

Site capacity assessment – Local Plan 2045

Site name	Cowley Marsh Depot
LP2045 Site Allocation	SPS4
Site size (ha)	1.71ha

Site location



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A) Site overview

Description of current context

- Current use is a City Council depot, recycling and storage for refuse collection vehicles.
- It is located within a residential area just off Cowley Road (but outside of district centre). It's a fairly low density use of the site and the buildings are not of particularly good quality. Hence the landowner is looking to relocate once an alternative site can be found and replace with residential to make more efficient use of site.
- The site is located in a residential area, adjoining the Cowley Marsh Recreation Ground
- There is green open space, with good links to transport and facilities on Cowley Road as well as the Sustrans route along Boundary Brook

Site photos



B) Open space, nature and flood risk

Description of current context

Green infrastructure

- UGF score: 0.14 (almost entire site is hard-surfaced with concrete or buildings, only minimal hedges around perimeter)

Biodiversity and ecology

- Small strips of LNRS along southern boundary and there is a TPO nearby but not within the site (00/00012/TC Land to West of Leafield Road).
- Semi-natural habitats are absent from the site. Potential protected species constraints include roosting bats and nesting birds.
- Significant established hedge along part of the Marsh Road boundary.
- LCA notes that within the nature reserve at the top edge of the recreation ground many wildflowers, including some rare species such as the Common Spotted Orchid, have been found.

Blue Infrastructure

- Most recent (2025) EA modelling now classifies parts of this site as Flood Zone 3b, and majority of land surrounding the site for access/egress lies in Flood Zone 3b. Flood risk may impact on capacity but not insurmountable. Level 2 site-specific SFRA will be needed to explore the risks in more detail.
- Boundary Brook runs along the eastern boundary of the site.

Land Quality

- The site is likely to require site investigation as potentially contaminated land owing to its existing use as a council depot and fueling station.

Analysis and urban design implications

- Currently the whole site is hard-surfaced with concrete so there is opportunity to improve permeable surfaces by introducing SUDs and permeable garden areas.
- Redevelopment would present opportunities to provide biodiversity enhancements. LNRS measures include creating and/or managing greenspaces and habitats to enhance their condition to benefit wildlife, improve connectivity, and provide wider benefits. Create new, varied ponds in suitable locations across all habitat types to increase biodiversity and create more clean water habitats
- Preliminary analysis suggests that the limited presence of green infrastructure features on the site currently means it is likely to score below the minimum thresholds for green surface cover as required by **Policy G3**. As such, proposals will need to ensure that an appropriate

proportion of green features are incorporated into the design of development to increase the onsite greening up to meet the minimum targets set out in the policy, demonstrated through submission of the Urban Greening Factor assessment.

- Opportunities to support and enhance biodiversity could include: introducing green roofs and SUDS; retaining existing hedgerows around the site and trees around and within the site, particularly around the north of the site closer to the nature reserve; Scope to connect into wildlife corridors by allowing wildlife to connect into the adjoining playing fields and Cowley Marsh Nature Reserve/Boundary Brook/Barracks Lane. There are allotments close by but severed by Cowley Road so a nature corridor is probably not feasible unless crossings could be introduced.
- Boundary Brook runs along the eastern edge of the site. Any proposal should include a site Flood Risk Assessment and design the development to avoid the areas at highest flood risk. This should also consider the site's access from Marsh Lane, parts of which lie in Flood Zone 3b. Existing use is depot whereas proposed use is residential, which in flood risk terms is an increase in vulnerability. Any proposal would need to demonstrate that the development will be safe for its lifetime and not increase flood risk elsewhere.
- For ecology, protective and enhancement measures should be incorporated for river and wetland restoration, as well as ecological buffer zones (minimum of 10m from bank top) for the Boundary Brook.

C) Historic environment, character and local context

Description of current context

Historic environment

- Not within close proximity of a listed building
- Not listed on the Oxford Heritage Asset Register
- Outside of the City Centre Archaeological Area
- Not within or adjoining the Conservation Area.
- Edge of site in Crescent Road view cone

Built environment

- Site is located within a residential area just off Cowley Road (but outside of district centre). The area is fairly low density and the buildings are not of particularly good quality.
- Existing buildings onsite are used for depot uses – some offices and some operational e.g. vehicle maintenance and filling station, so little opportunity for re-use for residential purposes. Buildings onsite are maximum 2 storeys, with flat roofs, so fairly low impact in combination with the hedges, in terms of the Crescent Road View Cone and other views.
- There are two residential properties within the site, at the corner between Marsh Road and the single track adjacent to the southern boundary, which are within the same land ownership.
- Modern infill development on nearby streets also contributes to the diversity of the area with the addition of 2-3 storey flats. The LCA notes that nearby materials are predominantly render or pebble dash and red brick with clay tile roofs.
- On the other side, public open space adjoins the site (Cowley Marsh Recreation Ground) with a mixture of informal space, tennis, cricket and football facilities, a lit 'streetsport' site with markings and equipment for roller hockey, basketball and a five-a-side football and an equipped play area. In the top corner at the edge of the recreation ground is a meadow nature reserve.

