

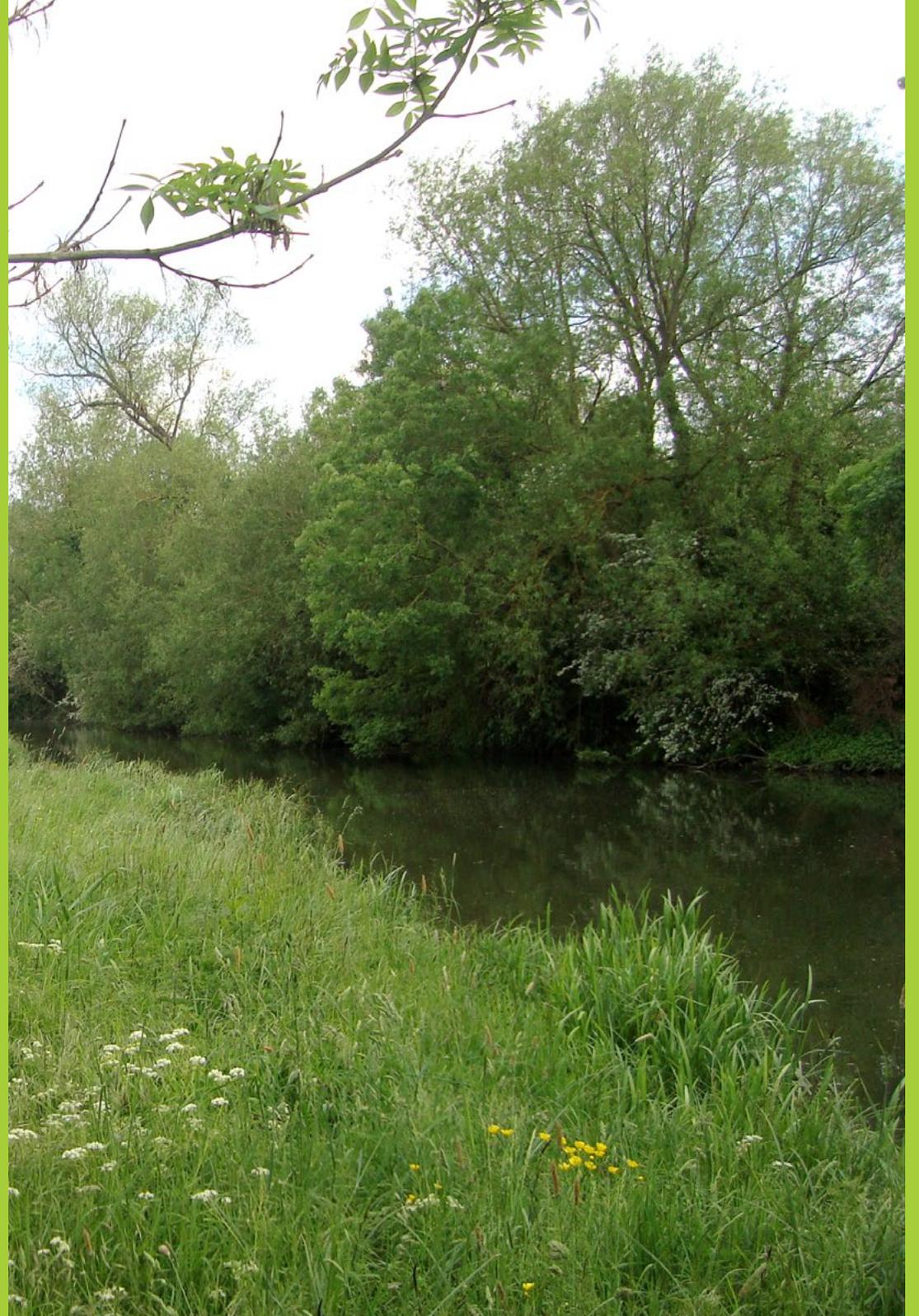
Character Zone Assessment 9

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.

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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.



