

Site capacity assessment – Local Plan 2045

Site name	Oxpens site
LP2045 Site Allocation	SPCW10
Site size (ha)	6.3ha

Site location



A) Site overview

Description of current context

Site description

- Mix of uses on site including Ice Rink, car park, former filling station, open space, sheltered housing and businesses.
- Outline planning permission granted (July 2025) for a mixed used scheme (on the majority of the site but not covering the full extent of it) including residential, student accommodation, commercial uses (Class E), hotel, and public open space.
- Planning permission for a pedestrian and cycle bridge linking the West End and Grandpont was granted in July 2024. However, this decision was the subject of a judicial review, which was heard in the High Court in February 2025, and dismissed. Permission to build across the River Thames was granted by the Secretary of State in July 2025.
- The "Oxpens River Bridge" will be an important piece of infrastructure that supports wider regeneration aims in this part of the city.
- Site located within the "West End" of the city centre off Oxpens Road, near to the railway station and Westgate Shopping Centre.
- A small portion of the site has been identified as Safeguarded Land under the East West Rail Safeguarding Direction (November 2025)

Site photos





B) Open space, nature and flood risk

Description of current context

Green infrastructure

- No TPOs on site but site aerial imagery shows the site contains some trees and hedgerows.
- UGF score is low (under 0.2) - existing on-site GI appears low quality scrub
- Oxpens Meadow benefits from Field in Trust status. It a well-used public open space.

Biodiversity and ecology

- Previous ecological assessments and aerial imagery indicate the site does not contain any priority habitats or habitats of high distinctiveness. The site is dominated by developed land or cleared ground, with areas of grassland, scrub, scattered trees, and hedgerow / tree lines.
- Potential protected species constraints include roosting bats, foraging and commuting bats, nesting birds, reptiles, and badgers.

Blue Infrastructure

- The River Thames runs along the southern site boundary.
- Site lies partly within Flood Zone 3b
- Patches of surface water flood risk present within site, with the largest patches located towards the eastern end

- OFAS safeguarding not required

Land Quality

- Site contains a former petrol filling station so potential for contamination on a small part of the site

Analysis and urban design implications

Green infrastructure

- The area known as 'Oxpens Meadow' offers an opportunity to deliver ecological enhancements if management can be diversified.
- Green roofs and walls should be considered
- Development proposals should demonstrate how green and blue infrastructure will be integrated across the site

Biodiversity and Ecology

- Opportunities for biodiversity enhancement should be delivered through development at the site. Potential exists for bats (roosting and foraging), birds, reptiles, etc.

Blue infrastructure

- The river corridor should be protected and enhanced through development proposals.
- Buffer (minimum 10m) should be left along the site boundary with the River Thames (at to southern-most boundary of the site).
- SuDS could be incorporated into future development of the site. This could be through a reduction in the amount of hard surfacing such as car parks, land around the rear of the buildings and in front gardens of residential development.
- Site specific FRA will be required to support planning applications for development proposals at the site.

Land Quality

- Site contamination investigation will be required to ensure any contamination issues associated with former uses are properly mitigated

LNRS

- Part of site is included within an area on the LNRS mapping that highlights several potential measures that could be implemented when delivering biodiversity improvements. (See County Council LNRS mapping tool for further details).

C) Historic environment, character and local context

Description of current context

Historic environment

Conservation areas

- Northeast corner of the site on Osney Lane is opposite a tight corner boundary of the Central (University and City) conservation area. Part of the southwestern boundary of the site is near the boundary of the Osney Town conservation area. Existing railway infrastructure and buildings (Student Castle) act as a buffer.

Heritage assets

- No listed buildings, SAMs, RPGs, on site.
- Nearest Listed Building is the Grade II Memorial South of Osney Lock, which is located on the Thames Towpath, and is screened by trees, the river and the railway from the site.
- OHAR registered local heritage assets nearby include the former Maroon Public House on Hollybush Row, Oxpens Meadow, and the Oxpens Road Bridge. The site of Osney Abbey OHAR is also near the site.

