Tinbergen Building.
- The Radcliffe Science Library buildings have also undergone comprehensive refurbishment to accommodate Reuben College, the University's youngest college, founded as Parks College in 2019.
- Because of the road layout and proximity to University Parks, there is no provision for lateral expansion of the University Science Area. Therefore, to retain the presence of experimental scientific research and teaching within the city centre, recent developments have had to adapt existing buildings and infill between plots.

8.3 Character

8.3.1 Use and access

Historic urban characterisation

Theme 2: university
Theme 3: association with historical figures

- The predominant uses in this character zone are institutional and educational, with the Science Area being home to world class, internationally significant research and development.
- The University Museum is open daily to the public, free of charge.

8.3.2 Streets and townscape

The Science Area is bounded by two main streets, Parks Road and South Parks Road, with smaller access routes within the Science Area complex.

Street pattern

Building lines and gaps; Saxon and medieval streets; Medieval plot boundaries

Theme 18: street layout of the Saxon burh

- Parks Road is medieval in origin, a straight, wide and tree-lined avenue leading towards North Oxford.
- South Parks Road originated as a track leading from Parks Road towards Holywell and followed the line of the Civil War fortifications.
- Within the Science Area, there are many smaller modern access roads, several controlled by vehicle barriers.

Public spaces

Theme 19: public space

- The only significant area of public space in this zone is the grassed forecourt of the University Museum, which provides an important area for visitors to rest, linger and enjoy their surroundings.
- The visible benefit of University Parks, where the borrowed landscape of significant tree canopies and setting give the possibility of long views from the Science Area.
- Spaces immediately around buildings where functions are encouraged to spill out, such as the cafe outside the Biochemistry Building (Biochem 1).

Plots and building line

- The Science Area is characterised by detached buildings with large floorplates, often set back from the street behind shallow verges and forecourts.
- The University Museum was set back for architectural effect behind a generous forecourt bounded by a low wall with handsome cast iron railings.
- Behind the main streets, infill buildings are squeezed together, arranged on a much disturbed loose grid pattern.



View looking east towards Department of Pharmacology off Mansfield Road (ADP, 1989), showing typical tarmac access road within the Science Area, controlled by vehicle barriers



The Science Area is characterised by large detached buildings behind shallow forecourts, such as the Forestry and Botany building on South Parks Road (Hubert Worthington, 1950)



The University Museum forecourt provides the main area of publicly accessible green space in this area



The streetscape of South Parks Road is softened by mature street trees and grassed verges

Pavements and street materials

Street materials

Theme 14: materials

- Within the Science Area complex, tarmac is the predominant street material.
- Street materials are mostly new, although on the north side of South Parks Road and St Cross Road there are surviving runs of granite sett gutters which contribute to historic character; more may survive under the tarmac surface.

Street furniture

- The street furniture in this zone is mostly modern.
- There is a surviving Victorian wall-mounted post box on the corner of South Parks Road and Parks Road, which has historic interest.
- A much adapted succession of masterplans based around significant building development, new buildings and adaptation of existing buildings is intended to address the piecemeal growth of public realm and to provide some sense to routes and activities through the area.



The Inorganic Chemistry building on South Parks Road is characteristic of Lanchester and Lodge's architecture in the Science Area, using rubble stone in a restrained neo-Georgian style



The Pathology Building on South Parks Road (E. P. Warren, 1926) is a large, detached institutional building of three generous stories, which is characteristic of this area

8.3.3 Green Space

Public access to green spaces

Theme 22: views in the conservation area

- The main area of accessible green space in this zone is the University Museum's large, grassed forecourt, which provides an important public amenity, but the zone is bounded by the University Parks – the largest area of accessible public green space in the city.
- The streetscape is softened by the mature trees lining Parks Road and South Parks Road, grassed verges and planted forecourts, a legacy of the area's previous inclusion within the University Parks.
- The avenue of lime trees on South Parks Road are a significant positive contributor. Planned succession is needed if this feature is to be preserved.



The Anatomy building (H W Moore, 1873) is a handsome late-Victorian building constructed of Bath stone ashlar and tucked behind the Pitt Rivers Museum

8.3.4 Buildings

Designations

Theme 14: materials
Theme 15: architectural details

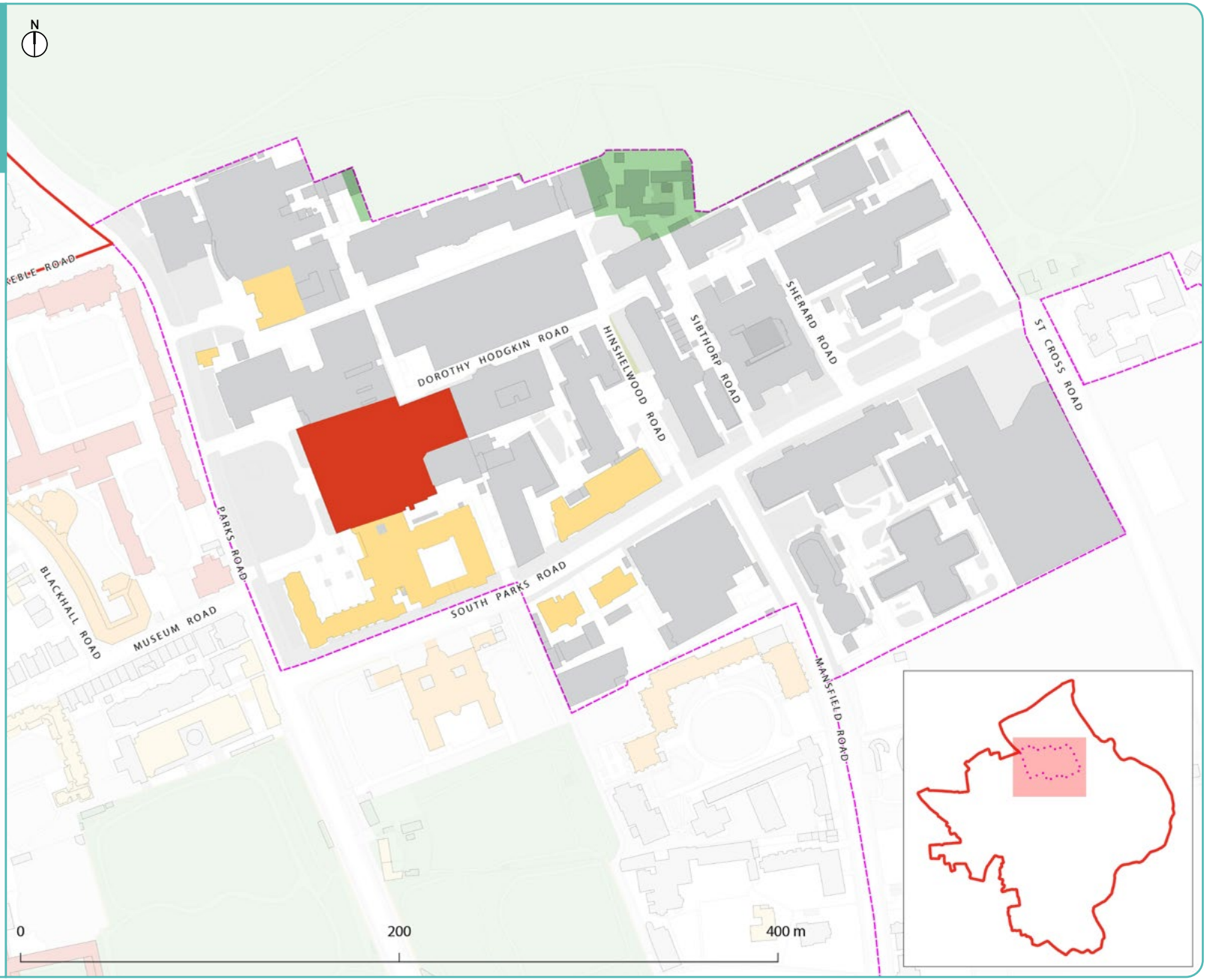
The Science Area contains buildings of a range of styles and materials, reflecting its piecemeal development over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Its overall character is of a series of large, detached but densely clustered institutional buildings, occupying substantial plots, which is distinctive to this part of the conservation area.



Some buildings do not contribute positively to the character of the zone because they relate poorly to the street

Designations
University Science Area

Key
- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- Grade I listed
- Grade II* listed
- Grade II listed
- Scheduled monument
- Registered parks and gardens



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Typology

- The University Museum forms the core of the zone; it is a seminal building of the Gothic Revival and one of the most important examples of museum architecture of the nineteenth century.
- The most architecturally distinguished buildings are grouped along the east side of Parks Road and the north side of South Parks Road; these are stylistically varied but the majority are designed in a restrained neo-Classical or neo-Georgian style.
- Some common characteristics can be identified:
  - Large, detached laboratory buildings.
  - Occupying substantial plots, but densely clustered.
  - Consistent height, generally three to four generous storeys.
- Behind the buildings fronting the main roads are later piecemeal and ad hoc buildings of more mixed quality.
- On the south side of South Parks Road, the two listed Victorian villas in yellow brick with red brick detailing are significant as the last survivors of the substantial domestic houses which originally lined the road.



The Physical Chemistry building (Lanchester and Lodge, 1940) has a horizontal roof profile which is characteristic of buildings in this zone; it has also had additional storeys added

Details

There is a wide range of materials, corresponding roughly to the decades when the buildings were designed: Bath stone ashlar; red brick; rubble stone; exposed concrete; buff and yellow brick; coloured cladding and glazing.



The Electrical Laboratory by T. G. Jackson, (1910, Grade II listed) has a pitched and tiled roof enlivened with pediments



Recent additions, such as the Biochemistry building (Hawkins Brown, 2008), now known as the Dorothy Crowfoot Hodgkin Building, contribute positively when they are sympathetic in scale to their surroundings and thoughtfully detailed

8.3.5 Positive contributors

Positive contributors

Buildings which contribute to character are sympathetic in scale, thoughtfully detailed and where relevant address the public streets successfully:

- Handsome late-Victorian buildings, such as the two-storey ashlar Anatomy building by H W Moore and the characterful and quirky Old Observatory by Charles Barry Junior.
- Stripped-back neo-Classical buildings designed by Lanchester and Lodge, using a restrained palette of rubble stone with stone dressings (popularised in Oxford with the construction of Rhodes House on the opposite side of South Parks Road) or buff brick: Inorganic Chemistry, Physical Chemistry, New Clarendon Laboratory and Physiology buildings.
- The Forestry and Botany building (1950) by Sir Hubert Worthington: also constructed of rubble stone with stone dressings, this relates well to other buildings he designed elsewhere in Oxford, such as the Faculty of Music on St Aldate's.
- Dunn School of Pathology at the east end of South Parks Road: this is a handsome neo-Georgian building in red brick with stone dressings and elegant curving double staircase to the front entrance.



