Site capacity assessment – Local Plan 2045

Site name	Osney Mead
Policy Ref:	SPCW8
Site size (ha)	17.8ha

Site location

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A) Site overview

Description of current context

- Mix of employment uses including industrial, warehousing and academic activities. Electricity substation and pylons present on site
- Currently at Category 2 employment site (OLP2036).
- LP2045 proposes site to be a "Key Employment Site"
- Not within a regen area
- Not currently within the city centre boundary
- LP2045 proposes extending the city centre to include this site.

[Continued overleaf]

Site photos

Photo OM1 - site entrance from the Towpath (near Osney Lock)

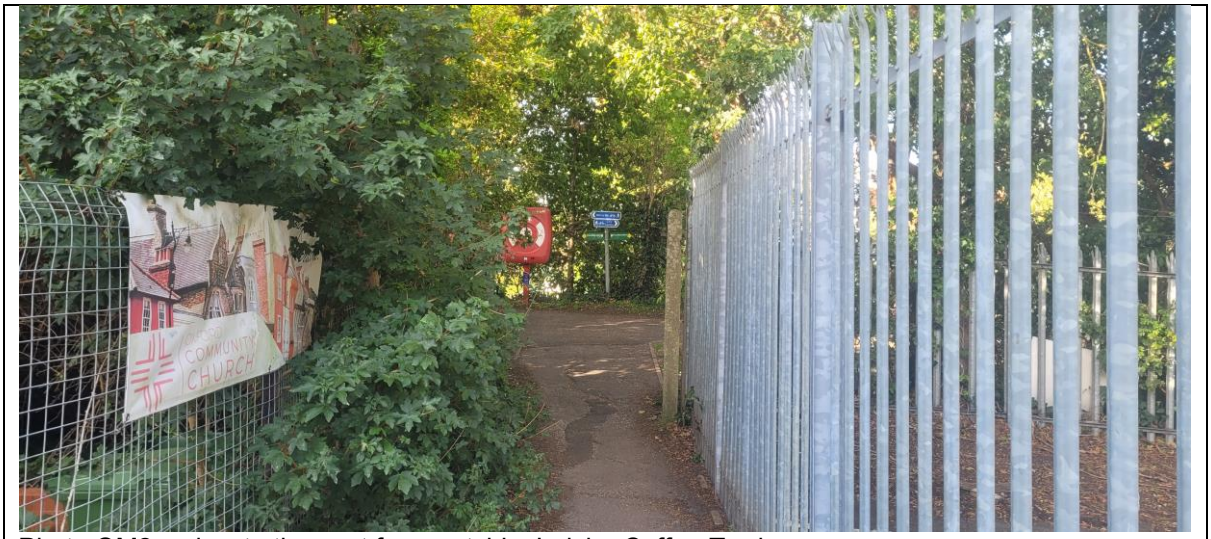


Photo OM2 – view to the east from outside Jericho Coffee Traders

Photo OM3 – Southwell Building

Photo OM4 – view to the west (taken outside the Ruskin School of Art – “Green Shed”)