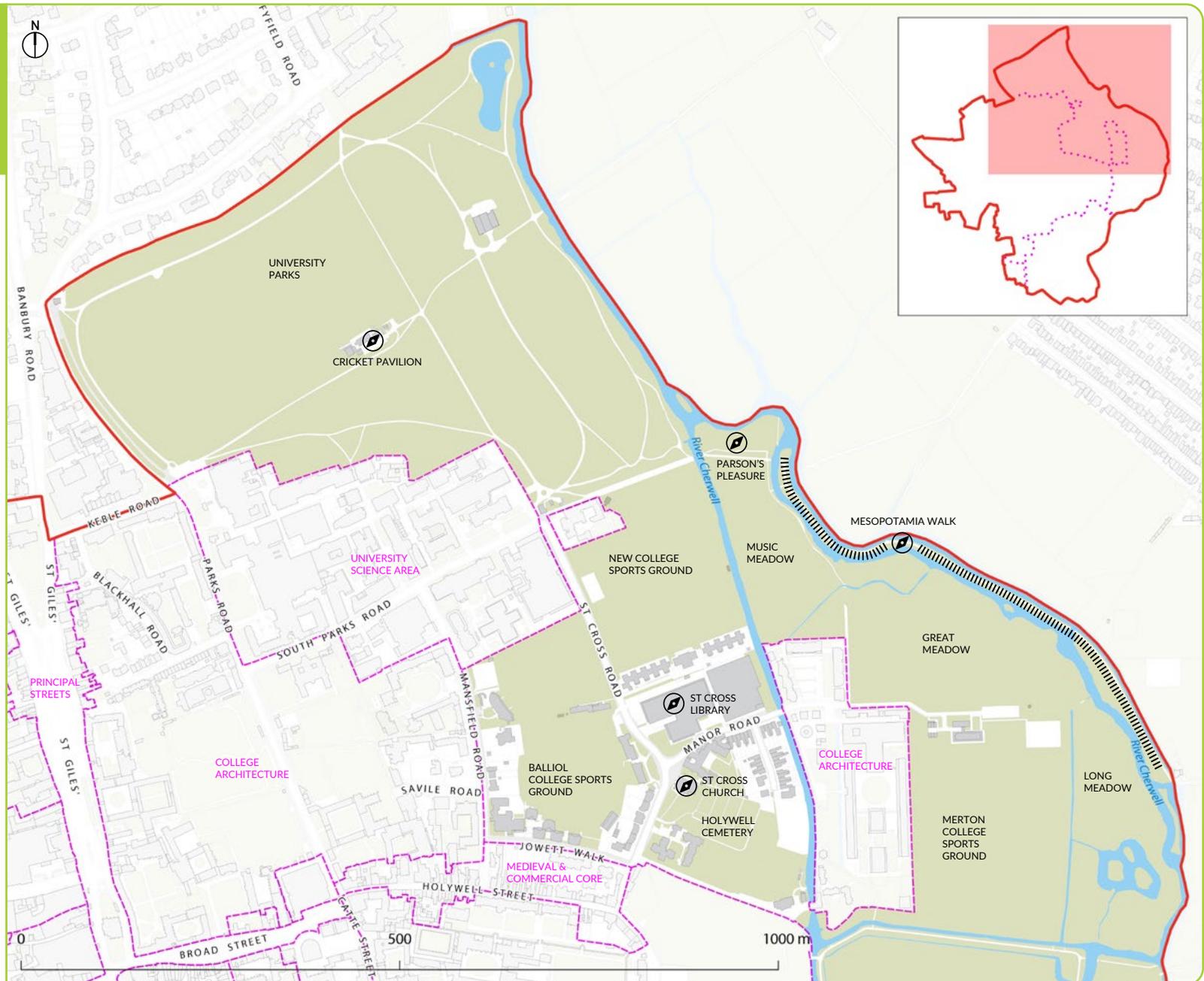
Notes for use:

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
-  Neighbouring character zones
-  Reference point

