

Site capacity assessment – Local Plan 2045

Site name	Sandy Lane Recreation Ground
LP2045 Site Allocation	SPS15
Site size (ha)	5.15ha

Site location



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A) Site overview

Description of current context

- The site predominantly is made up of recreation space consisting of three grass surface football pitches, with a small pavilion on the site which incorporates changing facilities. The site also includes an area of hardstanding located to the north east of the site, which abuts the rear of the Tesco Superstore and Retail Park. This part of the site has been in use for motorcycle training on a temporary basis.
- The site is largely set within an established residential area, however it is also within the proximity of Oxford Business Park and Oxford Retail Park which are located to the north of the site. In addition, to the residential neighbourhood to the south and west, St John Fisher Catholic Primary School is located to the southwest of the site with its own playing fields and pitches.
- The site is not in an area of significant deprivation, though it is in an area which is within one of the 30% most deprived areas in the country.
- The site is not within a city/district centre, with the closest being Blackbird Leys District Centre, which is about 700m walk to the southeast.

Site photos



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B) Open space, nature and flood risk

Description of current context

Green Infrastructure

- Much of the site is accommodated by playing pitches that are identified as supporting green infrastructure and that would need to be reprovided in line with policy requirements were they to be lost to development.
- In terms of other vegetation, including trees, shrubs and hedging, this is largely limited to the boundaries of the north east, south east and south west of the site—the area around the hardstanding is minimally vegetated. There is a line of larger mature trees forming the boundary with Blackbird Leys Road.
- The site is likely to currently score above the Urban Greening Factor policy target due to the extent of green surface cover.

Biodiversity and Ecology

- The pitches are unlikely to provide much biodiversity value at present, although there is potentially more value in the boundary vegetation, which is also likely to serve some function as green corridors linking to surrounding areas.
- Potential protected species constraints are likely limited to nesting birds in that boundary vegetation.
- The County's LNRS identifies the strip of land on the boundary running adjacent to railway line as being an area that could become important for biodiversity.

Blue infrastructure

- The site and its access/egress is within Flood Zone 1, however, there is surface water flood risk across the site.

Land Quality

- Previous assessments indicate that the site sits on some made ground and potential landfill so likely some contamination risks which would need to be investigated.

Analysis and urban design implications

- Pitch reprovision will be a key consideration for this site. Where these are relocated, there is potential to enhance the quality of remaining areas of greenspace to mitigate losses and provide various types of green infrastructure, including additional habitat creation to support biodiversity.
- With the site likely to be scoring above the UGF policy target at present, proposals will need to ensure this score is maintained. This can be achieved through retaining higher quality elements, such as the mature trees along the boundary, but will also mean losses in green features needing to be compensated for through enhancing the quality of other areas – e.g. lower scoring areas of amenity grass.
- Were some element of playing pitch needing to be retained somewhere onsite, there is potential for consolidating the existing space through provision of a higher quality pitch(es) to accommodate additional use. This pitch space might be better positioned closer to Blackbird Leys Road where the change in levels could have overshadowing/amenity impacts for other land uses.
- It's likely that boundary greening will remain important in providing some buffering to the transport corridors (the by-pass and the railway line) running either side of the site. What is there could be retained where possible or enhanced to improve quality.
- The boundary along the railway line is identified in the LNRS and new ecological enhancements that align with the measures identified in that strategy where possible would be particularly valuable for supporting biodiversity.
- Linear green features could be routed through and across the site to help break up any new development, in particular these could enhance the route in from the underpass and connecting up to the new railway station.
- Surface water flood risk could potentially be exacerbated where natural surface cover is removed, and this should be investigated and mitigated through a robust drainage assessment and inclusion of an appropriate drainage scheme (e.g. sustainable urban drainage systems).
- Potential for land contamination will need to be appropriately investigated and remediation carried out where necessary.

C) Historic environment, character and local context

Description of current context

Historic environment

- There are no notable historic environment features above ground on, or adjacent to, the site.
- There have been some noted archaeological remains nearby including a Roman kiln 90m to west and medieval stray finds to the east.
- There are no protected views that cross the site.

Built environment

- Other than the sports pavilion, there are no buildings on the site. The surrounding area is a mix of low density and low height post WW2 housing, particularly to the south-western side of the site. Meanwhile, beyond the bypass and to the northeast, is an area of higher density and height in Kersington Crescent and at the ARC Business Park.

- The site straddles the boundary between two different landscape character areas according to the Oxford landscape character assessment.
 - The greenfield, pitches are within the northern part of the Post 1960s Suburbs - Blackbird Leys (6A) character area, which is noted to comprise of a residential area which lacks quality in architectural detailing and suffers from a layout which has problems in respect of clarity of ownership of common spaces and is of moderate landscape quality with low historic integrity.
 - The area of hardstanding is within 20th Century Fringe Business, Industry And Retail - Cowley Motor Works (8A), which is made up of large scale retail, business and industrial estates of different scales and styles and is noted to be of low landscape quality and historic integrity but that has some sensitivity to change due to its contribution to the industrial heritage of Oxford.
- The site itself is in an area identified in the High Buildings Study as being in an area of greater potential for height. There are areas of more height, with larger buildings in the adjacent business park.