Archaeology

- Site lies within the City Centre Archaeological Area. Potential for medieval remains, and 17th Century (Civil War Defence) as well as some 19th and early 20th Century archaeological potential

Views

- Site located within historic core area and is visible within key views from Raleigh Park and Boars Hill.
- Views out from key viewpoints within the historic core also important – e.g., St Mary's Tower
- Site may be visible from views across the city (e.g., Elsfield)

Built environment

Land uses on site

- Mix of uses including surface level car park, Ice Rink, buildings including sheltered housing accommodation, Royal Mail sorting office and associated surface level parking, green space, several single storey/ low rise buildings (industrial in nature)

Land uses immediately surrounding the site

- The river and railway infrastructure are located to the south and west. Student accommodation and residential accommodation are located off Osney Lane. Becket St (to the north of the site) includes more surface level car parking (linked to the Railway Station). Oxpens Road forms the eastern boundary of the site. Activate Learning (further education), the southern boundary of the Westgate shopping centre are along Oxpens Road/ Thames Street. Oxpens Meadow is located to the south east of the site which is bounded by Castle Mill Stream and the River Thames.

Scale and form of surrounding development.

- To the west of the Railway (Osney Town Conservation Area is mainly 2-storey Victorian terraces
- To the south, beyond the river and the railway are the undeveloped river floodplains of the Thames
- To the west beyond the Castle Mill Stream and south of Thames Street, lies St. Ebbes which contains a mix of modern (20th Century) residential flats and maisonettes.
- Existing buildings on and around the site include from 1-3 storeys (Ice Rink and others fronting Oxpens Road) to 5 storey buildings (Student Castle). On the other side of Oxpens Road, Activate Learning/ Oxford includes some 3-5 storey metal clad buildings.
- The Westgate Centre is also a tall building which faces away from Thames Street/ Oxpens Road. which is near to the site.

Materials on and around the site

- Majority of site is surface level car parking
- On-site materials include brick (Royal Mail sorting office (red) and Richard Gray Court (buff) and the former Coven II nightclub (tarnished white). The former Formula Auto Centres building is a low-rise light industrial unit (most likely steel framed with white cladding and blue roller shutter doors).

Re-use of existing buildings on site

- Unlikely, current buildings on site are older and don't make best use of land.

Character area

- The majority of the site falls within Area 2B (Historic Western Fringe) as set out in the Landscape Character Assessment. While the remainder (including the Ice Rink, car park and the greenspace at Oxpens Meadows is classified as 9E (Pastoral Floodplains Hinksey/ Bulstake Streams).
- The Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) identifies Area 2B as the Historic Western Fringe and states:
- The Western Fringe character area wraps around the western edge of the historic core of Oxford. The area accommodates diverse land uses and ages of development. It is dominated in parts by the busy Oxpens Road (A420) and key vehicular conduits into the centre such as Park End Street, as well as the railway station and bus station. Between these busy roads and nodes, lies a dense jumble of historic buildings, retail and service development, and residential and academic land uses.

- It also sets out that the incremental change seen over the years in this area, is sometimes poorly integrated into the older fabric and historic context of the city. The area has a confusing street and block pattern with poor legibility. It is not an easy area to get around by walking, cycling or by car and there is little open space and poor visibility/ connectivity with the watercourses that flow through this part of the city.
- This area has some sensitivity to change as a result of its historic time depth and its gateway location, and proximity, to the historic core. It also lies within the view cones of the key viewpoints identified from Raleigh Park and Boar's Hill and this heightens its sensitivity to tall built elements. This area has undergone many changes over the years that has led to a loss of clarity of the urban form in part.
- The Hinksey / Bulstake Streams character area (9E) forms part of the wider flat, alluvial floodplain of the southern part of the River Thames, comprising the streams and tributaries that border the southwest of Oxford. The character area is critical in forming part of the landscape setting to the historic core, painted by Turner and celebrated in poetry by Matthew Arnold. It forms part of the landscape in the view of three notable view cones, from the Western Hills.
- This wider character area (9E) has an important role in the setting of the city of Oxford, providing a sense of rural landscape in proximity to the urban area, with good survival of floodplain features. The area is critical in the iconography of Oxford, forming part of a much painted and documented view from Boar's Hill and North Hinksey. The area retains a strong visual and cultural unity and vast areas of tranquil, rural countryside.