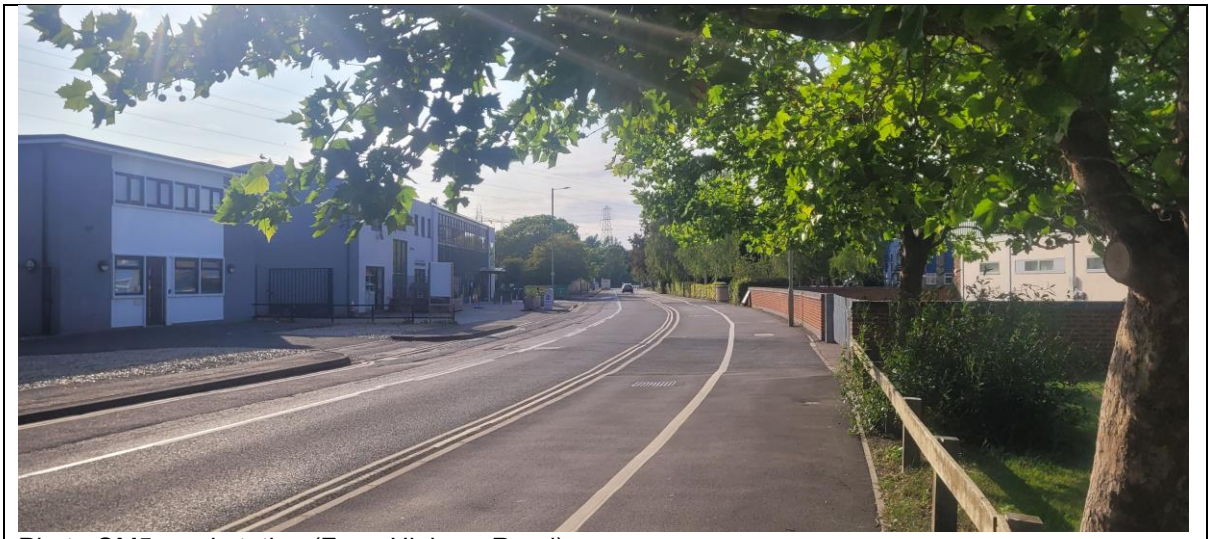


Photo OM5 – substation (Ferry Hinksey Road)

Photo OM6 – view of Thames Path (towards city centre) from eastern towpath entrance

B) Open space, nature and flood risk
Description of current context Green infrastructure • TPO group "Osney Mead (No.1) TPO 1982 – row of mature trees to the3 south of Osney Stream (northern boundary of site) to the north of units 1-6 Centremead.

- Row of mature trees along the northern boundary of the site are located within the Osney Town Conservation Area. Conservation area boundary includes the towpath (mature trees) from the Kings Centre down to confluence of Bulstake Stream with the Thames.
- Site also contains various other mature trees.
- Hedgerows also present at the site associated with formal landscaping arrangements at the industrial estate

Biodiversity and ecology

- Aerial imagery indicates the site is almost entirely comprised of developed land, with almost no remaining semi-natural habitat.

Blue Infrastructure

- Osney Mead industrial estate is located on an island between an arm of the River Thames and Bulstake stream and to the south of the Victorian Terraces of New Osney.
- Osney Stream also forms part of the northern boundary to the site (running from the electricty substation to where the stream joins the Thames at Osney Weir Pool.
- Flood Zone 3b located to the west and across the middle of the site.
- Flood Zone 3a covers western and central parts of the site.
- Flood Zone 2 covers almost all of the site.
- Areas of surface water flooding scattered across the site.
- Main access to the site is through an area of Flood Zone 3b.
- No OFAS safeguarding required at the site.