Analysis and urban design implications

- The presence of archaeological remains nearby to the site suggests there may be some potential for remains to also be found on this site during redevelopment, and this would need to be investigated and responded to if necessary.
- Whilst this area of the city is generally less sensitive in terms of views and limited in constraints, the impact of heights, massing and roof lines will still need to be considered, particularly in combination with existing and planned development of the adjacent business and retail parks. Lengths of continuous, blocky development excessively intruding upon the skyline could otherwise have negative impacts on the skyline.
- Development proposals for this site will need to be sensitively designed to strike the right balance in terms of density and height of new development so that it can fit in with the varying character of the surrounding areas.
- A transitioning of height and general densities may be most appropriate for the site. Higher densities may be more suitable towards the northeast of the site, which is likely to have more of a gateway feeling once the Cowley Branch Line station is open, and would be in keeping with the character of the industrial/business estates that are prevalent in the surrounding areas are typically of higher densities and heights. More consideration will need to be given to what would be appropriate in terms of density and height towards the southwest, which is surrounded by predominantly lower density/height residential uses.
- The relatively unremarkable character of design of the older developments in the surrounding areas, coupled with the limited sensitivities of the site, means that there are opportunities for introducing some additional character into the area through bringing forward high quality design within the development of this site.

D) Access, movement and layout

Description of current context

Access into the site

- The recreation ground is accessed from the south west from Blackbird Leys Road. This access route is down a fairly steep decline.
- There would be an additional non-vehicular access to the area of the site comprising hardstanding from the adjacent retail park via an underpass beneath the Eastern Bypass which links up with the ARC science park.

Layout of the site

- Currently the site is laid out as open space. The area of hardstanding is fenced off from the rest of the site.
- Cowley Branch line station is proposed on the edge of the site—with the rail line running along the south eastern boundary. Although the proposed station will be located on land in the ownership of Network Rail, the access routes to and from the station are within the site.

Connectivity to wider area

- There is good access to frequent public transport routes from Blackbird Leys Road.
- The new Cowley Branch Line station would also open up access to the wider area via rail.

Analysis and urban design implications

- The open nature of the site at present means that the design of access routes and circulation can be approached fresh alongside the broader arrangement of buildings and other uses such as open space. Movement through the site should seek to prioritise active and sustainable transport routes in the first instance.
- Whilst no vehicle access from Ambassador Avenue Way, there is potentially scope to run a bus service through the site from the retail park and onto BBL road.
- The location of the new branch line station would give this site a gateway function to this part of the city and allow improved access to the surrounding areas such as the ARC business park. This gateway role could be enhanced through incorporation of open space and placemaking around the station.
- The land proposed to service access to the Cowley Branch line station at the edge of the site will need to be safeguarded to ensure there are access routes for pedestrians and cyclists to ensure future passengers have suitable access to the branch line.
- There would be opportunities to improve linkages into the business park such as the route to and through the existing underpass.
- The station and other developments in the area may result in the opportunity for a pedestrian/cycle bridge over the railway line.

E) Other considerations

Other considerations to include in allocations?

Amenity

- There is likely to be considerable noise from the eastern by-pass and potentially more noise from the Cowley Branch Line on the other side of the site if and when it reopens to passenger traffic. These transport corridors could also be sources of other types of pollution (e.g. air pollutants). These considerations will need to inform layout of the proposed development and proposals should consider potential need for buffers and sound barriers, but also how buildings are located.
- The bounding of the site by the Eastern Bypass Road to the North and Cowley Branch line to the South will need to inform design measures that can help to protect the amenity of occupants of any future development.
- The change in levels up onto Blackbird Leys Road, from which access to the site is via a fairly steep decline, could result in loss of light and overlooking onto any development that fronts the south western boundary of the site. Location of development here will need to have particular consideration for these future amenity impacts and it is likely that some set back will be needed from the tree line. This space could be utilised for part of the open space requirement for the site, although care will be needed to ensure this is purposefully designed to avoid it feeling peripheral, or treated as leftover space.

Infrastructure needs

- The land within the site will play an important role in supporting access to and from the Cowley Branch Line Station.

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*

The site is currently open space, landowner has confirmed intent to develop for residential uses.

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*

The early review of potential sustainability impacts arising from developing this site (see individual site assessment form supporting Sustainability Appraisal) did not identify the potential need for mitigation in relation to any significant negative impacts (scored as --).

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:

- A varying density per hectare across the site, transitioning from gateway 80 dph in the northeast towards an area of suburban 60 dph in southwest.
- Retaining/enhancing vegetated buffers along the railway line and eastern by-pass. Incorporating a buffer strip/set back for development along the southwest boundary to avoid amenity impacts that could occur for dwellings too close to the BlackBird Leys Road.
- Assume pitches are to be reprovided offsite, and 10% public open space provision onsite (some of this could be delivered as part of buffer strip to BBL road).