

Site capacity assessment – Local Plan 2045

Site name	Ruskin Field
LP2045 Site Allocation	SPE14
Site size (ha)	3.51ha

Site location



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A) Site overview

Description of current context

- Site currently greenfield vacant undeveloped land with GI function and no public access.
- The site is adjacent to Barton which is one of the most deprived areas of Oxford.

Site photos



B) Open space, nature and flood risk

Description of current context

Green infrastructure

- Site contains significant existing trees and hedgerows around the boundaries of site and marking historic field boundaries, which are important to public amenity in the area and will provide valuable ecosystem services. Trees are protected by location within the Old Headington Conservation Area. Hedgerows are potentially "important" under the Hedgerow Regs.
- There is no public access to the site, but development would provide the potential benefit of opening up public access.
- The site currently scores well above the target UGF score, being entirely green infrastructure, and including some GI features of relatively high value.

Biodiversity and ecology

- Contains no nature conservation designations but has potential for nature conservation interest.
- Potential protected species constraints include roosting bats, foraging and commuting bats, breeding birds, reptiles, potentially badgers, amphibians and invertebrates.
- Ruskin Field consists of a series of neutral grassland fields. They appear semi-improved ranging from species-poor to moderately species-rich (semi-improved – good) and overall of medium distinctiveness.
- Some of the boundary hedges are wide and dense and likely to have value for birds and their retention is important to preserve and improve ecological value.
- Just to the south of the site (and within the previous site allocation) is priority habitat deciduous woodland.

Blue infrastructure

- To the south the site includes a small pond, with a ditch running to it. There is potentially a wetland element given the springs, seepages, and ponds in the area. This should be established through a detailed botanical survey.
- Site is in Flood Zone 1 - (*Patches of surface water flood risk present in close proximity to ditches*)

Land quality

- Potential for peat deposits on site as they have been recorded at Dunstan Park to the west of the site.

Analysis and urban design implications

- Boundary features should be retained and hedgerows and treelines across the site retained as far as possible for their ecological value and potential for enhancement
- Detailed biodiversity surveys will be required at the right times of year to ascertain what protected species are present and any mitigations that may be needed.
- Built development should avoid the southern part of the site where there is a pond, potential for wetland species, greater potential for peat deposits; this area should be used for enhancements to biodiversity and green infrastructure.

C) Historic environment, character and local context

Historic environment

- Site is entirely within the Old Headington Conservation Area and as a vestige of the rural landscape, the application site makes an important contribution to the character, appearance and significance of it.
- Old Headington has origins in the mid-12th Century and retains the character of a quiet rural village with an attractive green setting.
- The 2011 Conservation Area Appraisal notes that the fragments of green fields within the conservation area contribute to the rural character of the village and provide a green setting, with hedges and hedgerow trees in views looking over to the countryside. It should be noted that there have been changes to the area since 2011. The hedgerows provide structure and vertical interest in views set against the foreground and background of development.
- The 2011 Conservation Area Appraisal notes two significant view lines of relevance to the site, which is looking NNE from the SE corner of the site and looking SW from the road adjacent to the NE corner of the site, towards Ruskin College.
- The site is not within a view cone but there is potential for it to impact views from the Elsfield View Cone.

- View from Stoke Place across Ruskin Fields to Elsfield is one of the most sensitive across and out of the CA.
- There is a Grade II listed wall to the south of the site (Walls of Walled Garden at Ruskin College, Grade II), although the green and treed nature of the unallocated part of the field provides strong screening.
- The site lies within the settings of a number of other listed buildings: *The Rookery* (Ruskin College), Grade II, *Stoke House*, Grade II listed, *8 Dunstan Road*, Grade II listed, *The Manor Farmhouse* and *Garden Wall of Manor Farmhouse*, both Grade II, *Church of St Andrew*, Grade II*
- Evidence of Iron Age activity and Roman pottery production has been recorded from the adjacent college campus site, so it has archaeological potential.

Built environment

- Old Headington has a clear village development envelope and distinct character from surrounding, later developments. Fields form part of the former setting of the village
- The site is within the Old Headington Core Character Area 3B. Old Headington is a former village. Its origins are Saxon, but a medieval church remains and most of the village retains a strong sense of its post-medieval character. Most buildings are stone or brick with slate and clay roofs. Remaining green spaces such as Ruskin Field and particularly Dunstan Park and Bury Knowle Park contribute to the generally leafy feel.

Analysis and urban design implications

- The field is one of the few vestiges of the rural character of the conservation area and contributes to its setting and understanding its history. Green space must be strategically retained in order to conserve this character.
- Hedgerows and treelines should be retained where possible and integrated into the future development, as their structure provides a vital visual link to the countryside beyond.
- Low density development that can be interwoven with significant green infrastructure is likely to be most appropriate to retain the character of the conservation area.
- An LVIA of the view from Elsfield View Cone will be needed. Initial testing in views suggests development closer to the A40 is least sensitive, and heights should remain low- in the most part only a few storeys- to minimise negative impacts on character of the Conservation Area.
- Important views across the site should be retained by careful siting of buildings.
- The setting of the Crinkle Crankle wall and other buildings of Ruskin College are highly sensitive and the need to protect their setting must be balanced against the need to retain the green visual connection across the undeveloped countryside that the field provides.

D) Access, movement and layout

Description of current context

Access into the site

- Currently no vehicle access to the site.
- PROW to the east of the site – Stoke Place – part BOAT, part Bridleway
- City Council has agreed access rights to the site from Foxhall Road, should development come forward.
- The only other potential access point would be through the college, which would limit development to that linked to the college.

Connectivity to wider area

- Nearest bus stops are on Haliday Hill to the west of the site – service 14 operates from here, and the X3 runs along Foxwell Drive every 20 minutes.
- There is good accessibility of the site to amenities and workplaces.

Analysis and urban design implications

- Foxwell Drive provides the best opportunity for access as it would be an independent access, and it also gives good access to the X3 bus route that runs every 20 minutes.
- Stoke Place is narrow and rural in character and is not suitable to bring in a vehicular access from, but potential for pedestrian, wheeler and cycle access to it should be considered.

E) Other considerations

Other considerations to include in allocations?

Amenity

- The A40 (Oxford ring road) is at the northern boundary of the site which may cause disturbance such as noise and pollution. Mitigation may be necessary.

F) Landowner aspirations

Landowner intention to develop for residential.

G) Any extra work needed to inform allocation?

First stage biodiversity surveys have been undertaken- more would be required at application stage to support detailed proposals.

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:

- Further testing may show that greater capacity is possible, but because of the very sensitive nature of the site in terms of heritage, setting and green infrastructure/ecology, a cautious approach has been taken to calculating a minimum capacity.
- A density of 25dph is assumed, fitting of the greenfield location in a largely intact rural village type conservation area
- n-s hedgerows and boundaries to be maintained.
- The northern area of the field to be developed, with the southernmost parts closer to the pond area and priority habitat to be retained green, with opportunities for enhancement of these, potentially as public open space that is a nature area.