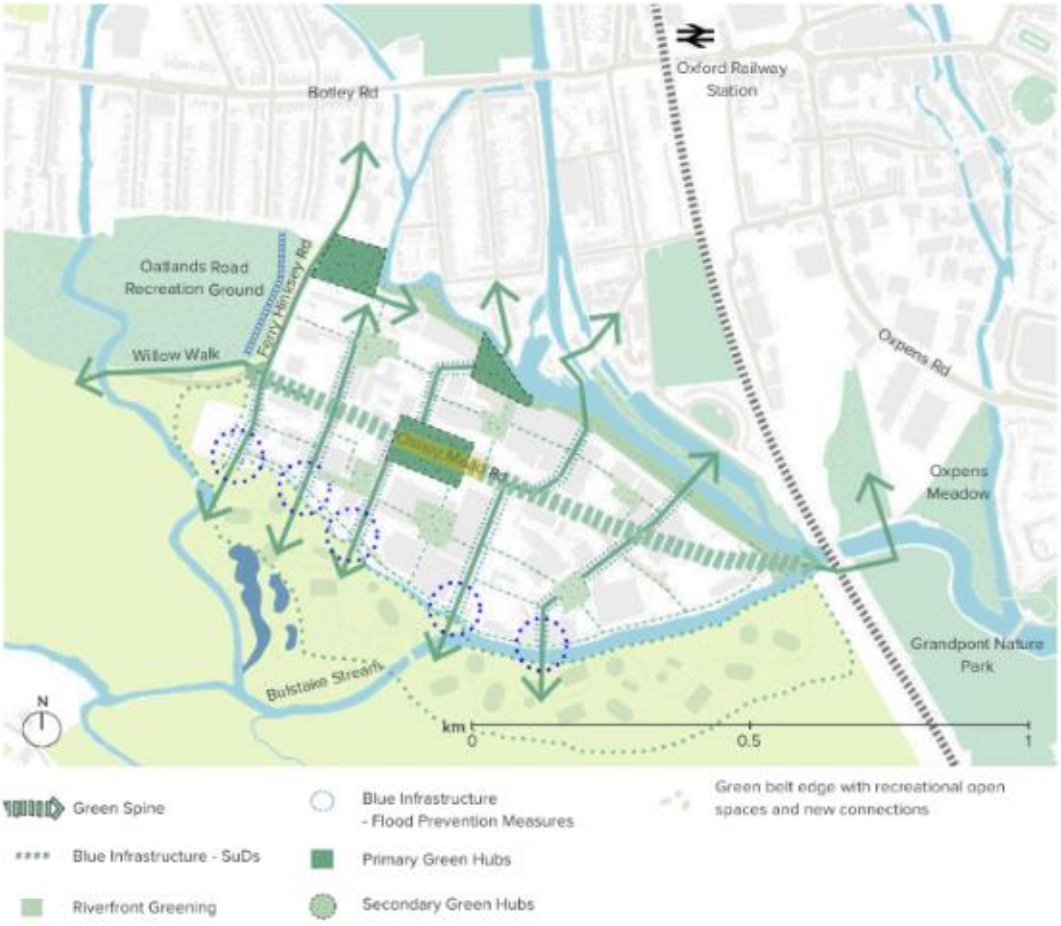
Land Quality

- Potential for contamination is unknown however, given the site's history as an industrial estate and considering the variety of previous industrial-related uses, contamination issues are possible.

Analysis and urban design implications

- If existing trees are removed new trees should be planted to mitigate the impact on tree canopy cover and green infrastructure in the area, i.e., no net loss.
- Given the relationship to the surrounding fields to the south there is potential for extending wildlife corridors through new green infrastructure provision, and opportunities exist to plant new trees to improve connectivity within GI network.
- Ensure no indirect impacts arise from development on adjacent habitats, including the River Thames, Bulstake Stream, and surrounding grassland/meadows.
- Development near the boundaries of the site should be encouraged to preserve/ restore/ re-naturalise bankside habitats and provide buffers wherever possible, while avoiding any additional impacts through, for example, additional artificial lighting.
- LNRS draft local habitat map includes a portion of the Osney Mead industrial estate (from Riverside House to the Osney One Building) as a Priority Measure to r*estore river diversity and manage rivers and their riparian (riverside) habitats to achieve good ecological condition that supports species*. Mapping suggests that this is an "area that could become of particular importance to biodiversity" i.e., that enhancements should be focused within this area.

- *Blue and Green Infrastructure design principles (figure 9) West End SPD*



- *West End SPD "spatial framework" suggests the following design principles to support green and blue infrastructure at the Osney Mead site:*
- *Trees, swales, and planting along central green spine and green fingers to introduce biodiverse landscapes and improve urban greening*
- *Promotion of active sports and recreation to encourage healthy living and relationship with natural environment*
- *Creating a wide range of new spaces for play*
- *Allowing for community food growing to encourage sustainable lifestyles*
- *Nature trails making more accessible and improving interaction between the natural and human environment including the green belt areas and the Thames bank*
- *Distributing a SuDS network throughout the site and most heavily in areas with the highest flood risk to enable comprehensive development*
- *Activating the largely inaccessible and inactive Thames riverfront for public enjoyment, (where possible).*

C) Historic environment, character and local context

Description of current context

Historic environment

Conservation Areas

- Southern Bank of River Thames (including towpath) is within the Osney Town Conservation Area.
- The mature trees on the southern bank of the River Thames provide a degree of screening Osney Town from the industrial buildings located at the estate.