The Dunn School of Pathology at the East end of South Parks Road (OCC)

Positive contributors
University Science Area

Key
- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- Positive contributor (non-designated)



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8.3.6 Roofscape

Roofscape

Theme 21: roofscape, skyline and landmarks

Building heights

- Building heights are mostly three or four storeys of generous dimensions, frequently over basements, reflecting internal laboratory use.
- Several buildings have had an additional storey added e.g. Physical Chemistry; Physiology.

Roofscape and skyline

- The majority of buildings in this zone have a horizontal roof profile with flat roofs or shallow pitched roofs concealed behind parapets. The exceptions are the pre-1900 buildings, most notably the University Museum, which has a dynamic roofscape with steeply pitched roof and central turret, which is visible in long views from the city centre.
- The surviving Victorian villas on the south side of South Parks Road also have pitched roofs with chimneys providing vertical accent, while T G Jackson's Electrical Laboratory has a pitched and tiled roof enlivened with pediments.
- The nature and use of buildings in the science area often require plant equipment that has had an effect on the roofscape. The most successful buildings have integrated this into the design, rather than being an add-on.



View looking south from the University Parks towards the Science Area, showing the new Beecroft Building on the right

8.3.7 Landmarks

Roofscape

Theme 21: roofscape, skyline and landmarks
Theme 22: views in the conservation area
Theme 27: setting of the conservation area

The neo-Gothic masterpiece of the University Museum is the defining landmark of this area and its central turret is visible in long views from the city centre.

Landmarks within the character zone

- University Museum, Parks Road.
- Radcliffe Science Library, Parks Road.
- Inorganic Chemistry Building, South Parks Road.
- Dyson Perrins Chemistry Laboratory, South Parks Road.
- Physical Chemistry Building, South Parks Road.
- Plant Sciences Building, South Parks Road.
- Dunn School of Pathology, South Parks Road.

Landmarks outside the character zone

- Keble College, Parks Road.
- Rhodes House, South Parks Road.

Roofscape
University Science Area



Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary

Building heights

- 0m
- 5m
- 10m
- 15m
- 20m
- Flat roofs
- Elevated panorama
- Designed public view
- Focal point
- Landmarks

Source: Building height data based on environment agency lidar DTM and DSM 2m

The Beecroft, Biochemistry and LAMB buildings have been updated from available planning information.

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8.3.8 Views

Unfolding views

- This zone is primarily experienced as a series of densely clustered, large institutional buildings in unfolding views along South Parks Road.

Designed views

- The large forecourt of the University Museum provides it with a generous setting in views from Parks Road, while the tower of the museum is visible in longer views and elevated viewing places such as the tower of St Mary's Church.

Views from University Parks

- The Science Area forms a dense layering of large buildings running around the southern and western boundaries of the Parks, with the turret of the University Museum forming a distinctive feature in long views from the north and east. Several of these building, such as the Sherrington Building, were designed with formal well detailed north elevations , designed to be viewed and enjoyed from the University Parks.

Other views

- Views of the area can be obtained from the east of the city, specifically, Mesopotamia, Marston and Headington Hill. There are also views from the north west corner of University Parks, along Mansfield Road and looking north across the sports and playing fields to the south of the area. The area can also be viewed from high points in the city centre.

8.3.9 Movement and activity



Theme 26: tranquillity

Although this zone is on the periphery of the city centre, it is a busy through-route to North Oxford.

Traffic

- South Parks Road forms provides an alternative route for traffic banned from the High Street during daylight hours.
- There is therefore a steady flow of vehicles along South Parks Road with frequent queues at the traffic lights with Parks Road.
- Delivery and service buildings move through the area at all times of the day throughout the week.

Cycling

- Cycle lanes are marked on South Parks Road and Parks Road, and a short stretch of off-road lane is provided by the University Museum.
- Both roads are busy cycle routes for cyclists travelling towards the University Parks and North Oxford.

Pedestrian

- There is a regular stream of pedestrians passing up Parks Road to visit the University Museum and University Parks.
- The forecourt of the Museum is often busy with school and tour groups.
- Further within the Science Area complex, footfall is far lower and the area feels quiet.

8.3.10 Archaeology

Theme 12: archaeology

Oxford Archaeological Action Plan further detail and guidance

- Until the nineteenth century, this character zone comprised fields and parkland on the edge of the city centre. The area is rich in archaeological remains that include Late Neolithic/early Bronze Age flat graves, barrows and monumental linear monuments, Iron Age and Roman settlement remains, a Roman cemetery and parts of the Royalist Civil War defences.
- The Science Area has been densely developed, which has caused some localised disturbance to the archaeological record, however presence of modern buildings cannot be interpreted as implying the removal of archaeological interest from the building footprint.
- Therefore the below-ground archaeological potential of the zone to reveal evidence of past occupation is considered to be variable in areas which have already been developed, but high in the few undeveloped areas. For example the site of the Beecroft Building (2018) yielded evidence of Roman occupation, medieval pottery, and remains of the Civil War defences.

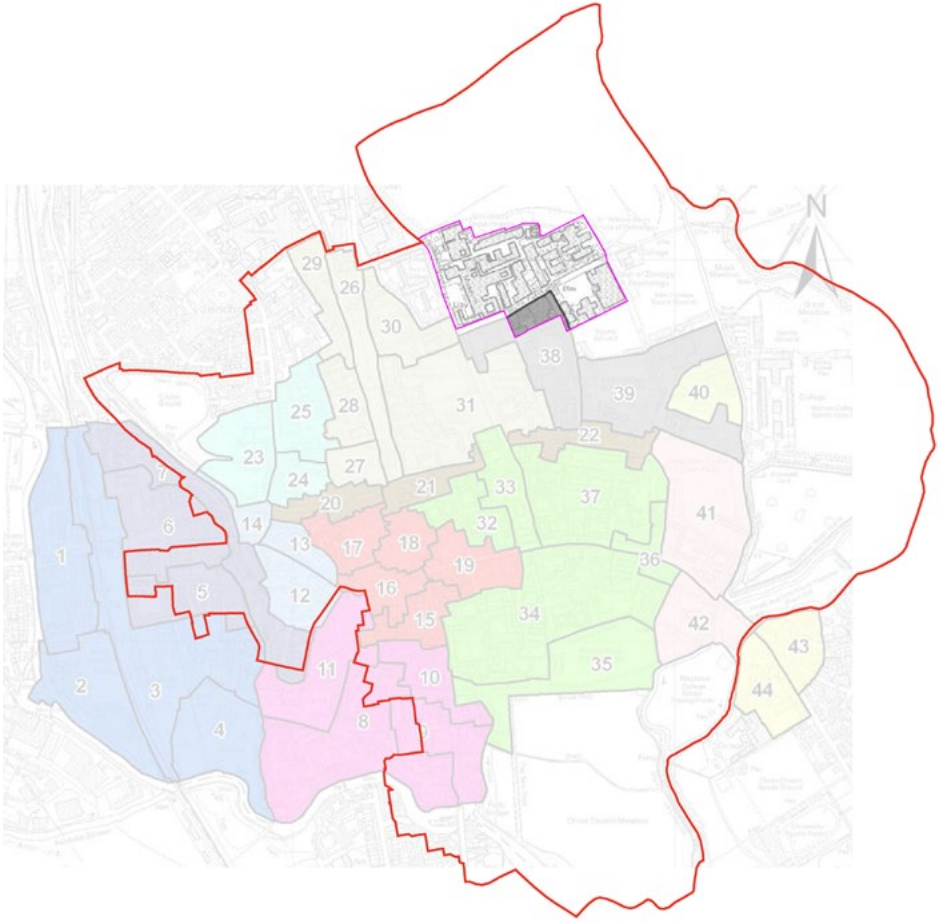
8.4 Useful documents and further guidance

Refer to the following Historic Urban Character Assessments on the Oxford City Council website for detailed accounts of the character zone. The key plan shows their boundaries.

- HUCA 38 Holywell and Northeast Expansion: Mansfield Road

Other useful documents include:

Oxford Heritage Walks Book 3: On foot from Catte Street to Parson's Pleasure, Malcolm Graham 2015