Analysis and urban design implications

- The site is suitable for residential development of similar density and form to the surrounding residential area.
- Development of 2 storey terraced blocks would reflect existing surrounding street frontages along Marsh Road, and surrounding streets along crescent road and Temple Road, and could help to complete the urban form along Marsh Road, to positively engage with the street whilst also respecting the significant established hedge.
- Site is large enough to allow for a mix of flats and houses, which would also allow for some variation in roofscape form and heights. Surrounding terraced houses mainly have pitched

roofs, although in the vicinity there is also higher density modern flats eg on former industrial land.

- Some 3 storey townhouses and 2-3 storey flats on the site could be in keeping with some of the modern infill on Marsh Road, and would offer greater density. Likely to be more opportunity for this towards the back of the site overlooking the park although it would need to be tested in views across the field and in the view cone.
- Dominant materials in surrounding residential streets are brick and render, and some examples of brick detailing too. Development should incorporate high quality materials taking inspiration from local area.
- The edge of the site is within the Crescent Road view cone so it will need to be demonstrated that new development on the site does not have unacceptable impacts on the views across or into the site. Some of the threats to the view cone, as identified in the View Cones study, might include planting of inappropriate tree species such as Leylandii as wind breaks or visual screening features; new built development gradually eroding remaining green spaces and encroaching on the corridor of Boundary Brook or on the open areas of Cowley Marsh; or streetscape 'clutter' such as telegraph poles, lamp posts, sign posts and other vertical features.
- Some young, planted trees along the edge adjoining the open space (outside of the red line), and some more mature trees along northern edge, along Marsh Lane. These offer opportunity to incorporate into landscaping.
- If the landowner chooses to retain the two existing residential properties within the site, then the design of this corner will need a sensitive edge, or they could alternatively be redeveloped within a comprehensive scheme.

D) Access, movement and layout

Description of current context

Access into the site

- Pedestrian access is via pavement alongside the existing vehicle entrance linking to existing pavements along Marsh Road. There is no significant change in level so this would also be suitable for disability access.
- For vehicles including refuse and emergency vehicles, there is existing road access via Marsh Road (off Cowley Road) which would be suitable.
- Site adjoins but not within Temple Cowley CPZ.

Layout of the site

- Site fronts onto Marsh Road, currently no access to the adjoining open space / recreation ground.
- Little scope for existing depot buildings onsite to be reused so layout is likely to change with redevelopment.

Connectivity to wider area

- For cycle access, there is easy access to Cowley Road, and the opportunity to connect into Sustrans route 57 along Boundary Brook.
- Pedestrian access via Marsh Road to Cowley road, giving easy access to the buses on Cowley Road. Also, pedestrian connections to Barracks Lane.
- There are pavements on both sides of Marsh Road, connecting to Cowley Road, Crescent Road and Temple Road, and all have good surveillance from residential buildings
- There are also footways across the green open space connecting to Barracks Lane and Cowley Marsh Nature Reserve (currently not directly accessible from the site due to brick wall on the western edge).

Analysis and urban design implications

- Existing vehicle and pedestrian access onto Marsh Road (and onwards to Cowley Road) would be suitable, including for refuse and emergency vehicles.

- Opportunities should be taken to develop and link into existing pedestrian and cycling ways.
- Redevelopment would also present opportunities to improve the permeability of the site and pedestrian/cycle access through the site to footways and cycle networks.
- Any new internal streets must be legible, active and bring forward a similar urban grain to the surrounding residential streets. There are opportunities to increase permeability through the site, opening up access to the Recreation Ground for the local community south of the site.

E) Other considerations

Other considerations to include in allocations?

None identified

F) Landowner aspirations

Landowner has confirmed (2025) intention to develop site for residential, pending finding a suitable site to relocate the depot.

G) Any extra work needed to inform allocation?

Level 2 site-specific SFRA is underway, which may further impact on capacity

H) Key considerations informing the minimum number of homes for the allocation policy

Minimum capacity for the site has been calculated with the following assumptions:

- Retention of established trees/hedgerows at perimeter, and buffer along watercourse
- 10% onsite open space provision
- Suburban density applied to remaining site (60dph) = 85 dwellings.
- Minus 2 existing properties onsite = 83 net gain

Note this may still need further discount depending on EA flood risk comments from SFRA level 2