Heritage assets

- Several listed buildings in the vicinity of the site, including Grade II Osney Abbey, Grade II Osney Mill Cottage are located to the north of the Thames (away from the industrial estate itself). The Grade II Memorial 300 Yards South of Osney Lock is close to the most easterly point of the site.
- Osney Abbey Scheduled Ancient Monument is located on the northern side of the River Thames
- The site of Osney Abbey is also on the Oxford Heritage Asset Register

Archaeology

- Given the proximity of the site to Osney Abbey, there is some potential for medieval remains at the site (however earlier remains appear to have been truncated prior to the construction of the present-day industrial units).

View cones

- Site lies within the Raleigh Park view cone and Boar's Hill View cone
- Large commercial buildings (at Osney Mead) with extensive shallow-pitched roofs create a plateau of undistinguished big, modern rooftops in the foreground that blur the definition of the historic city centre and compete for prominence with the historic high buildings (of the city centre)
- The buildings of the Osney Mead Industrial Estate have introduced a roofscape of large shallow-pitch hipped roofs of white or light grey sheet materials that cross the framed area in front of the city centre, drawing the eye away from the city centre's architectural interest.
- Tree cover provided in high summer helps reduce their visual impact.
- The print hall of the Newsquest building is particularly prominent as a large boxlike structure rising up above the surrounding green landscape in the foreground of the view.
- The line of pylons that runs across Osney Mead provide a "jarring feature" that contributes to the modern intrusions of industrial development to the formerly rural foreground of the view.

High Buildings TAN

- Key views out from the historic core also need consideration
- Identifies the West End and Osney Mead as a "dynamic area"
- High Buildings TAN provides a high-level assessment, based on 3D modelling, for each specified area. It identifies thresholds to understand the point at which change is likely to occur as a result of high buildings. It also indicates the nature of that to views in, out and across the city based on four visual tests.
- For the West End and Osney Mead dynamic area, "competition/ obstruction" is the relevant visual test.
- Competition/ obstruction is defined as the potential obstruction / competition with existing built form visible at this location at the height indicated
- Views out: St Mary's - competition at 15m
- Views in/ across – Boars Hill – competition at 18m

Built environment

Land uses on site

- on-site: "modern" (1970s) industrial estate containing a mix of uses including secondary office accommodation, industrial uses, academic institutional buildings (mainly associated

with the University of Oxford), wholesalers, and other employment uses. An electricity substation and several pylons are also located on site

Land uses immediately around the site

- River Thames forms northern and western boundary of the site
- Beyond the River Thames to the north is Osney Island
- Bulstake Stream forms part of southern boundary before the stream joins the River Thames.
- Floodplain meadows/ fields are located to the south Bulstake Stream (Ellie's Field)
- Floodplain meadows/ fields also form part of the southern boundary of the site as Bulstake Stream meanders from near the south-west corner of the site through the landscape
- Eastern boundary of the site links through to the Oatlands Road Recreation Ground
- The north-westerly tip of the site adjoins a predominantly residential area (Ferry Hinksey Road) which links through to Botley Road – the key arterial routes into the city from the west.

Scale and form of surrounding development

- Osney Island - mainly 2-storey Victorian terraced housing, with some 3-storey properties on West St, South St, and modern 3-storey flats around Gibbs Crescent. The prominent 4-storey red brick structure of Osney Mill can be clearly seen from the lock.

Materials on the site

- Osney Mead Industrial Estate includes steel framed buildings with metal cladding and/ or brickwork elevations. Some feature pitched roofs and roller shutter doors, while others are curved. Some have roofs. Roofs and side elevations often appear to use a lighter colour palette.

Re-use of existing buildings onsite

- The majority of existing buildings at the Osney Mead Industrial Estate are older industrial, office, and academic institutional buildings. Some newer more buildings (e.g., Swale Lab), offer more modern facilities. Unlikely that there will be a strong desire to retain some of the older building stock.