Character Zone Assessment 9

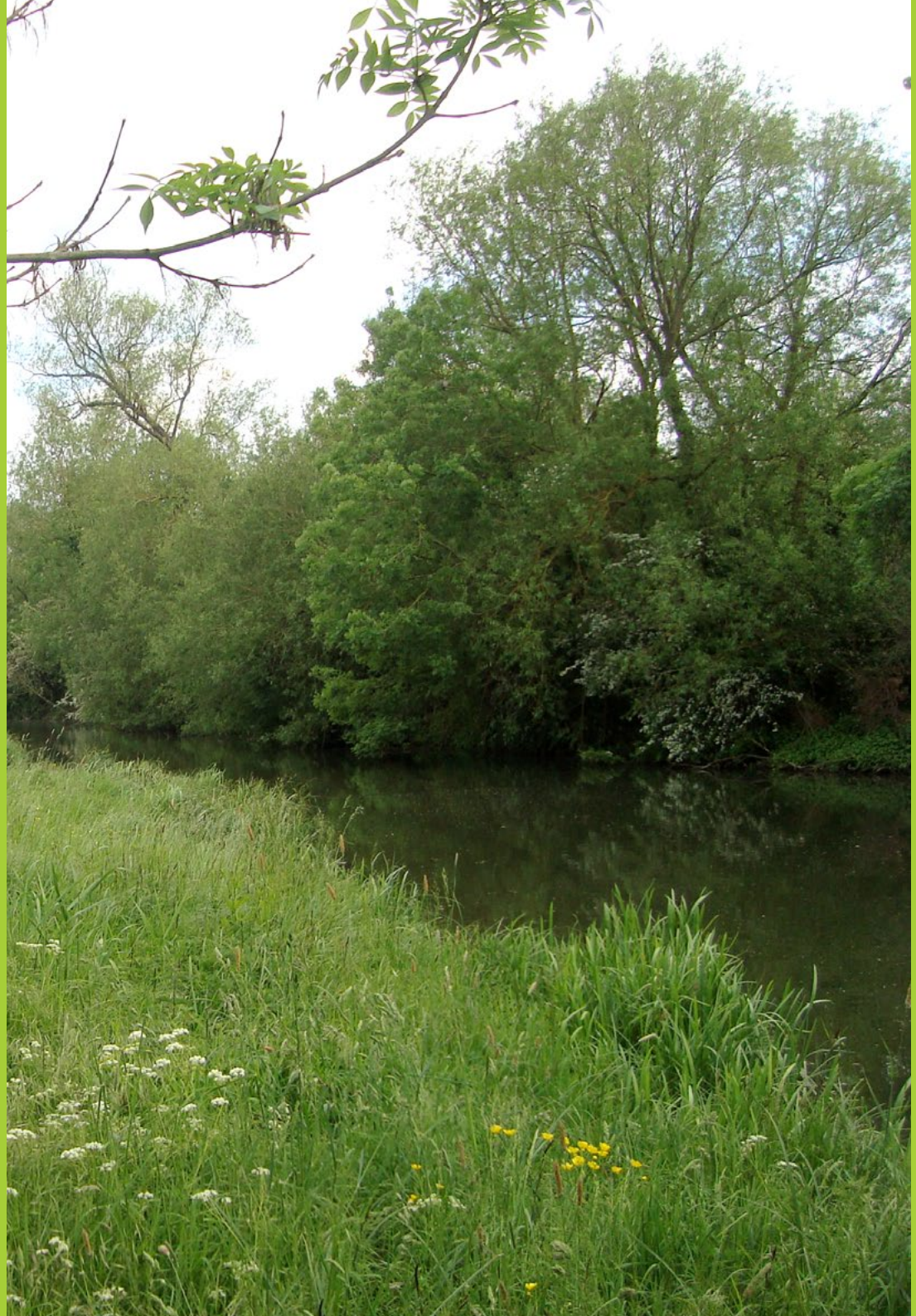
Flood Plain

Oxford Central (City & University) **Conservation Area**

Zone includes:

- University Parks
- Christchurch, Magdalen and Angel and Greyhound Meadows
- Folly Bridge
- The Botanical Gardens





Flood Plain Character Zone
Oxford Central (City & University) Conservation Area

The Conservation Area Appraisal divides the Conservation Area into nine character zones. This chapter contains a detailed analysis of one of these: the Flood Plain Character Zone. It can be used to understand the history, character and appearance of this part of the Conservation Area, and to inform planning application and development proposals.

This Conservation Area Appraisal aims to promote and support developments that are in keeping with, or enhance, the character of the Central (City & University) Conservation Area. This section is concerned with the reasons for designation, defining the qualities that make up its special interest, character and appearance. It is not possible to describe every facet of the area that contributes positively to its character. The omission of any reference to a particular building, feature, space or positive contributor should not be taken to imply that it is of no interest. Additional positive contributors will be identified through the development management process.

Contents

9.1	An overview of character and special interest
9.2	A brief history
9.3	An analysis of character (considering use, street and townscape, green space, buildings, roofscape, landmarks and views, movement and activity, archaeology)
9.4	Further useful information

Icons

Throughout, icons direct you to relevant sections of the Conservation Area Appraisal and links to other relevant documents.


relevant layers of the conservation area map / GIS mapping


relevant character themes in the appraisal


relevant sections in the appraisal


suggestions for further reading


information relevant for planning


sources of further information

Maps

The maps below are extracts from the Conservation Area mapping set, which consists of layers of useful information ranging from archaeology and historic maps to green space, listed buildings and street materials. Please note that maps may not show the full extent of listed buildings and do not show curtilage-listed structures. If you are unsure if your building is listed check the National Heritage List for England and seek the advice of the City Council's Urban Design and Heritage Team.

9.1 Overview of character and significance

The flood plains of the River Isis (Thames) and River Cherwell are iconic features of Oxford. They provide a tranquil, leafy counterpoint to its townscape and architecture. The extent of green space is exceptional for a city centre, providing a superb community resource and important habitats for several rare or endangered species. The flood plains are therefore fundamental to creating the distinctive character that makes the city centre conservation area a place of outstanding significance.

This zone includes some areas of development where the structures, managed and natural landscape are consistent with the overall character of the flood plains and river crossings. The area around Folly Bridge is included in this zone because the purpose of extending the conservation area here was to manage the setting of this ancient river crossing. The college playing fields around St Cross Road are included because the predominant character of this area is still scattered buildings set in green space, in contrast to the dense urban development of the city centre, and the function of the playing fields (sport and recreation) is consistent with the main uses of the flood plain.

The following aspects of the zone are of considerable historical, architectural, townscape or social significance and contribute positively to the character and appearance of the conservation area:

- The extent and quality of green space in the centre of the city, which has inspired Oxford residents and students for centuries, and has substantial aesthetic, communal and historical value.
- The ecological value of so much green space in the heart of a city.
- The survival of the meadows allows understanding of the original siting of the city by the Saxons on dry ground adjacent to river crossing points.
- These crossings survive as Folly Bridge and Magdalen Bridge, which are therefore of exceptional importance to understanding the origins, history and layout of Oxford, and for understanding it as a riverside settlement that derived livelihood and prosperity from the river and river borne trade.
- The different characters of the Isis and Cherwell are part of the distinctive personality of Oxford: the Isis is broader, more urban and busy with pleasure craft; the Cherwell is gentler, intimate and more rural. The playing fields are another distinctive type of green space – ordered and highly manicured.
- The views across the meadows are exceptionally important: both the panoramas of the famed towers and spires rising above the meadows, and the views looking outwards towards the greensward, which appears to be unbroken because east Oxford is hidden from view.
- Vehicles and bicycles are restricted in most of these areas and are not permitted in the University Parks or Christ Church Meadow. This is vital to maintaining the characteristically tranquil atmosphere.

The principal aspects of the zone that harm character and appearance are:

- Piecemeal development on college playing fields, which can erode the sense of open space.
- Development within and outside the zone that would harm views across the green space and changes the appearance of looking out over an unbroken landscape.
- River pollution, which harms the zone's biodiversity and in some instances inhibits enjoyment of the waterways for leisure pursuits, such as river bathing which was once common in the city.

Opportunities for enhancement in this character zone include:

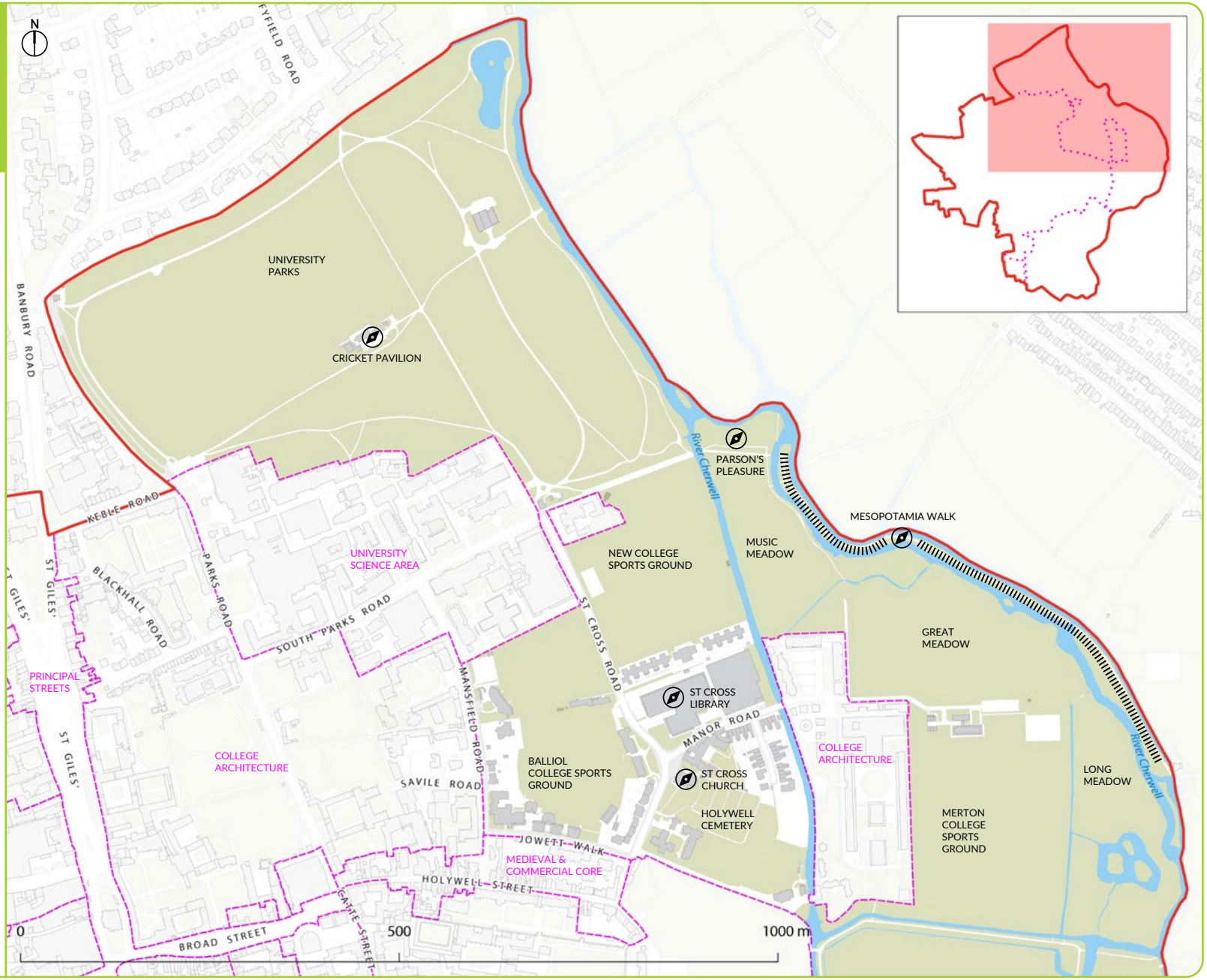
- Measures to support and enhance biodiversity.
- Improving awareness of underutilised publicly accessible green spaces, such as Angel and Greyhound Meadow.
- Improving the accessibility of green spaces within the character zones, such as for wheelchair and pushchair users to ensure that it can be enjoyed by people of all ages and abilities.
- Improvements to the public realm around Folly Bridge, which is cluttered and unfriendly for pedestrians, and detracts from the character and appearance of this landmark structure.