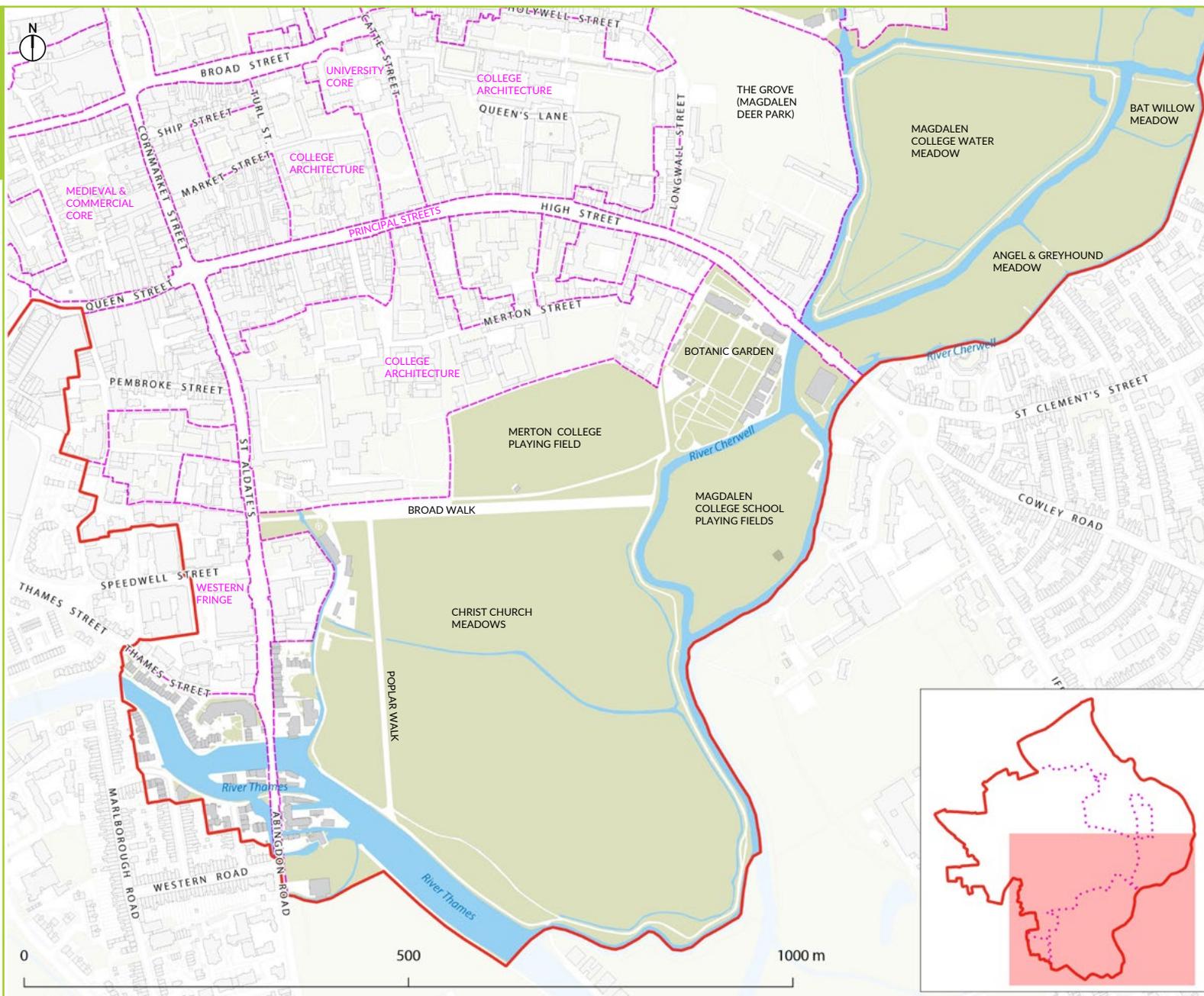


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Overview Flood Plain

Key

-  Oxford Central Conservation Area boundary
-  Neighbouring character zones
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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.



Development around the perimeter of college playing fields, such as the pavilion-style New College Weston buildings

- 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.