Character area

- Osney Mead Industrial Estate is categorised within Area 8C Botley Industrial and Retail Parks. The Landscape Character Assessment states:
- Osney Mead industrial estate is located on an island between an arm of the River Thames, Botley Stream and Bulstake Stream, to the south of the Victorian terraces of New Osney. It comprises a number of large commercial and light industrial units of various sizes, styles and materials, located along a single feeder road. Buildings are generally one- to two storeys with some taller units encompassed by the trees along the southern area boundary. The Osney Mead industrial estate falls in the landscape within the historically admired view from Raleigh Park. The roofs of the industrial estate are visible in the foreground, although mature vegetation provides some screening.
- 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. This 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.

Analysis and urban design implications

Urban design

- New development should create visual and physical permeability through the site to improve legibility
- Public spaces (with active frontages) could be aligned with key gateways to the site to help create a welcoming entrance to the site and to support the creation of lively, dynamic and safe environment spaces
- Inspiring public art could be used in key public spaces to support wayfinding, legibility
- Buildings should face onto public spaces to create a sense of enclosure
- By mixing uses in within blocks can enable access to a wide range of services and ensure inactive pockets/ areas do not emerge
- West End and Osney Mead SPD includes a range of other urban design implications that should also be considered
- Any taller buildings should be planned for in a way that does not impact views into, out from and across the city.
- Innovative building typologies should be considered that contain a mix of uses. These could "step-up" from the rural edge of the site which lies in the Oxford Green Belt

Heritage assets

- How to improve the setting of Listed buildings at Osney Lock should be considered.
- Protecting and enhancing the setting of the Osney Town Conservation Area should be considered – currently the mature trees along the northern boundary of the site provide screening for the conservation area from the industrial uses currently at Osney Mead

Views (height, massing, scale and roofscape)

- Further development that extends the coverage of the area of large shallow-pitched roofs between the viewing place and the historic city centre or makes it more visibly prominent would have a negative impact on this view.
- The impact of the Newsquest Print-hall rising up from the industrial estate demonstrates how increasing the prominence of these buildings detracts further from the view.
- Visual impact analysis will be required to ensure that any development proposed creates an appropriate visual relationship with the historic core and the western hills. Proposals may also need to consider the visual impact of views across the city (e.g., Elsfield).

Materials and detailing

- There are opportunities to enhance the view by reducing the prominence of the industrial estate's roof-surfaces. This might include using darker or less reflective materials for roofs when they are replaced or using tree planting to break up the area of roof-surfaces.

D) Access, movement and layout

Description of current context

Access into the site

- Access to the site via walking, cycling and wheeling is possible along the towpath (from Osney Island). A second access via the towpath exists at the eastern corner of the site however the towpath at this location does not benefit from hardstanding/ paving making access via this entrance more difficult in poor weather conditions.
- Osney Mead can also be accessed from the west via Willow Walk, which provides pedestrian and cycle access to/ from North Hinksey. Willow Walk is classified as a Bridleway.
- A second access to/ from the site (footpath) suitable for pedestrians only as there are a number of stiles and stepped bridges to navigate.
- At the West of the site pedestrian and cycle access exists to/ from Osney Mead via the car park for Oatlands Road Recreation Ground on Ferry Hinksey Road. There is also what appears to be an unofficial access to Oatlands Road Recreation Ground near Willow Walk.
- Public vehicular access to the site exists from Ferry Hinksey Road (via Botley Road). Ferry Hinksey Road also provides access via walking, cycling and wheeling.
- Gated vehicular access to the EA Depot site at Osney Mead exists via Mill Lane on Osney Island.

- Access to the site is also possible via the River Thames, at the EA Depot.

Layout of the site

- Central feeder road accessing plots of varying size and orientation.
- Site appears to have been developed focusing on the needs of individual occupiers
- Lacks a cohesive structure
- Does not promote internal circulation/ movement
- Layout likely to have been developed as the site came forward from the 1960s onwards.
- Individual plots are likely to have been developed to suit individual occupier needs.
- A CPZ operates on site for on-street parking. Osney Mead currently falls within the West Oxford CPZ.
- Off-street parking is associated with individual occupiers with many plots including parking spaces.