Notes for use:
This zone forms a crescent of predominantly green space from the University Parks in the north-east round to the Folly Bridge in the south-west. It does include areas of development associated with this zone, such as Holywell and Thames-side housing. St Catherine's College forms part of Character Zone 3: College architecture

Overview
Flood Plain

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- NAME: Neighbouring character zones
- Reference point

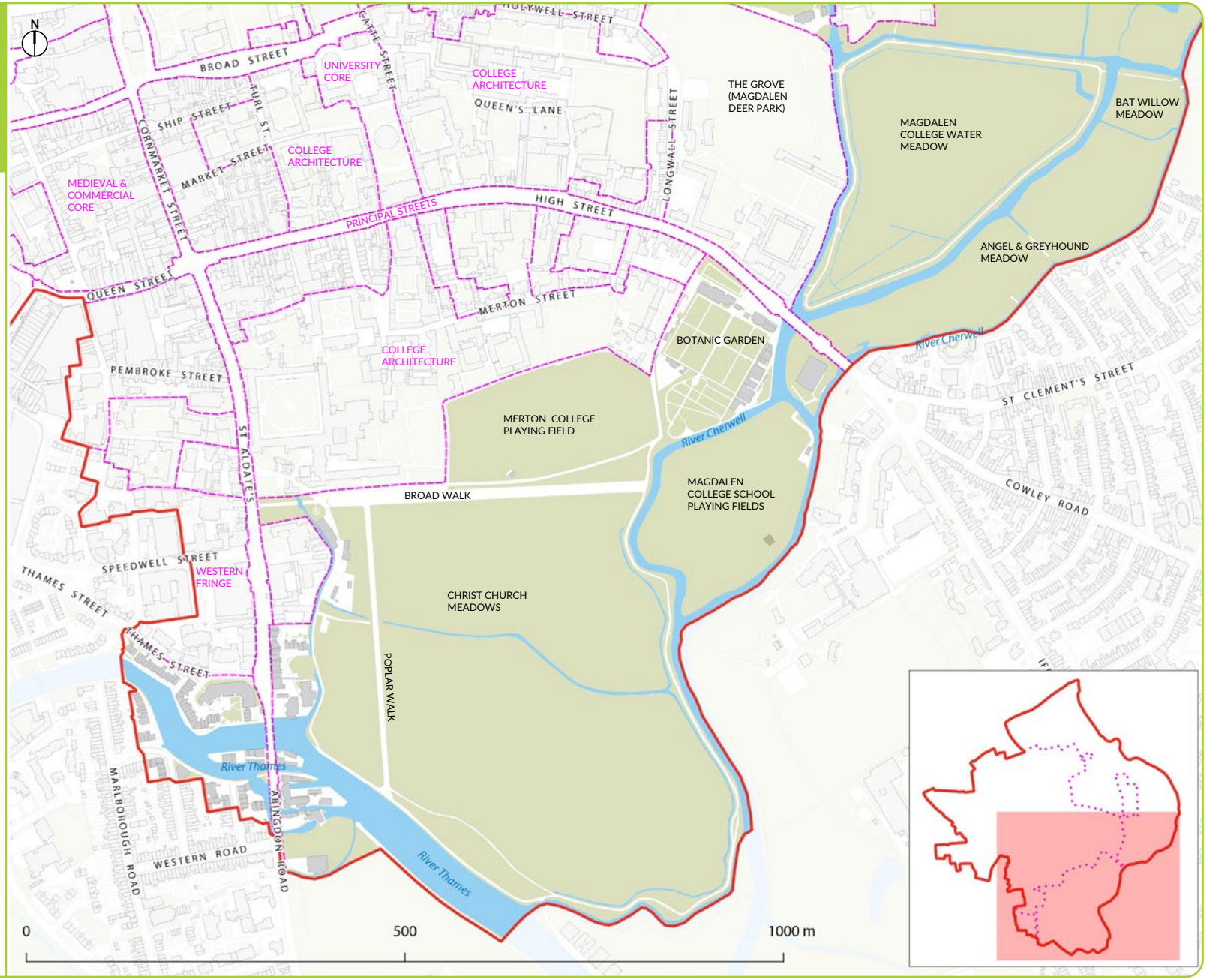


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Overview
Flood Plain

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- NAME Neighbouring character zones
- Reference point



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9.2 History

9.2.1 Prehistoric Landscape

- The University Parks preserves the remains of ritual and funerary earthworks dating from the Mid-Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age. The remains including a linear barrow cemetery, show up as parch marks in dry weather along with Iron Age and Roman features relating to rural settlement activity.

9.2.2 River crossings

- Oxford was founded because of its strategic location at crossing points on the Thames floodplain.
- The Thames fording point was improved first with a Saxon timber causeway and then a Norman stone causeway – the Grandpont. Evidence for both of these survive under St Aldate's. The bridging section is now known as the Folly Bridge, and dates to 1826.
- This area was a focus of river industries and trades well into the twentieth century, such as Salter's boatyard and offices, but now it is housing.
- The Cherwell crossing at Magdalen Bridge is similarly ancient. There was a sequence of wooden and stone bridges on this site prior to the present 11-arch bridge, built 1772-90. This was widened on the south side in 1882.

9.2.3 Holywell historic suburb

- A small suburb outside the walled town, clustered around the twelfth-century St Cross Church and early-sixteenth-century Manor House (now housing graduate accommodation for Balliol College) with Holywell Mill to the south-east by the Holywell Mill Stream.
- The walled municipal cemetery was established in the mid-nineteenth century by St Cross churchyard on the Holywell Mill meadow leading down to the Cherwell, on land gifted by Merton College. Many notable Oxford figures including Kenneth Grahame (author of The Wind in the Willows) were buried there.

9.2.4 Magdalen College meadows

- Magdalen College was founded in 1458. By 1578, the Agas map shows a meadow bounded by arms of the Cherwell. This was encircled by a tree-lined walk and accessed from the college by a bridge. It became known as 'Addison's Walk' in the early nineteenth century after the celebrated poet and essayist Joseph Addison, who was a Fellow.
- The deer park, also known as the Grove, was once laid out with formal walks lined with mature trees. Deer are first mentioned in 1706-07.

9.2.5 Christ Church Meadows

- From its foundation on the site of St Frideswide's Priory, Christ Church College was bounded by open water meadows to the south. These are shown on Agas' map of 1578, with a perimeter walk flanked by a double avenue of trees named 'Christ Church Meadows and Walkes'. By 1676 (Loggan's map), the Broad Walk was also established.
- Earthworks were constructed approximately along the line of the Broad Walk during the Civil War. In 1863 the New Walk (also known as the Poplar Walk), leading south from the new Meadow Buildings to the Isis, was laid out. The War Memorial Garden adjoining St Aldate's followed in the late 1920s to create a formal approach to the Meadows.
- At the north end of the Meadows, Deadman's Walk follows the line of a surviving section of the thirteenth-century town wall. By tradition, it commemorates the route of Jewish funeral processions (prior to their expulsion from England in 1290) from the Jewish quarter at St Aldate's to their burial ground on the present-day site of the Botanic Garden.

9.2.6 The Botanic Garden

- The Botanic Garden opened in 1621, the first in Britain and one of the oldest scientific gardens in the world.
- The Danby Gate at its front entrance, designed by Nicholas Stone between 1632-3 is one of the earliest structures in Oxford to use the classical style.

9.2.7 The University Parks

- These were laid out on ground purchased by the University from Merton College in 1854-60 as an arboretum and recreation space for the University, with sports pitches in the open central section.
- The University Museum, completed 1860, was built in the south-west corner and a section of the Parks was developed in the mid-to-late twentieth century as the University Science Area.
- A walk was created in 1865 along Mesopotamia, the island between the Cherwell and the millstream to the King's Mill.

9.2.8 College playing fields

- Colleges started creating formal playing fields in the nineteenth century as sports, starting with cricket, became popular and were codified.
- Development around their perimeters was limited until the twentieth century to cricket pavilions and a few larger detached villas on the south-east side of Balliol College cricket ground.
- Off Manor Road, short terraces of late-Victorian housing are shown on the 1898 OS map clustered near St Cross Church. Post-war college developments gradually infilled Jowett Walk and extended along the west side of St Cross Road.
- The St Cross Law and English libraries were built in 1961–64 on a large site opposite St Cross Church to designs by Sir Leslie Martin and Colin St John Wilson.

9.2.9 The Angel and Greyhound Meadow

- The Angel and Greyhound Meadow is a flood meadow located on the east bank of the Cherwell. Its name was derived from the old Angel and Greyhound coaching inns on the High Street, for which it served as horse pasture. It was once owned by Magdalen College but is now owned by the City Council and open to the public.



Development around the perimeter of college playing fields, such as the pavilion-style New College Weston buildings



Attractive historic buildings of the former Salter's Boatyard (now the Head of the River pub) by Folly Bridge

9.3 Character

9.3.1 Use and access

Flood risk; Green Belt; Woodland; Historic urban characterisation

Theme 1: contrasts and complexity
Theme 11: living
Theme 24: waterways
Theme 25: green space

- **Flood plain:** important function in regulating volumes of water flowing through the Cherwell valley and protecting the town from flooding.
- **Agriculture:** grazing animals.
- **Recreation:** private: sports, recreation; public: walks, bathing, dog walking, playground, punting, Botanic Garden.
- **Residential:** college student accommodation; private housing on and west of the Folly Bridge, on both banks.
- **Institutional:** St Cross Law and English library; Social Sciences building.



Much of the residential use in this area is student accommodation, often constructed around the perimeter of college playing fields



The Flood Plain provides important spaces for recreation and relaxation, such as the banks of the Cherwell in Christ Church Meadows

9.3.2 Landscape

Topography

Theme 23: topography and geology
Theme 24: waterways
Theme 25: green space
Theme 26: tranquillity and sound

Topography

- The eastern end of High Street and St Aldate's slope up from the floodplain, which makes a positive contribution to their character and appearance. Other streets are largely level.

Riverscapes

- The different characters of the Isis and Cherwell are a vital aspect of the distinctive character of Oxford: the Isis is broader, more urban and busy with pleasure craft; the Cherwell is gentler, intimate and more rural.
- The area around Folly Bridge is a quintessential Thames riverscape and was designated to protect the character of the river crossing: an ancient crossing, with inhabited island, passing pleasure cruisers, industrial relics and nineteenth- and twentieth-century housing.

Christ Church Meadows

- Characterised by wide tree-lined paths around a central fenced-off meadow (used for cattle grazing).
- A formal approach from the west side by St Aldate's through the War Memorial gardens.
- Wilder areas along the banks of the Cherwell.
- The southern stretch along the Isis is dominated by pleasure boats and rowing boats, in noticeable contrast to the more tranquil atmosphere of the Cherwell.
- The character of the eastern bank of the Cherwell, in terms of tree cover, green space and the absence of light pollution, help maintain the tranquil character of the meadow.

