

Site capacity assessment – Local Plan 2045

Site name	Diamond Place and Ewert House
LP2045 Site Allocation	SPN1
Site size (ha)	1.85

Site location



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A) Site overview

Description of current context

- The site is part of the Summertown District centre.
- The site includes a large amount of level open space, much of which is used as car parking to serve the shops on Banbury Road, the Ferry Leisure Centre and Ewert House. There are two buildings within the site, of little architectural merit. Ewert House is a large building used largely for University administration and exams. The community centre is a well used asset, but is single storey and an awkward hexagonal shape.
- The Diamond Place Car Park is particularly busy in the daytime, with car movements in all directions making the place difficult to read and unpleasant to navigate.
- The rear of shops and their servicing areas are to the west of the site, the north is mainly Summer Fields School, the east has a foot and cycle path that is quite rural in character, with a strong tree/hedge line or fence along the length of the site and the rest of the surroundings is residential, including student accommodation.

Site photos

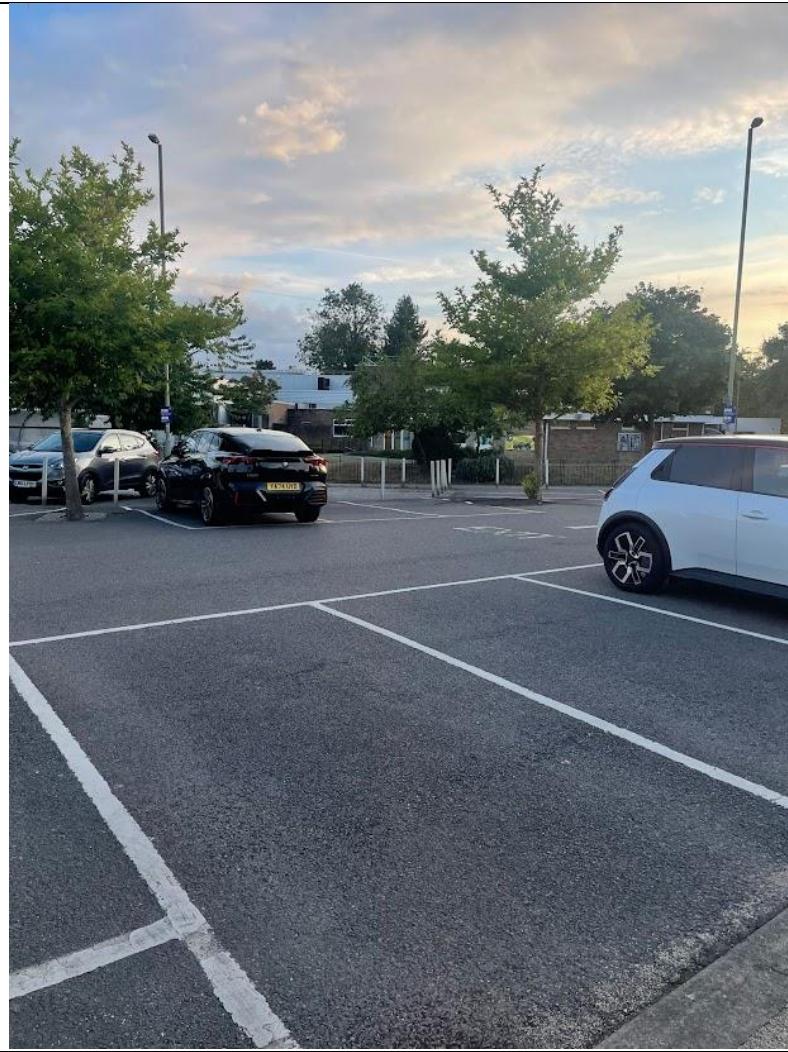
Looking to Ewert House from the west:



Looking to Ewert House from Ferry Car Park:



North Oxford Association Community Centre:



B) Open space, nature and flood risk

Description of current context

Green infrastructure

- There are some small areas of planting and soft landscaping within the site.
- Outside the Community Centre is a small grassed area that is separated off from Ferry Leisure Centre Car Park. Despite its limited size, this area is well used, likely in part due to there being little other public open space in the area.
- There are mature trees dotted around Diamond Place Car Park.
- Some shrubs mark the border between Ewert House and Ferry Leisure Centre Car Park, which appears as an extension of historic east-west field boundary, but is now planted landscaping.
- Around the edges of the site are some more significant green features.

Biodiversity and ecology

- Potential protected species constraints are likely limited to roosting bats in existing buildings. The school fields east of the site are well connected to the wider landscape via hedgerows.

Blue Infrastructure

- The site is in Flood Zone 1 with some patches of surface water flood risk within the site. There is also safe access/egress from the site, as the surrounding area is also all within Flood Zone 1.

Land Quality

- Depending on nature of proposed development, a site investigation and contamination risk assessment may be required to confirm absence of risks.

Analysis and urban design implications

- If existing trees are removed, new trees should be planted to fully mitigate the impact on tree canopy cover and green infrastructure.
- An extension of the neighbouring green areas into the site as green fingers will be important to achieve UGF score, and to reflect important characteristics of the area.
- Public open space will need to be provided. There is scope for this to be successfully provided in a number of ways, but high-quality planting will be needed, even in a more urban-style space and an attractive area that appeals to all and that includes sufficient seating is important.