Connectivity to wider area

- Designated cycle route along the main road of Osney Mead industrial estate, as well as cycle routes from the area along the River Thames and to the wider Thames valley.
- Willow Walk riverside route (completed 2023) provides cycle and pedestrian links to Osney Mead with Botley and North Hinksey.
- Botley Road contains numerous stops serving the city centre from Botley, Cumnor Hill other locations outside the city.
- Connections via Botley Road also include access to Oxford Station and the city centre and vehicular connections to the A34 and SRN.
- Various locations in the city centre can be accessed via the towpath.

Analysis and urban design implications

<u>Eastern site access from the towpath</u>

- The delivery of the "Oxpens bridge" across the River Thames to support increased accessibility primarily to Grandpont, would also support increased accessibility of this site by walking, cycling and wheeling, via the towpath.
- The towpath currently runs underneath the railway line (see photo OM6), and the existing eastern site access (next to the Bodleian Libraries Administration Office) has the potential to be a key entrance for site-users.
- The delivery of a new public square at/ near this location (and improved wayfinding) would create a strong sense of arrival.
- Part of the eastern site access (including the towpath and mature trees) forms part of the Osney Town Conservation Area as such, it will be important to incorporate the mature trees within the Conservation Area into any plans to deliver a clear, legible entrance.
- Ensuring a safe and secure route from the site to the city centre along the towpath will need to be carefully considered give the highly constrained railway underpass (photo OM6). It will be important to activate this space. The West End and Osney Mead SPD, suggests some potential interventions such as a cafe, public art, play seating or waterfont activity.

<u>Access to the site from the towpath near Osney Lock and Weir</u>

- The current site access at this location would benefit from improvements to create a stronger sense of arrival and enhanced wayfinding. Photo OM1 shows the current condition of the site.
- The current access to the site from Osney Lock and Weir is via bridge. The West End and Osney Mead SPD, suggests, "the bridge needs to land in a good quality piece of public realm, which is activated".
- The West End and Osney Mead SPD, also sets out that the existing bridge provides a crucial connection from Osney Island into Osney Mead and the redevelopment of the site provides an opportunity to improve the width of this bridge to accommodate increased footfall.

- The towpath runs alongside the River Thames between the two existing access points. Redevelopment of the site creates an opportunity to enhance this space.
- The West End and Osney Mead SPD, considers that along this route there is the potential to create a "green space where people can dwell, socialise and play" and has the potential to increase activity along the river.

Access to the site via Bridge St/ EA Depot

- The sole access to the EA Depot on Osney Mead is via Bridge St on Osney Island. Aerial imagery suggests there are two parallel bridges that run from Osney Island to the depot site. The access via Bridge St is gated for authorised EA staff using the Depot only.
- The EA Depot is only accessible via Bridge St on Osney Island. Aerial imagery suggests the EA Depot is not accessible from the Osney Mead site. It appears to be surrounded by fences. and no routes or connections currently exist from Osney Mead itself.
- Redevelopment of the site creates an opportunity to deliver an additional access from Osney Island which would be publicly accessible for walkers, cyclists, and wheelers (and emergency services vehicles).
- The West End and Osney Mead SPD, sets out that a new public square could provide the landing point for the former EA bridge with a rich mix of uses facing onto it, creating a "vibrant heart" of Osney Mead.
- Enabling public access at this location would require the relocation of the EA Depot to another suitable location.

Access to the site via Ferry Hinksey Road

- The substation at Ferry Hinksey Road does not represent a welcoming gateway to Osney Mead. There is a lack of "sense of arrival". See Photo OM5.
- Redevelopment creates an opportunity to deliver a transformed entrance that creates a sense of arrival at the site. This should include improved modal prioritisation for walking, cycling and wheeling, and could be linked with junction improvements at Botley Road/ Ferry Hinksey Road.

Access to the site via Willow Walk

- Existing access via Willow Walk connects the site North Hinksey and Botley. Redevelopment of the site would enable improvements to this area to create a welcoming gateway to the site and with an appropriate sense of arrival.

Creation of new site access points:

- The West End and Osney Mead SPD, suggests several new access points could be created that link the site to the wider green belt to the south.