Magdalen Water Meadow and Bat Willow Meadow

- Secluded tree-lined paths around the perimeter of a traditional English meadow. The path is raised above the ground level of the inner Meadow and separated from it by a ditch and iron fence.
- Punts passing up and down the river create a distinctive Oxford character and provide a tranquil way of experiencing the conservation area.
- The peaceful character of these spaces is sensitive to the character of development further east on Marston Road and Headington Hill .

Mesopotamia and Merton-owned meadows (Music Meadow, Great Meadow, Long Meadow)

- Wilder areas, relatively unmanaged, providing access to the countryside on the doorstep of town.
- The woodland on the edge of Great Meadow is an important example of a willow carr (waterlogged woodland: an increasingly rare type of landscape in England).

University Parks

- Character of a traditional managed public park, with more manicured appearance and boundaries, and sporting facilities including pitches, practice nets and a pavilion.

Botanic Garden

- Formal paths and gardens, centred around the walled garden and glasshouses.
- An exceptional designed landscape and views to the Danby Arch are a quintessential part of the eastern approach to Oxford.

Holywell historic suburb

- Even by the late nineteenth century, Holywell retained a sense of a detached small suburb surrounded by fields, distinct from the city centre.
- The St Cross churchyard and adjacent cemetery provides a tranquil and publicly accessible green space leading towards the river. The platform created by the raised cemetery provides views to the fifteenth century precinct wall of Magdalen College and the wooded banks of the Cherwell.

College playing fields

- Large open expanses of managed grass pitches, not open to the public.
- Increasing pressure to develop land from the late nineteenth century onwards has led to infill development around the edges of the playing fields, which is altering the character of this part of the zone from open space to urban streetscapes.

Paths

- There are many paths in this character zone – either gravelled where there is higher footfall (Christ Church Meadow, Magdalen) or simple dirt and grass tracks, in keeping with its rural character.
- Tarmac is not consistent with this character, and its use on foot paths is limited to the more urban area west of Folly Bridge, and to an access road at the south end of University Parks, leading to a bridge across the Cherwell, which reflects the higher level of cycle and foot traffic along this route in and out of the city centre.
- Roads within this area are tarmac, including St Cross Road and Manor Road.



The Cherwell has an intimate and rural character



Magdalen Water Meadows, providing an attractive riverside walk for paying visitors, although the majority of the meadow is fenced off for grazing



The Isis, busy with pleasure craft and lined with residential and commercial buildings around Folly Bridge

9.3.3 Public space

Public access to green spaces; Woodland

Theme 19: public space
Theme 25: green space

Access

Most of the flood plain meadows are privately owned by colleges or the University. There is controlled public access to much of the area along the Cherwell, although the central meadows are mostly fenced off for grazing animals and college playing fields are private.

Where access is available it is an invaluable public resource close the centre of the city, of great cultural and communal value.

Free public access during daylight hours: The University Parks and Mesopotamia Walk, Music Meadow, Great Meadow and Long Meadow, the perimeter walks around Christ Church Meadows, Holywell graveyard and the Angel and Greyhound Meadow (including children's playground).

Paid public access: Magdalen College and meadows; Botanic Garden.

No public access: College and school playing fields.

Bridges

- Oxford exists because of its bridging points. Therefore, the bridges over the two rivers make a significant contribution to the history and character of the city and the conservation area. Their different forms add interest and variety and reflect the different character of the rivers.
- The two principal crossings – Folly Bridge and Magdalen Bridge – are handsome arched ashlar structures. A similar but smaller bridge spans the Cherwell at Magdalen to give access to the college meadows.
- Folly Bridge is approached by the Grandpont causeway underlying the modern road. This eleventh-century causeway is the only one of its kind and date known in northern Europe, and therefore of exceptional significance.
- The Grade II listed bridge over the Cherwell at Parson's Pleasure dates from 1949 and was the first statically indeterminate pre-stressed concrete bridge in Britain.
- Other bridges across the Cherwell are mostly simple timber structures of rustic character, such as those connecting the Mesopotamia walks or the Magdalen meadows, while simple iron railed or timber bridges connect St Clements to the Angel and Greyhound Meadow.
- The Jubilee Bridge over the Cherwell from Christ Church Meadow was built in 2014 and introduces new structural forms and materials (tubular steel).



Angel and Greyhound Meadow is an important area of publicly accessible green space, although its entrance is hard to find



The new Jubilee bridge over the Cherwell, providing private access to Christ Church playing fields

9.3.4 Buildings

Historic urban characterisation

Theme 11: living
Theme 23: topography and geology

By its very nature, there are relatively few buildings in this zone, although the character of St Cross Road has become more urban in recent years with the development of the Library and student accommodation blocks lining the perimeters of college playing fields. There is housing west of Folly Bridge and on other margins.

- Terraces: short row of terraces on Manor Place and larger detached Victorian villas along St Cross Road.
- St Cross Church and Holywell manor: the core of the medieval hamlet of Holywell, built of stone with pitched, tiled roofs.
- St Cross Library: a dominating building in this zone, because of its large plot size and horizontal roof profile.
- Modern college student accommodation: typically arranged in groups of pavilions, such as the New College Weston Buildings or Balliol's Jowett Walk development. The accommodation pavilion is a new typology for the city centre, replacing the traditional quad and staircase plan.
- Botanic Garden: two-storey ashlar buildings in a Classical style, now used as student accommodation by Magdalen College, set well back from the street behind hedges and flowerbeds. The glasshouses at the Botanic Gardens are also a distinctive feature of this section of the Cherwell.
- At Folly Bridge: a picturesque cluster of historic riverside buildings, including warehousing, and, west of the bridge, recent housing facing the river.

Plots and building lines

Medieval plot boundaries; Building lines and gaps

Theme 11: living
Theme 23: topography and geology

- Remnant medieval plot and field boundaries are of value to the townscape and should be protected.
- New housing west of Folly Bridge faces the river; behind on Thames Street there is a poor relationship to the street.

Materials

- Predominantly brick of various hues: red brick on the Victorian terraces off Manor Road and on the New College Weston Buildings, sand-coloured brick on the St Cross Library, grey and buff brick on Balliol student accommodation on St Cross Road, yellow brick on the Balliol Jowett Walk accommodation, red and brown brick upstream of Folly Bridge.
- Some of the older buildings around Folly Bridge were built of stone, as are St Cross Church and Holywell Manor, and the Botanic Garden buildings.
- The Social Sciences (Manor Road) building adjacent to the Law Library uses bright white and grey cladding, which is at odds with the prevailing materials and colours in this area.



The Social Sciences building, using bright white and grey cladding which is at odds with the prevailing materials and colours in this area

9.3.5 Positive contributors

Positive contributors

- The remaining villas along St Cross Road and Mansfield Road and the terraced housing along Manor Place and Manor Road contribute positively as good examples of nineteenth-century domestic architecture.
- College sports pavilions are characteristic of this area and make a positive contribution to the conservation area.
- The glasshouses of the Botanic Garden are distinctive horticultural buildings which reflect the long history of cultivation of exotic plants on this site.
- The modern housing along the Thames south of Thames Street responds well to the riverside setting in its careful massing and lively balconies and frontages, which echo the late Victorian and Edwardian idiom from the Thames' playground heyday.
- Folly Bridge, its nineteenth-century Old Toll House and the riverside buildings around Folly Bridge including the Salter's warehouses, offices and boat-building workshops are characterful survivals reflecting the importance of river travel and industry to Oxford's history. A number of these structures are listed, but those that are not also contribute positively to the character and appearance of the character zone.
- The weir and punt rollers by Parsons Pleasure are some of the only surviving built infrastructure associated with the famous, historic river bathing place. They serve as a landmark feature for punters and kayakers travelling along the Cherwell.

9.3.6 Designations

Green Belt; Designations; Designated green spaces

In addition to listed buildings and registered parks and gardens (see relevant maps), this zone contains extensive open space and ecological designations, indicating the environmental importance of these areas. For example, the historic land management regime in Magdalen Meadows has enabled the rare Snake's Head Fritillaries to flourish where elsewhere in the Thames Valley they have been lost, adding to this area's ecological value and providing an additional draw for tourism.

Green Belt: This entire zone except the immediate context of the Folly Bridge forms part of the green belt.

Protected Open Space: University Parks, Balliol, New College and Merton Playing Fields, Angel and Greyhound Meadow, Merton Field.

Wildlife Corridors: the River Cherwell and Christ Church.

Sites of Local Importance for Nature Conservation: Great Meadow, Long Meadow and Magdalen Meadow.