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

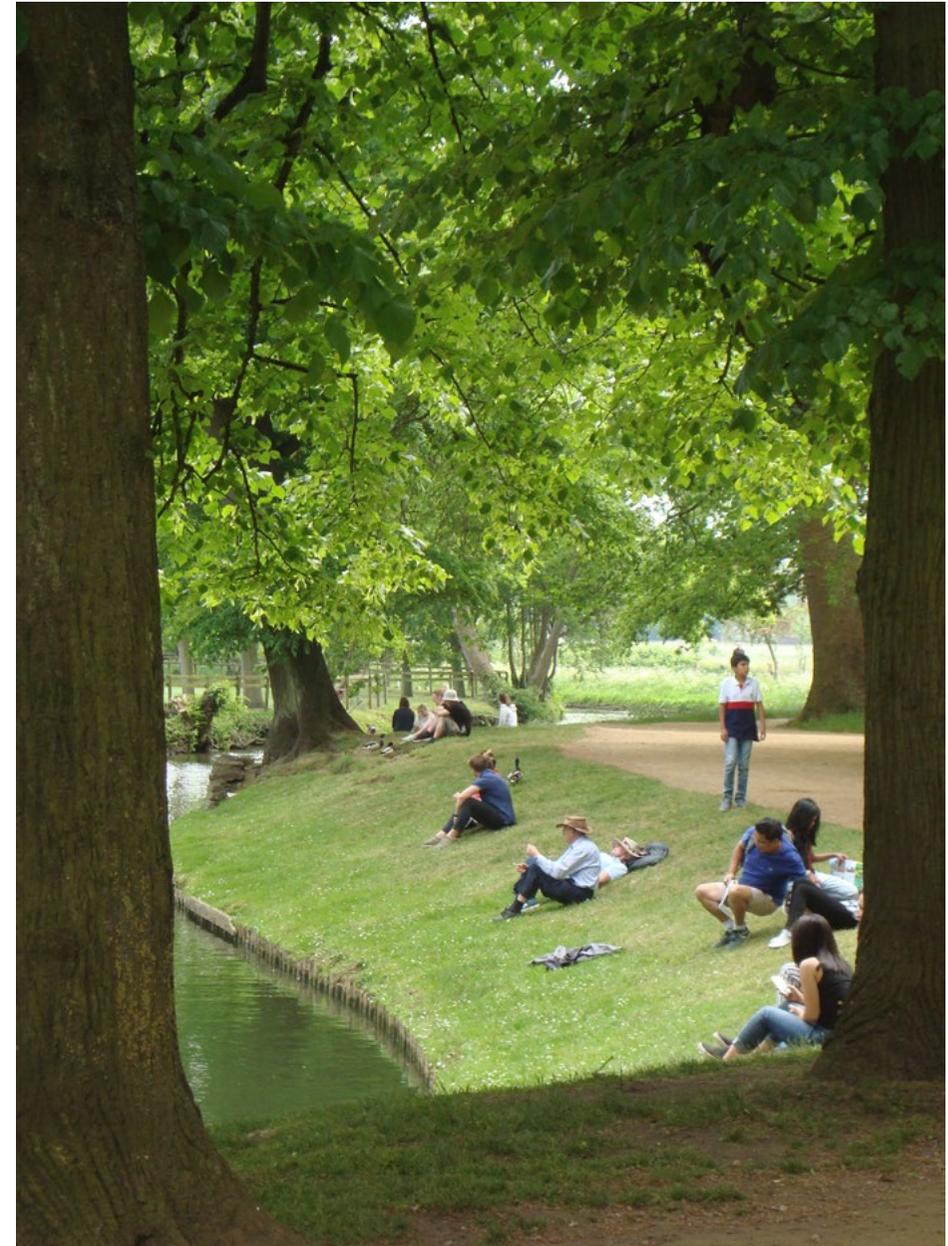
Theme 24: waterways

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.



Angel and Greyhound Meadow is an important area of publicly accessible green space, although its entrance is hard to find

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).



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.



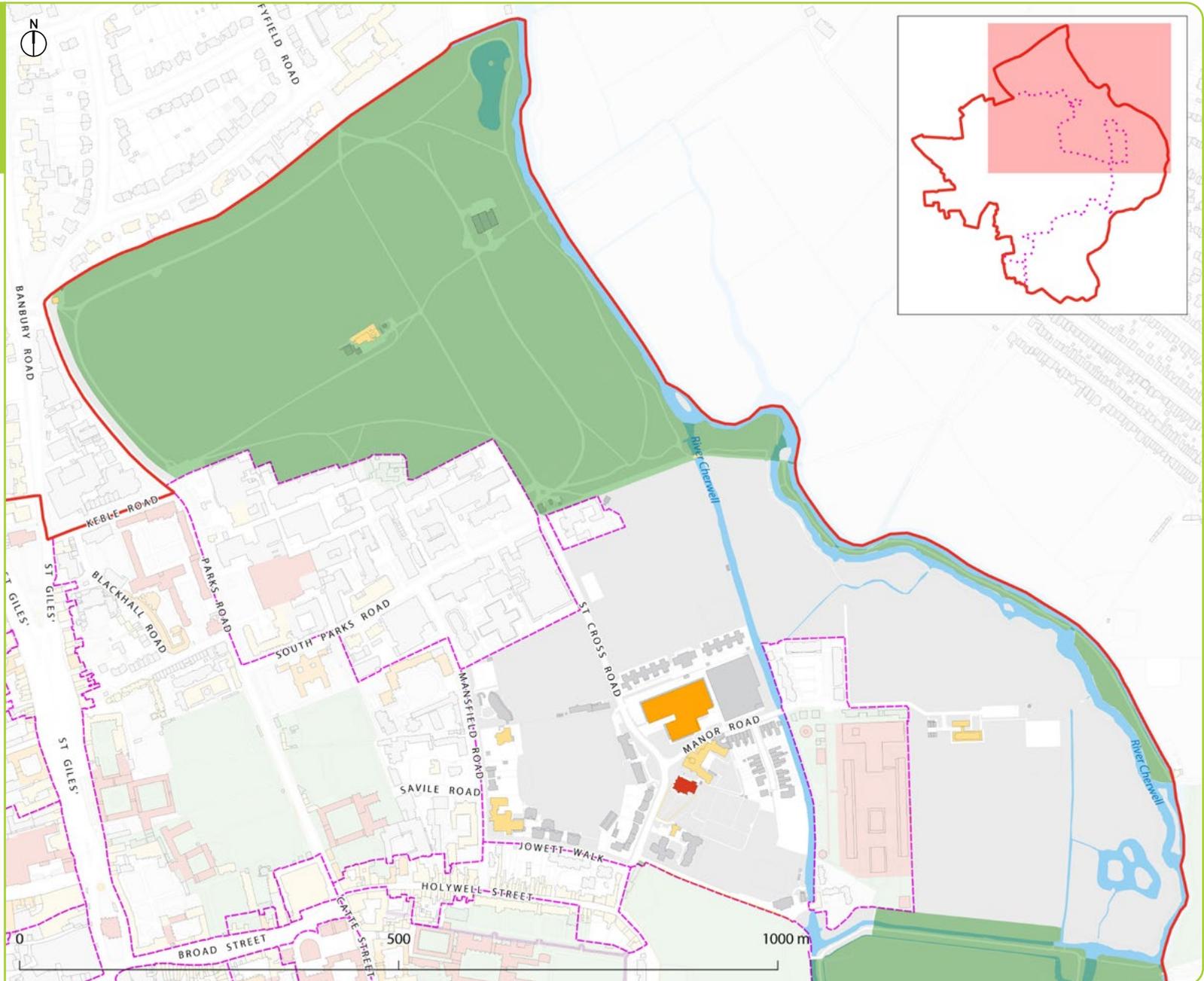
Residential houses by the Isis by the Oxford Architects' Partnership (1970-80s)