Site circulation

- The West End and Osney Mead SPD, suggests the establishment of several north-south routes through the site that branch from a primary east-west route (or central spine). This would create clear block patterns within which development could be located as well as civic spaces/ public realm and would enable the creation of several points along the southern boundary from which the wider countryside/ Green Belt/ existing network of footpaths could be accessed.
- The creation of a street hierarchy (primary, secondary, etc.), should then be used to guide building heights/ built form to ensure that development at the site edges forms an appropriate relationship with the existing urban form and character. E.g., the open floodplain meadows of the Green Belt at the southern boundary. The tree-lined recreation ground to the west and the Osney Town conservation area to the north.

Off-site connections: walking, cycling and wheeling

- Existing walking, cycling and wheeling connections to Osney Mead are generally poor quality, for instance the towpath does not benefit from consistent surfacing; is prone to flooding; and can get very muddy in poor weather conditions.
- Redevelopment of the site creates an opportunity to deliver improved walking, cycling and wheeling connections to the site from the wider areas (including access to the wider Green Belt to the south, and to the west across Oatlands Road Recreation Ground (which connects the site to Lamarsh Road (Botley Road Retail Park), and Botley Road (several streets including Riverside Road and Oatlands Road).

<u>Off-site connections: Bus-routes</u>

- While bus stops are located near to Osney Mead (on Botley Road), these are generally more than 5mins walk away from the majority of the site. There is poor public transport accessibility to the site itself.
- This creates an opportunity to improve public transport connectivity to Osney Mead (e.g., the extension of bus routes into the site as well as the creation of bus stops and potential space for bus layover).

E) Other considerations

Other considerations to include in allocations?

Amenity

Amenity considerations

- Noise: although the site is currently in use as an industrial estate, neighbouring uses are predominantly residential or rural in nature. Should site become an extension of the city centre, consideration should be given the following neighbouring uses:
    - Residential areas (Ferry Hinksey Road and within Osney Town Conservation Area) are low rise – mainly 2-storey (1930s semi-detached housing on Ferry Hinksey Road) and two-storey Victorian terraced housing within the Osney Town Conservation Area.
    - West Oxford Primary School also on Ferry Hinksey Road (adjacent to sub-station)
- Lighting: given location of the site, close to the River Thames and Bulstake Stream, both of which provide potential foraging habitats for bats, a lighting strategy is likely to be required to ensure that any impacts on foraging habitats for bats can be suitably mitigated.
- Air Quality: nearest diffusion tubes to the site are located at Botley Road/ Hillview Road. Latest data (2023) shows NOx emissions are low - 19µg/m3. If city centre boundary extended to include the site, then additional diffusion tubes may be required to monitor data on-site
- Buildings that perform well in terms of sustainability and/ or are required for other operational purposes should be retained and their sustainability credentials enhanced to ensure that carbon emissions are minimised throughout the building lifespan.

Infrastructure needs

- Site contains an existing substation and pylons. Site masterplan should consider the form that this electricity infrastructure will take as the site is redeveloped and the development implications of retaining this infrastructure in its current position should also be explored as part of any site-wide master planning work.
- Any community infrastructure that is brought forward at the site should add value to, and complement the existing and proposed offering both elsewhere in the West End of the city centre, and nearby on Botley Road.

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*

Mix of uses including employment, academic, research and development, student accommodation, employer-linked affordable housing and market housing.

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

The site is subject to significant flood risk, and it is important that future occupiers are not put at risk, as well as that development of the site does not worsen flood risk elsewhere. It is not yet demonstrated that residential development is definitely possible on the site. Residential accommodation is one part of the University's intentions for the site. The University would be able to keep ownership and therefore, management of. the accommodation. They would therefore be able to manage who occupies the accommodation, to ensure they are capable of following the evacuation plan that would need to be in place. For that reason, the proposed policy allows for residential accommodation but does not require it.

However, for the purposes of the SHLAA, an assumption has been made that residential accommodation is provided (247 units). That is because it seems likely to be possible, and there is a strong intention to do so; it is just that, until it is further tested, the policy should not require it absolutely. The assumption in the SHLAA is based on the landowner's intention, which reflects what could be fitted into the areas at lower flood risk.