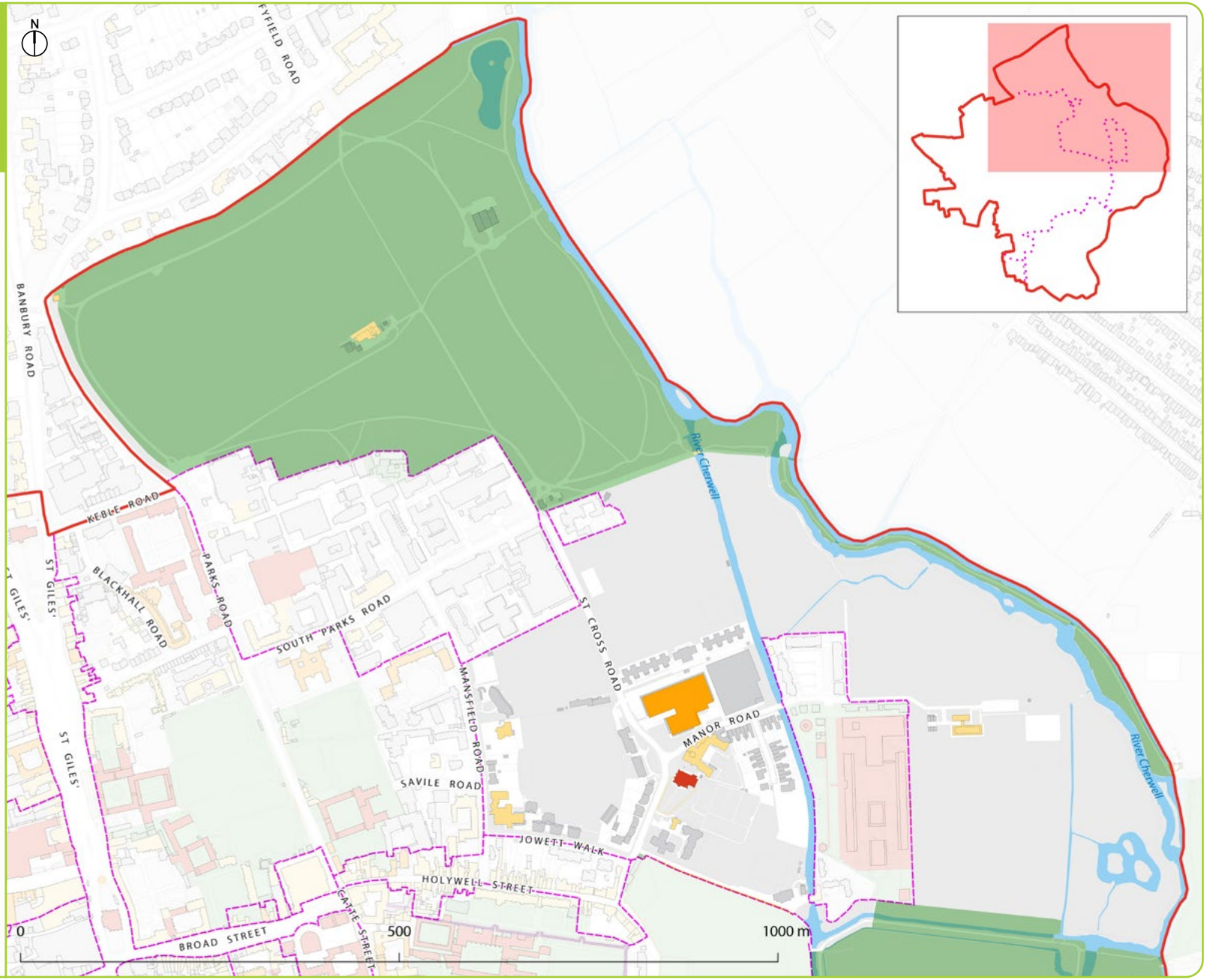


Residential houses by the Isis by the Oxford Architects' Partnership (1970-80s)

Designations
Flood Plain

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- Grade I listed
- Grade II* listed
- Grade II listed
- Scheduled monument
- Registered parks and gardens

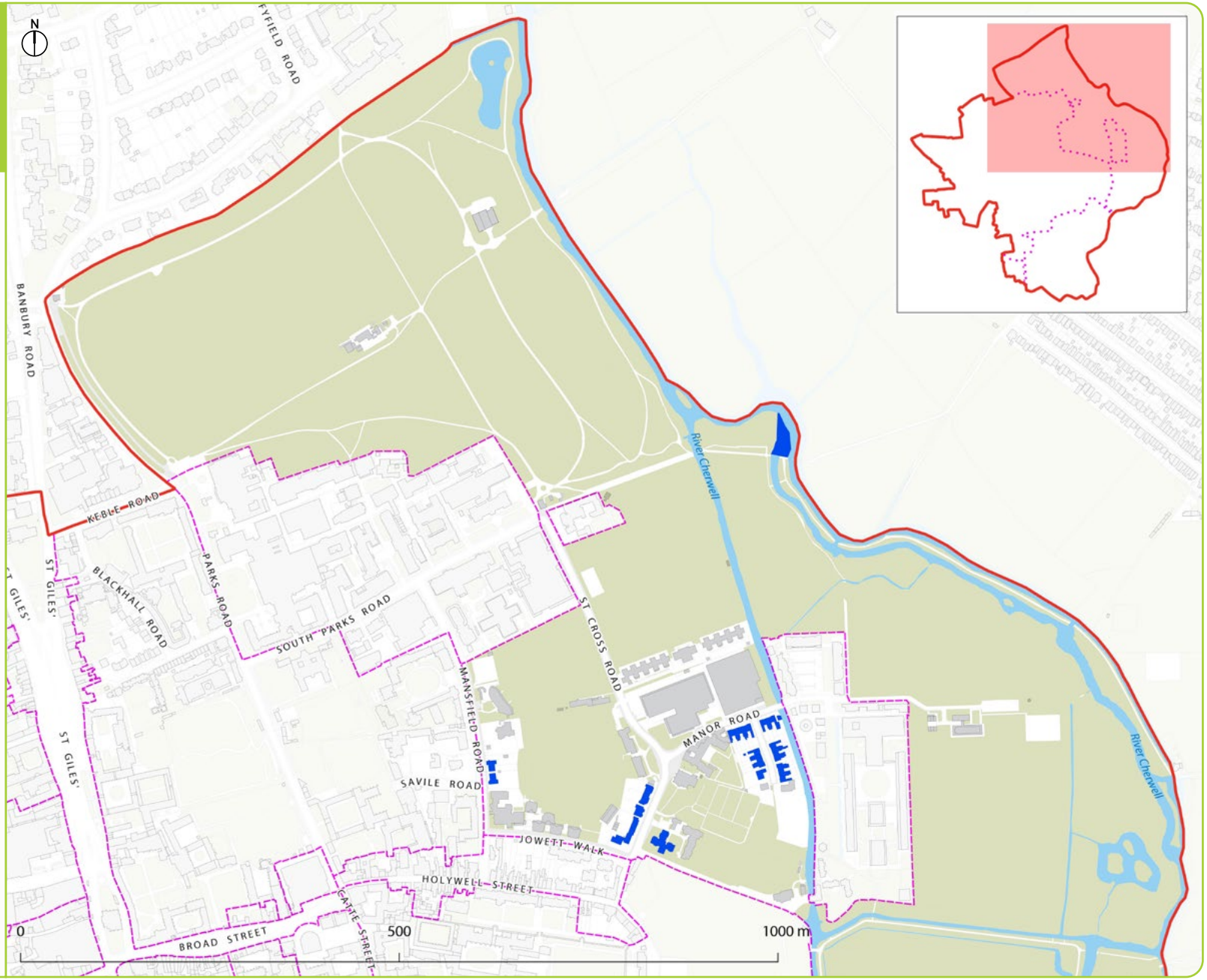


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Positive contributors
Flood Plain

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- Positive contributor (non-designated)