C) Historic environment, character and local context

Description of current context

Historic environment

- The Grade II listed Diamond Cottages sit near to the site, between Ferry Leisure Centre and the Banbury Road. At present the cottages are characterised by their back-land feel and their backdrop is already of significantly larger-scale and more modern developments. There is some potential for the backdrop to be enhanced.
- The North Oxford Victorian Suburb Conservation Area is situated to the south and includes a section of Banbury Road. The conservation area is characterised by large detached and semi-detached houses built in the early 1850s. Although the site falls outside of the conservation area, it is important to consider the views.
- The site has very limited visual connection to the historic core, meaning there is potential for height, with care, and especially away from the more sensitive edges (the boarding accommodation to the north and green corridor to the east). The High Buildings TAN sets out what heights have potential to have an impact on the historic core.
- The site is of archaeological interest as it is adjacent to an area of cropmarks of Prehistoric or Roman era. This will require further investigation as part of any redevelopment.

Built environment

- The site lacks good quality urban design owing to the dominance of the open surface car parking.
- There is poor inter-relationship from the boundaries to the surrounding area, and some of these edges are sensitive, so care is required.
- The site is in the North Oxford Open River Terrace character area. This is an area of former arable and pasture fields evolved largely into open recreational spaces adjacent to the urban landscape. Many retained hedgerow boundaries indicate the former use. The typical block pattern is one of single estate or recreational buildings scattered within the open landscape.

Analysis

Analysis and urban design implications

- New development should be designed to conceal unattractive views of the backs of Banbury Road shops and Ferry Leisure Centre roofline.
- Care needs to be taken to avoid overlooking of Summer Fields School, especially the boarding accommodation immediately to the north of the site.
- Development proposals that exceed the height that the High Buildings TAN states may have an impact on the historic core will be required to provide extensive information so that the full impacts can be understood and assessed (Policy HD9).

D) Access, movement and layout

Description of current context

Access into the site

- There are three vehicular access points into the site currently. Ewert Place provides access to Ewert House Car Park, Diamond Place provides access to Diamond Place Car Park and Ferry Pool Road provides access to Ferry Sports Centre Car Park. All access points allow two way traffic and there is no vehicular link between the different parts of the site.
- Diamond Place is currently the best used of the access points and cars can turn left or right onto Banbury Road relatively easily. It also provides the strongest visual link into the site from outside.
- Ferry Pool Road is narrow and parked cars mean that it is effectively a single lane. It can also be difficult to exit and turn right onto Marston Ferry Road due to vehicles queuing at the traffic lights.

Layout of the site

- The site provides an important pedestrian and cycle link between the district centre and Cherwell School. The route cuts diagonally across Ferry Car Park and is marked out on the tarmac, but pedestrians, cyclists and wheelers must move between parked cars on the Diamond Place Car Park in order to navigate across.
- There is potential for better connectivity around the site for vehicles as well as pedestrians, although level changes may not allow this. In any event, it is important the site is designed so it cannot operate as a cut-through.

Connectivity to wider area

- The site is very well served by public transport, with bus stops nearby and frequent buses to the city centre, out of Oxford to the north and buses to the John Radcliffe and Blackbird Leys.
- Oxford Parkway Station is about a 35min walk, but only a 7minute bus ride away.
- Adjacent to the Ferry Car Park, the athletics track of Summer Fields School to the east has previously been a site allocation. The school is not currently interested in bringing forward that site for development, but the possible need to allow for future access should be considered.

Analysis and urban design implications

- Clear visual links through the site will be important to maintain legibility
- Pedestrian, wheeler and cycle links through the site should be formalised
- The site should provide high quality public open space that appeals to all senses and creates an area to meet and obtain respite in the centre of the busy district centre.
- The possible need to allow for future access through to the Summer Field School athletic track should be considered.

E) Other considerations

Other considerations to include in allocations?

Amenity

- The site includes a community centre, which should be replaced to a better standard than at present. The prospect of providing a new medical centre should also be explored.

Infrastructure needs

- The potential for the GP surgery to be relocated to this site should be explored as part of any development.

F) Landowner aspirations

An Outline Strategic Business Case has been prepared by one of the landowners (City Council) who consider that it is possible to bring forward a viable scheme. OUD, as the development agency arm of the University of Oxford, are keen to explore the site's development potential and have an ambition to provide some student accommodation. The University will need to find alternative accommodation for the Examination Building. In order to maximise the public benefits of this scheme it would be advantageous to undertake a comprehensive redevelopment of the site involving both key landowners, so the timing, phasing and mechanism for partnership working will be key to its delivery. Landowners actively engaged with the local community. Uses proposed are housing-both market and affordable- student accommodation, replacement community hall and potentially a new health / medical centre. Possibly retention of some element of car parking.

G) Any extra work needed to inform allocation? (won't apply to all sites)

N/A

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, which are not design guidelines:

- 10% of the area used as residential should be used for public open space
- The assumption is made that the multi-storey car park to serve the site could be accommodated in the space between Diamond Place and Ewert Place, to about a third of the way across the site to the west. This is an assumption and not part of the policy direction, but is based on some sound reasoning about what will be required and how it should be provided.

- The space of the community centre and its garden is sufficient space for a significant community hub containing improved community facilities and shared with other provisions, which may or may not be commercial, such as a health centre
- There may be some modest other commercial uses at ground floor, extending into the site from the district centre, although these could be at the base of the car park and will have limited impact on capacity.
- A density of 100dph is assumed, in keeping with the district centre character of the area.