Designations

Flood Plain

Key

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

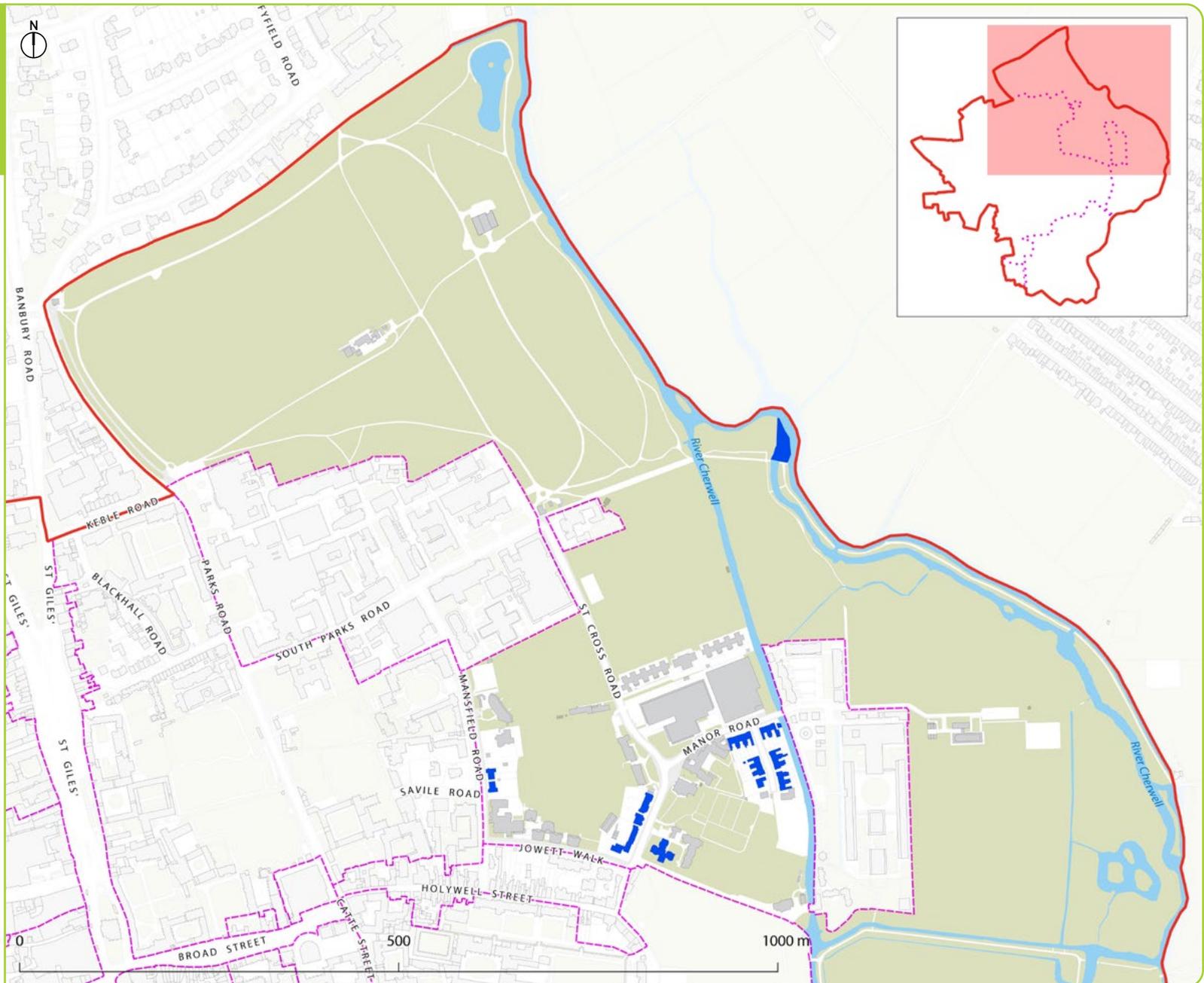


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Positive contributors Flood Plain