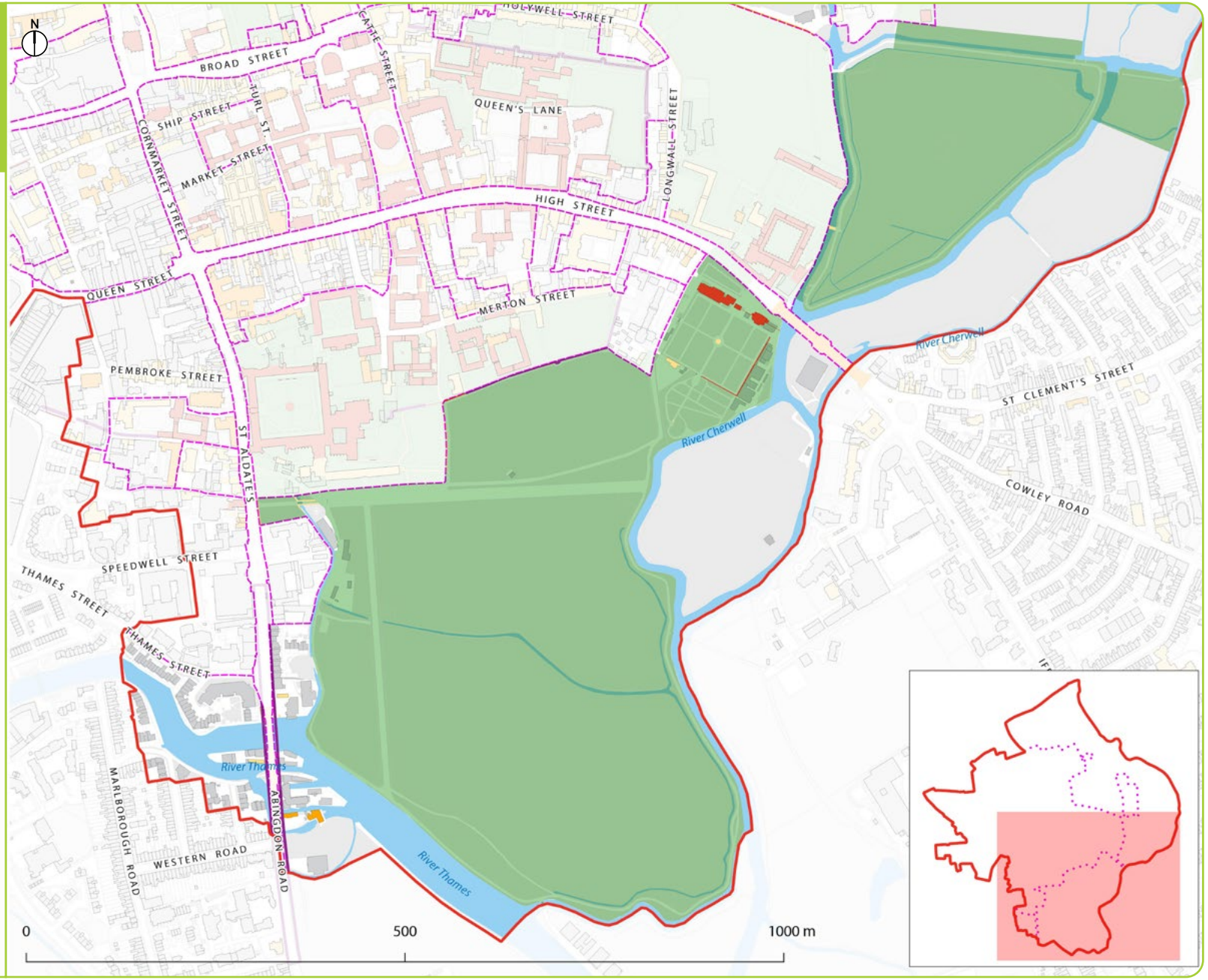


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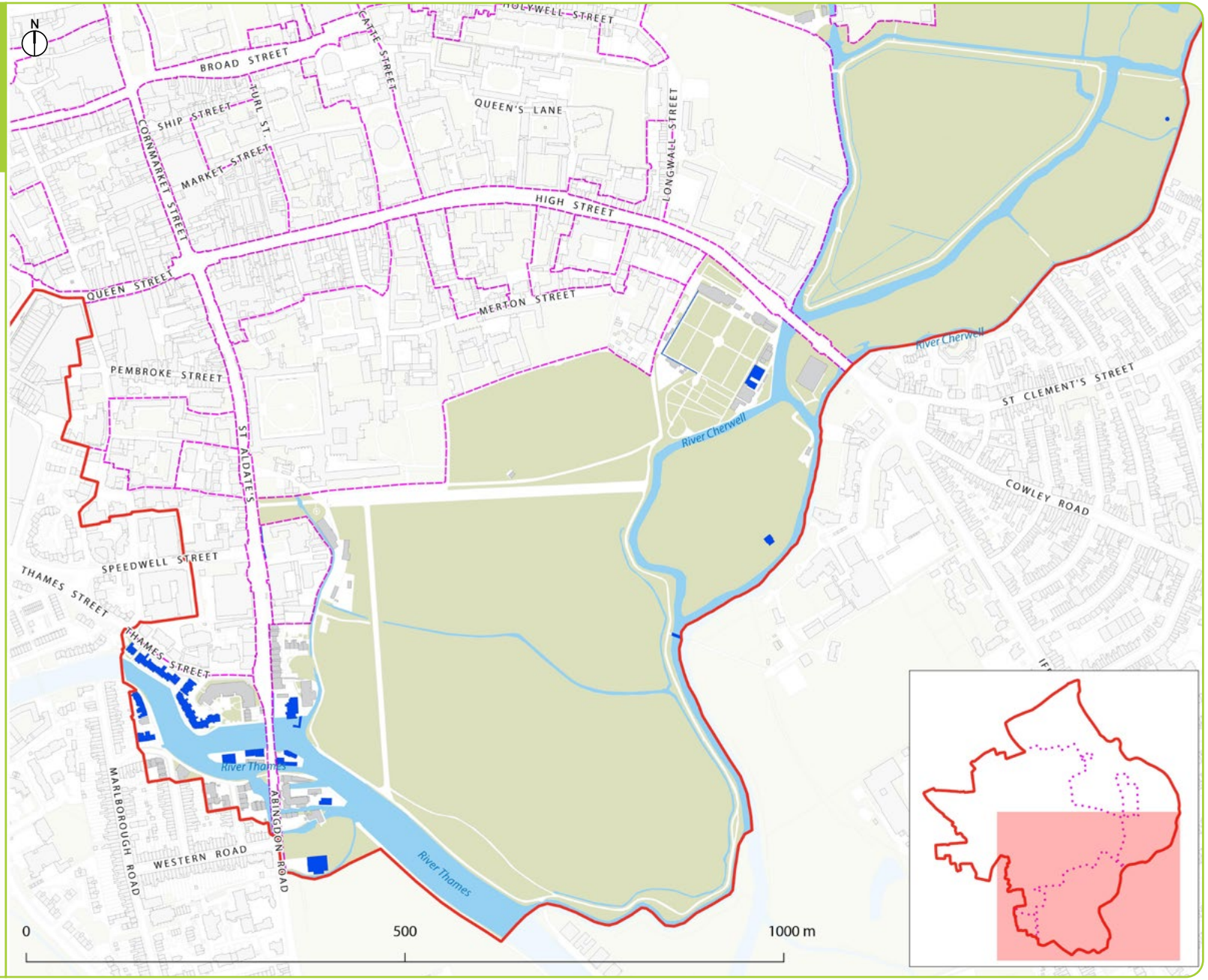


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Positive contributors
Flood Plain

Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
- Positive contributor (non-designated)



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9.3.7 Roofscape

Roofscape

Theme 21: roofscape, skyline and landmarks

Building heights are generally three to four storeys.

Roofscapes are very varied, ranging from steep pitched clay tile roofs of the Victorian terraces off Manor Road, low-pitched leaded roofs of the New College Weston buildings to flat roofs of the Balliol student accommodation on Jowett Walk and the St Cross Library and modern mansards at the bottom of St Aldate's.

Skylines are important because these buildings can be viewed at some distance across the open space.



Modern student accommodation blocks along Jowett Walk use a variety of different colours of brick and have varied rooflines

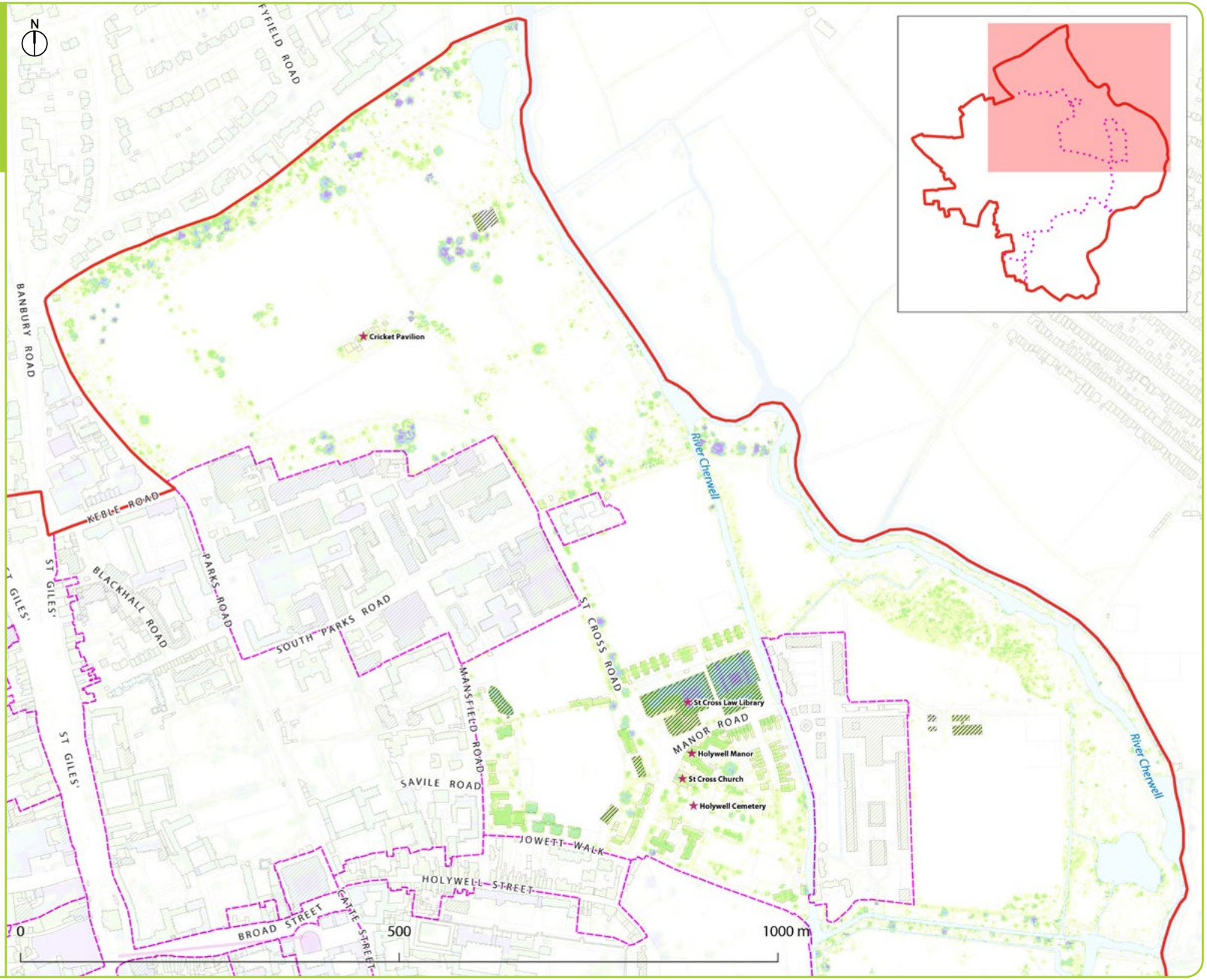


St Cross Law and English Library is a dominating building because of its large footprint and strongly horizontal lines



Use of brick, stone and render coupled with a lively rooflines creates an attractive riverscape by Folly Bridge

Roofscape
Flood Plain



Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary

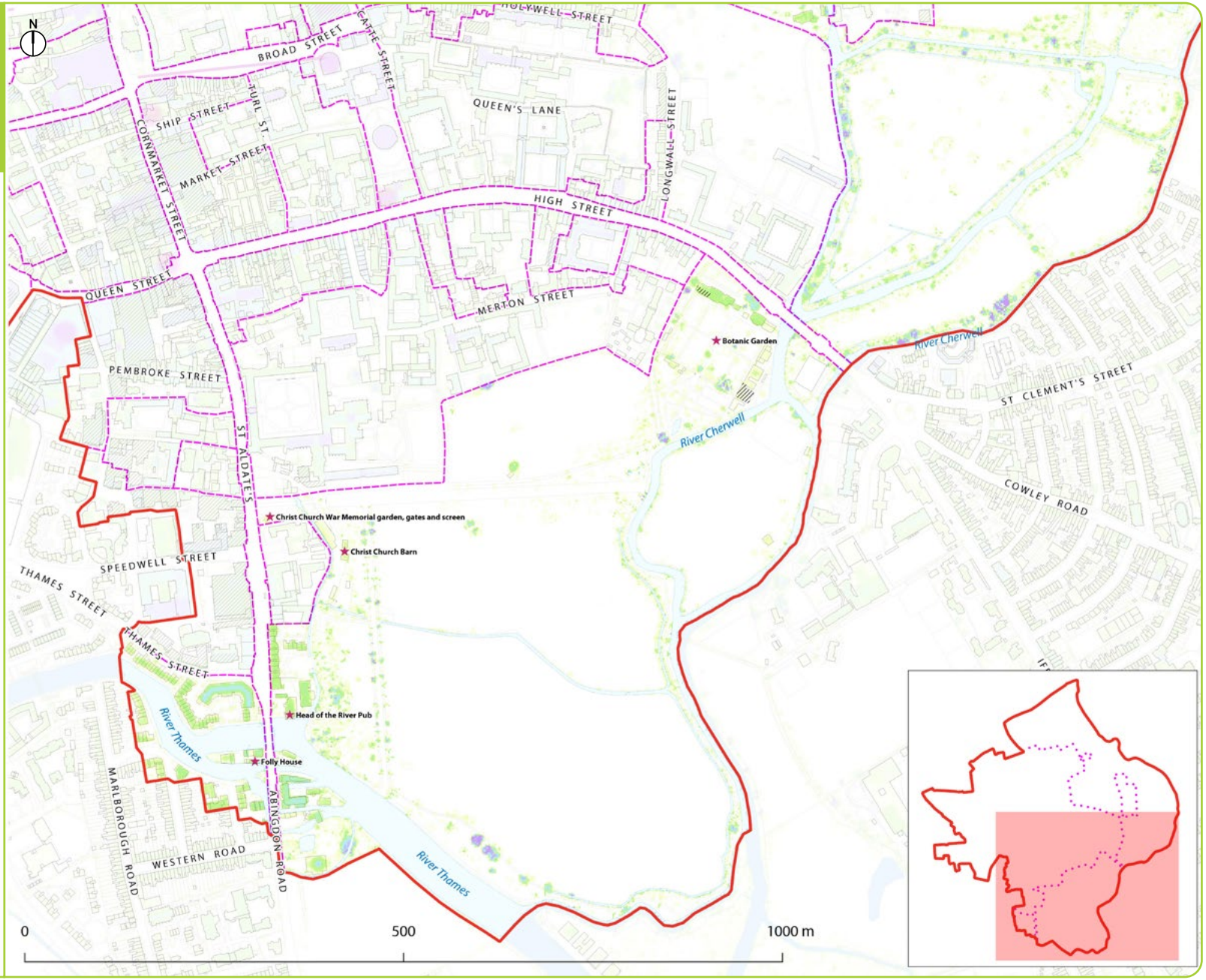
Building heights

- 0m
- 5m
- 10m
- 15m
- 20m
- Flat roofs
- Elevated panorama
- Designed public view
- Focal point
- Landmarks

Source: Building height data based on environment agency lidar DTM and DSM 2m

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Roofscape
Flood Plain



Key

- Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary

Building heights

- 0m
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- 10m
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- Flat roofs
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- Designed public view
- Focal point
- Landmarks

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9.3.8 Landmarks

Roofscape

Theme 21: roofscape, skyline and landmarks

Because it is largely open space, there are few landmark buildings within the character zone. However, the river crossings, especially Folly Bridge and Magdalen Bridge, are significant features, historically and in terms of townscape. Outside the zone, many of the famed towers and spires of Oxford are integral components of the highly significant views across the flood plain. Magdalen and Merton chapel towers and the crossing steeple of Christ Church Cathedral are particularly prominent in the foreground of such views.