Analysis and urban design implications

- Given the city centre location, it is likely that development coming forward would seek to maximise heights. As the area lies with the city's Historic Core Area and within several view cones, the proposal of any tall buildings will need to demonstrate that they have undergone appropriate visual and contextual analysis to ensure any potential impact resulting from their siting, massing, and form can be mitigated/ avoided.
- Given the visual sensitivity of the site there are opportunities to enhance the view from e.g., Raleigh Park View Cone, by "reducing the prominence of visually intrusive roof-surfaces". Examples provided in the city's view cones report (2015), include the use of darker or less reflective materials for roofs, or using tree planting to break up the area of roof-surfaces.
- A varied roof-scape would provide more visual interest. One of the key design aspirations of the West End SPD is a "dynamic roof landscape" which could provide a "picturesque contribution to Oxford's skyline within industrial and three-dimensional greenery".
- Given the visual prominence of the site's location, it may not be possible to utilise solar panels on the roofs. Solar tiles or other non-visually intrusive renewable energy solutions should be considered and delivered.
- Given the potential sensitivities of the site, investigation as to whether solar panels may be appropriate on flat roofs, should be undertaken, if they are sought in this location.
- There is opportunity to deliver a public open space with associated landscaping as part of the delivery of this site.
- There is an opportunity to improve landscape/ townscape of the site due to its existing poor quality. Parking opportunities could be reduced significantly given the city centre location with good existing links via cycling, walking and its proximity to the Railway Station. As mentioned previously, there are opportunities to improve bus access to the site.
- There is an opportunity to greatly improve the public realm, given the site's existing poor quality.

D) Access, movement and layout

Description of current context

Access into the site

- Pedestrian public access to the site is currently limited as the majority of the site is within private ownership. In particular, the northern half of the site which includes the Royal Mail sorting office and associated surface level car parking, additional former surface level public car parking which now appears to be in use as a site compound. The flats at Richard Gray court include private space for residents, while the former filling station is fenced off.

The Ice Rink, and public car park fronting Oxpens Road are publicly accessible but access through the site is not possible.

- Pedestrian access to the southern part of the site is possible via Oxpens Meadow
- Pedestrian access around the site is possible using the existing public realm which is described in the LCA (2022) as a barrier to movement limiting certain connections (e.g., cycle and pedestrian movements to and from the Oxpens site itself).
- The sweep of Oxpens Road itself dominates the street and block pattern.
- Cycle access in and around the site features the same limitations as the pedestrian movements.
- Private vehicle users to the site are able to access the site via Oxpens Road only. There is not internal site circulation for vehicles at present.

Layout of the site

- Current site layout appears to be focused around surface level car parking as the site's main use, with the on-site built form (other than modern student accommodation delivered at Student Castle), providing what seems to be a secondary role in the overall site layout.
- Other than the existing student accommodation development, the site is not structured into any recognisable block or other pattern of urban form.
- While public and private spaces are clearly defined (private spaces are fenced off), this does not create a positive sense of place.
- The majority of the older existing built form appears to front onto Oxpens Road, which itself is "barrier to movement". The existing built form is all older, some of which is poor quality (e.g., tired, aging, Formula Autos Centre – an older light industrial building formerly used as a car repair centre), and although this area of the city does have industrial heritage, the existing buildings on site are not of the same architectural quality of some of the nearby streets within the West End.

Connectivity to wider area

- Pedestrian access to the Westgate and city centre shopping area is currently via a pedestrian crossing located on Oxpens Road/ Thames Street. This junction also provides access (from Thames St/ Abingdon Road) to the Westgate for private car users. The pedestrian crossing, whilst functional, does not add to the public realm, which remains dominated by the width of Oxpens Road. This area is often congested, particularly at weekends, with visitors to the city choosing to drive and park at the Westgate, rather than pursuing more active modes.
- The former Gasworks Rail Bridge connects Grandpoint with St Ebbes and can be accessed via another bridge over the Castle Mill Stream to connect pedestrians with the southern-most part of Oxpens Meadow.
- To the north of the site, via Becket St, is Oxford Station, and bus stops are located here (and at the Westgate shopping centre) to a variety of locations, within and outside the city.
- Oxpens Road itself does not contain any active bus stops currently.