Key

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



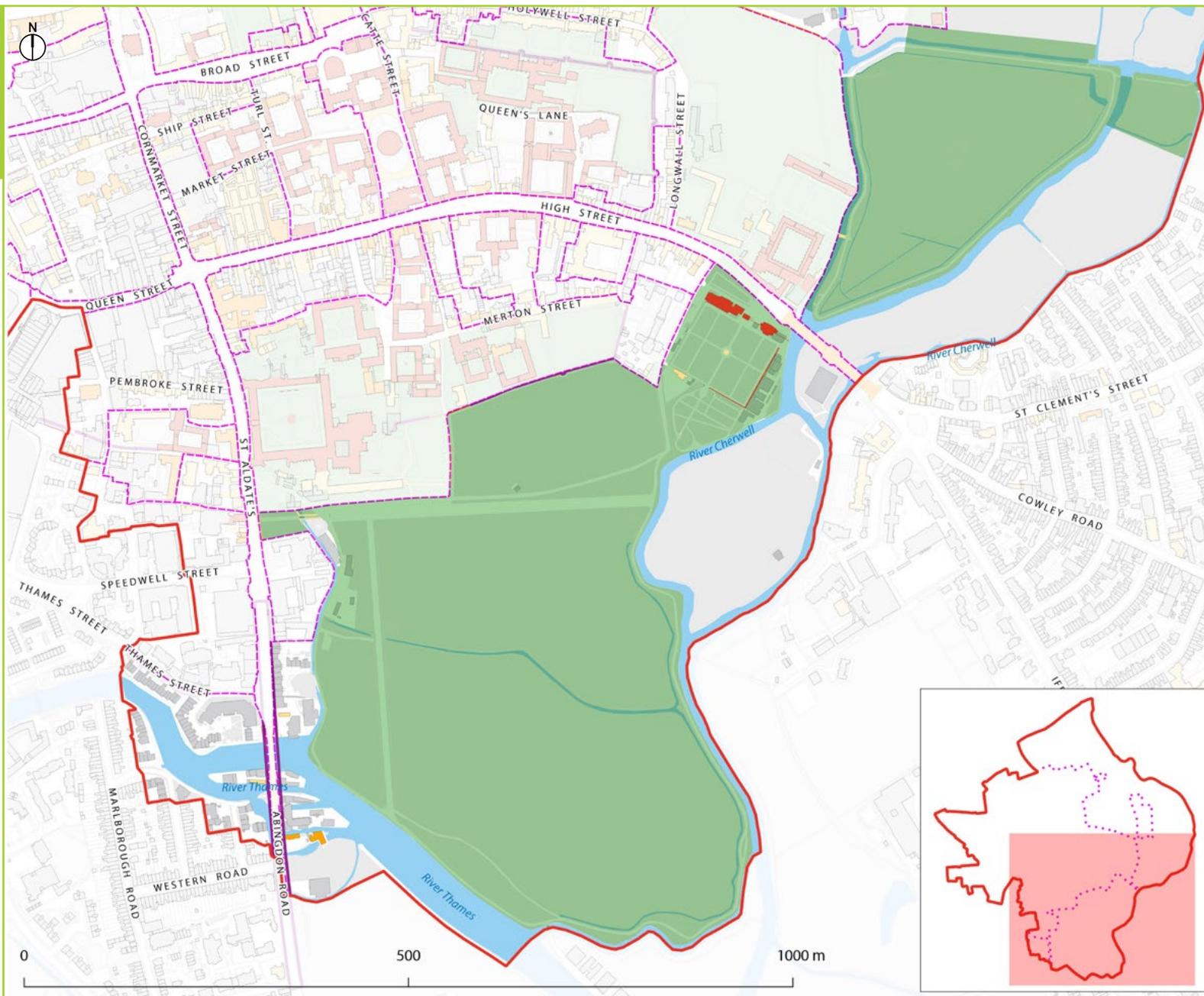
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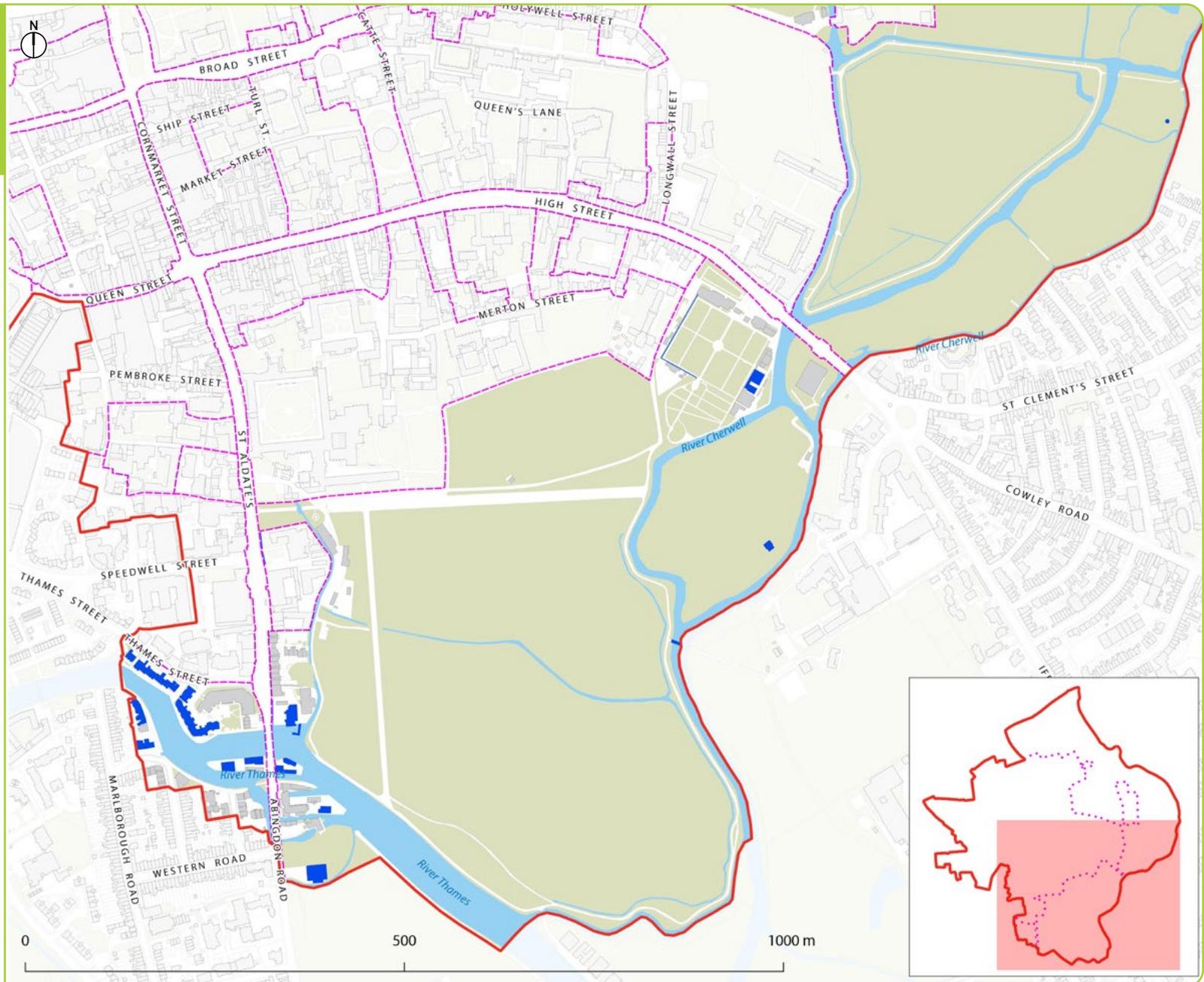