Within the context of Christ Church Meadows, the Meadows building, the college barns and the War Memorial Garden, gates and screen form specific landmarks. The avenues of trees along the Broad Walk and Poplar Walk form 'living landmarks' that contribute to the character of the Meadows.

Landmarks within the zone

- Folly Bridge, Abingdon Road.
- Head of the River Pub and loading crane, St Aldate's.
- Holywell Cemetery, St Cross Road.
- Holywell Manor, Manor Road.
- St Cross Church, St Cross Road.
- St Cross Library, St Cross Road.
- Magdalen Bridge, High Street.
- Botanic Garden, High Street.
- Christ Church barns.
- Christ Church War Memorial Garden, gates and screen.
- Avenues of trees along Broad Walk and Poplar Walk in Christ Church Meadows.
- Oxford University Cricket Club Pavilion, University Parks

Landmarks outside the zone

- Christ Church Cathedral, St Aldate's.
- Christ Church Meadow Building
- Magdalen Chapel, Magdalen College, High Street.
- Merton College Chapel, Merton Street.

9.3.9 Views

Public viewing panoramas

- Views across the flood plain to the city centre are amongst the most famous in the city, panoramas which are part of the very image of the city, in particular, the view across Christ Church Meadows. The rural character of Christ Church Meadows contrasts with the formal paths and architecture, creating a juxtaposition that makes the many views from this location of particularly high value. These views illustrate the original siting of the city on dry ground adjacent to an early river crossing point. Because the historic core is otherwise so dense, these views are the only ground level panoramas in the conservation area.

Views from and along the rivers

- Views from, and along the rivers from river crossings, boats and punts, are highly significant because of the historical importance of the rivers to the foundation of the city and for movement and trade, and because of the way topography and landscape can be understood, experienced, and above all enjoyed.

Views out of the Conservation Area

- Views of the conservation area on the eastern edge are screened by a band of mature trees along the Cherwell. This screening provides a strong sense of seclusion: from a distance, east Oxford is entirely hidden by trees and vegetation, so the water meadows areas feel very rural despite being surrounded by the city. Nevertheless, some of the development along St Clements is of significant scale and abuts the boundary with the water meadows, so that whilst it is almost entirely hidden by vegetation during summer, it is more visible during winter, affecting this sense of seclusion.

9.3.10 Movement and activity

Theme 21: roofscape, skyline and landmarks
Theme 26: tranquillity and sound

Traffic

- Vehicles are excluded from most parts of this character zone.
- Folly Bridge remains the principal access point into the city centre from the south and the weight and noise of traffic here degrades the character and experience of this part of the conservation area.
- On the eastern edge, traffic is funnelled along St Cross Road, which is a busy through-route to North Oxford. Side streets such as Jowett Walk and Manor Place are much quieter.
- Vehicular parking in Christ Church Meadow, adjacent to the Meadow Building, is harmful to the setting of the listed building and to the Grade I Registered Park and Garden.

Pollution

- The flood plain zone has much lower levels of air and noise pollution than in the centre of the city and provides a welcome respite.

Pedestrians and cycling

- Access throughout the rest of the character area is mostly pedestrian, with occasional provision for access by service and maintenance vehicles.
- Bicycles are restricted through most of these areas and are not permitted in the University Parks or Christ Church Meadow. It is this as much as the absence of vehicles that gives most of the character zone its very tranquil atmosphere.
- Magdalen Bridge is a busy cycle route, connecting the central conservation area with the residential areas of Iffley and Cowley.
- Folly Bridge is a pinch point for pedestrians due to its narrow pavements and can become heavily congested, particularly during regattas when high volumes of people are accessing the Thames towpath. This is exacerbated by parked bicycles and signage.
- Accesses to, and routes around, the zones publicly accessible green spaces do not always cater to wheelchair or pushchair users.



The flood plain provides many attractive views towards the city centre, such as this view across the Botanic Garden towards Magdalen tower



Activity is highest in Christ Church Meadow and along the Isis, which is busy with boats

Activity

- Activity levels vary across the floodplain: off the streets, it its highest on Christ Church Meadow and Broad Walk, and much lower in places such as Angel and Greyhound Meadow.
- Boating is a distinctive feature of river use (primarily for pleasure boats). The college boathouses on the Isis just outside the boundary of the conservation area provide a focus for competitive rowing, while the Cherwell is used primarily for punting and by other similar unpowered craft.

9.3.11 Archaeology

Theme 12: archaeology

Oxford Archaeological Action Plan further detail and guidance

- The character zone comprises parts of the Thames and Cherwell flood plains and parts of the higher Summertown–Radley gravel terrace. The buried remains of Prehistoric monuments and Royalist Civil War earthworks are recorded in parts of this zone. The pre-history of the conservation area includes assets of national importance and is well preserved in the University Parks in particular, where the remains of a Bronze Age linear barrow cemetery are visible on the ground in dry summers.
- This zone encompasses a wide range of assets, including the palaeochannels and reworked channels of the river Cherwell and river Thames, the medieval suburb of Holywell, the historic river crossings at Folly Bridge and Magdalen Bridge (and the nearby likely 'Viking' burial), the second site of the medieval Jewish Burial Ground, the seventeenth-century Botanic Garden, parts of important designed college gardens and the remains of industrial and boatyard sites located near the river crossing at Folly Bridge.
- The flood plain has remained largely undeveloped because it is low-lying and liable to seasonal flooding, so it has the potential to preserve evidence of earlier activity to an unusual degree.
- The below-ground archaeological potential of the zone is therefore considered to be moderate to high depending on location.

9.4 Useful documents and further guidance

Refer to the following Historic Urban Character Assessments on the Oxford City Council website for detailed accounts of the character zone. The key plan shows their boundaries.

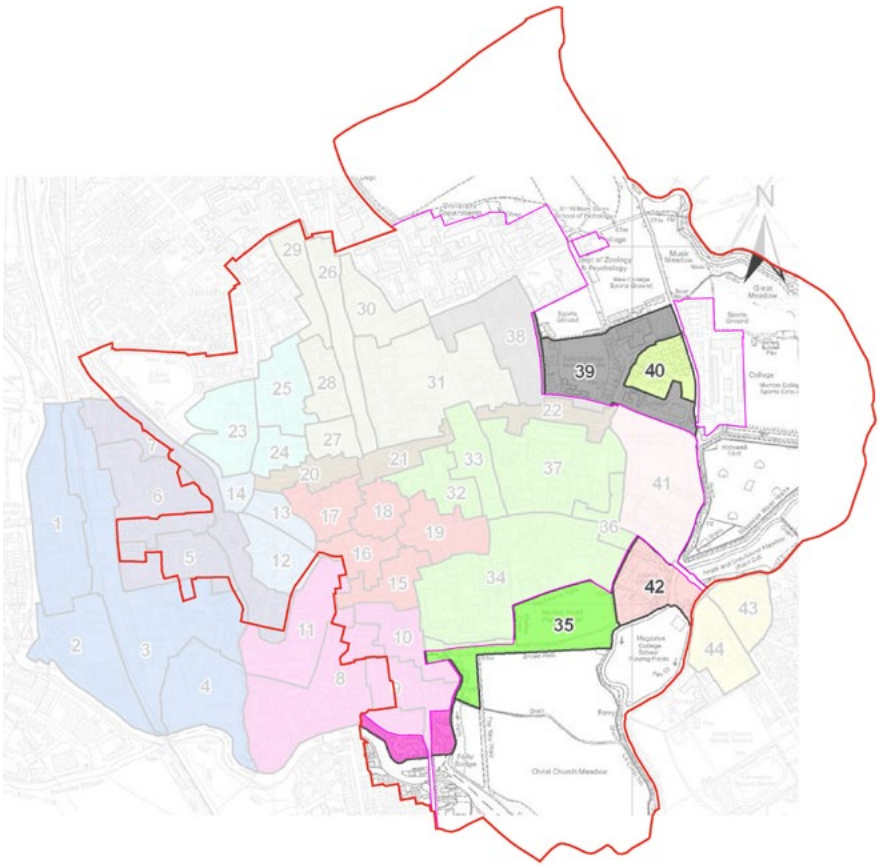
- HUCA 8 Thames Crossing and Floodplain: Thames Waterfront.
- HUCA 9 Thames Crossing and Floodplain: St Aldate's.
- HUCA 35 The Eastern Colleges: Broad Walk.
- HUCA 39 Holywell and Northern Expansion: Modern Colleges.
- HUCA 40 Holywell: Historic Core.
- HUCA 42 The Eastern Suburb: Botanic Garden.

Significant areas of the flood plain zone are included within Historic England's Register of Historic Parks and Gardens for their special historic interest. The following entries contain more detailed history and description of these areas:

- Christ Church (Grade I), list entry number: 1000441.
- Magdalen College (Grade I), list entry number: 1000435.
- The University Parks, Oxford (Grade II), list entry number: 1001651.

Other useful documents include:

Oxford Heritage Walks Book 3: On foot from Catte Street to Parson's Pleasure, Malcolm Graham 2015



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