Analysis and urban design implications

- New development should seek to improve circulation through the site and should create new well-designed pedestrian/ cycle routes that encourage users to enter and move around and through the site.
- Internal site legibility and permeability could be assisted by using innovative public art as wayfinding.
- Pedestrian and cycle access points could be located along Oxpens Road and Osney Lane. Routes through the site could be prioritised for pedestrians/ cyclists but should be sufficiently engineered to enable delivery vehicles and waste collection vehicles to use the space at certain dedicated times.
- However, access for delivery vehicles should be away (as far as possible) from residential development especially if deliveries are scheduled to take place outside of "daytime" hours (e.g., 7am – 11pm).
- Consideration should be given to how, where and when larger vehicles need to access the site and whether routes through the site should be primarily pedestrian/ cycle friendly.

- The site's relationship with Oxpens Road should be improved and public realm improvements to address the dominance of this road should be investigated and delivered with appropriate organisations.
- Wider connectivity into and out from the site over the river would be improved by a bridge which enables access for all users.
- Public space delivered at the site should be accessible for all users.
- Consideration should be given to site blocks that contain a mix of uses as this can encourage a range of activities at all times of day and help ensure that parts of the site are active most of the time and do not lend inadvertently themselves to anti-social behaviour etc.
- The site's relationship with the River Thames could be improved by enabling better access to it.
- The site's northern edge along Osney Lane could enable vehicular access, as could an access point from Oxpens Road. However, most access points during daytime hours should have pedestrian/ cycle/ active travel user priority.

E) Other considerations

Other considerations to include in allocations?

Amenity

- The site is located on a main vehicular route within the west end of Oxford's city centre and part of the site runs parallel/ is close to the railway line. As such, there is likely to be some noise associated with its location.
- Part of the site boundary is along the River Thames, while the Castle Mill Stream forms the boundary between Oxpens Meadow and the residential community at St. Ebbe's, as such, there is potential for bats to be present in the vicinity of the site. Appropriate lighting should be provided which should be informed by a lighting strategy
- Latest air quality diffusion tube data (2023) from point sources closest to the site show low levels of NOx emissions
 - Oxpens Road/ Thames St – 13µg/m3
 - Osney Lane/ Hollybush Row - 17µg/m3

Infrastructure needs

- Wider electricity network upgrades are taking place in parts of Oxford to support planned growth.
- If the land currently occupied by the Ice Rink is to be developed, this will need to be relocated to a suitably accessible location.
- Plans in place from Thames Water to address wider wastewater capacity issues for the plan period through a series of upgrades to the Oxford STW.

F) Landowner aspirations

What use(s) does landowner propose onsite – see Call for Sites, SHLAA, LP2040 reps.

- *if residential, have they specified student, post-grad, key worker etc*
- *If non-resi – have they specified use e.g healthcare, R&D, offices etc*

Outline planning application granted for mixed use scheme comprising residential (234 homes and 258 student rooms: 337 dwellings equivalent total), commercial (class E) floorspace and a hotel.

Landowner/ developer aspirations for the remainder of the site are to support the delivery the remaining dwellings (113) as featured within the extant site allocation - 450 dwellings. However, majority of remaining land at the site is not currently within the landowner/ developer ownership or control.

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

- *Site-specific mitigations identified from SA*
- *Heritage impact assessment*
- *SFRA Level 2 assessment*
- *HRA biodiversity survey conclusions/recommendations*

SFRA Level 2

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

- Given city centre location a mix of uses are appropriate.
- Landowner intention is to bring forward a mixed-use scheme including employment and residential.
- The minimum housing number is very much dependent on landowner intention, as there are already a range of existing lawful uses appropriate to the city centre location.
- Landowner is proposing a minimum of 450 dwellings