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Positive contributors Flood Plain

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9.3.7 Roofscape



Roofscape



Theme 21: roofscape, skyline and landmarks

Building heights are generally three to four storeys.

Roofscape 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.



St Cross Law and English Library is a dominating building because of its large footprint and strongly horizontal lines



Modern student accommodation blocks along Jowett Walk use a variety of different colours of brick and have varied rooflines



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

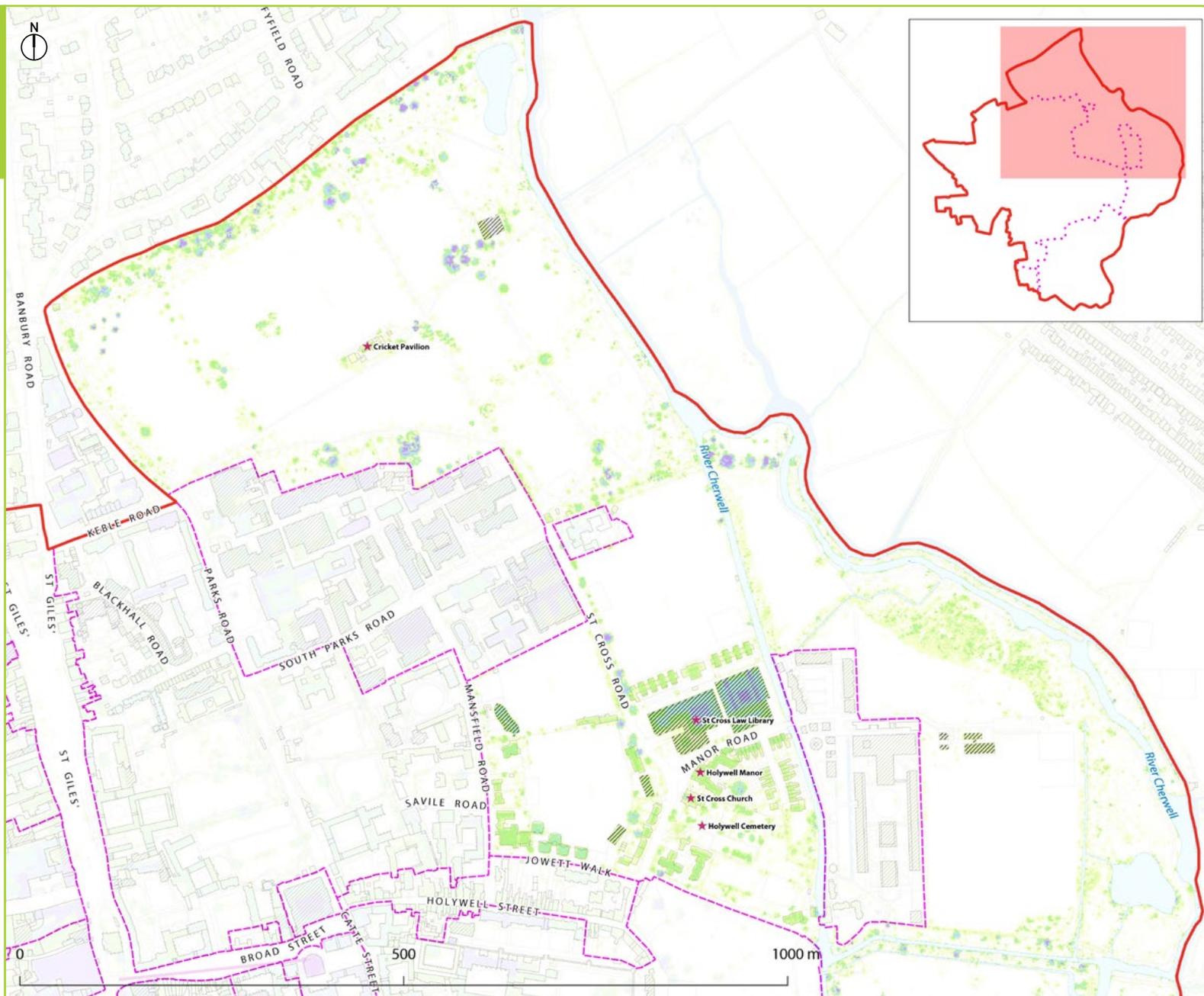
Elevated panorama

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

5m

10m

15m

20m

Flat roofs

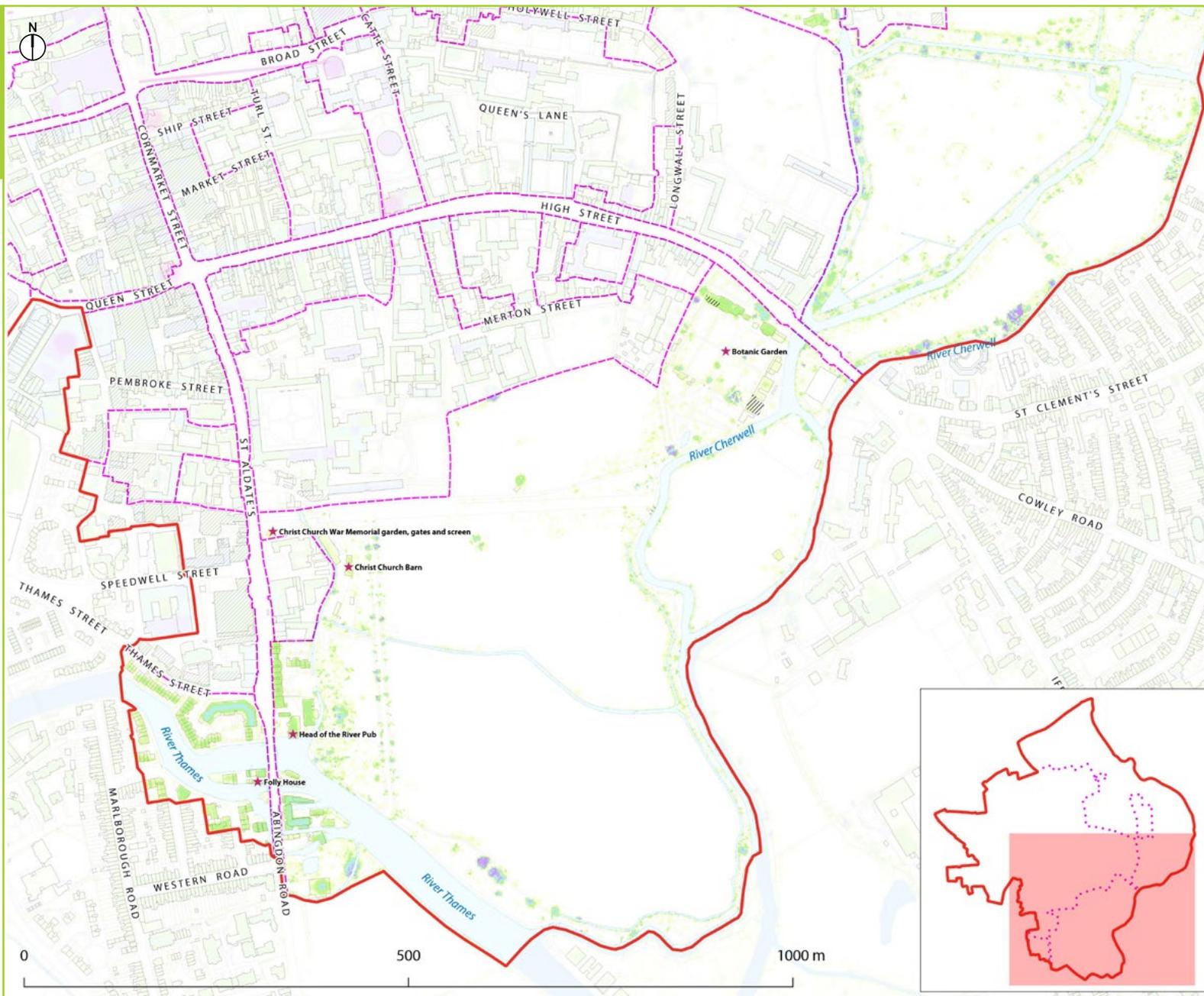
Elevated panorama

Designed public view

Focal point

Landmarks

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



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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 is 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

