

Site capacity assessment – Local Plan 2045

Site name	Government Buildings and Harcourt House
LP2045 Site Allocation	SPE3
Site size (ha)	2.37ha

Site location



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A) Site overview

Description of current context

- Site is divided into two parcels, a northern parcel (which will be referred to as Part 1) and southern parcel (which will be referred to as Part 2).
 - **Part 1** of the site (Government Buildings) is a car park surrounded by Clive Booth Student Village on two sides, Marston Road and Headington Hill Park.
 - **Part 2** (Harcourt House) is separated from **Part 1** by the historic Cuckoo Lane, and is currently in use as a small business estate and cadet accommodation consisting of 1-3 storey buff brick buildings with grey tiled pitched roofs.
- Site is not within an area of significant deprivation (it is within the 20% least deprived areas in the country).
- Site is located in the east of the city, and not within a city/district centre (closest to the East Oxford district centre).

Site photos



B) Open space, nature and flood risk

Description of current context

Green infrastructure

- The site is directly adjacent to Headington Hill Park, with part 1 to the northwest corner and part 2 forming part of the western boundary. Apart from the buildings and some large patches of hardstanding, the site itself is dominated by scrub and mature woodland.
- A high hedge with some trees separates Part 1 of the site from the Marston Road and low trees and shrub define the back edge. Mature trees and hedging/shrubs separate Part 2 of the site from Marston Road, with a low stone wall part way along, whilst high hedging runs along its rear boundary separating it from Headington Hill Park.
- Various trees at Part 1 of the site are protected by Tree Preservation Orders, including a line along the northern boundary, a tree in the middle and three trees in the southwest corner. Part 2 of the site is entirely within the Headington Hill Conservation Area thus the various trees within are protected through this (where they are over a certain size).
- A high-level desktop Urban Greening Factor assessment indicates that the levels of green surface cover on the site means it would score above the policy target for residential developments.

Biodiversity and ecology

- Part of the northern parcel is identified by DEFRA's online mapping as potentially containing Open Mosaic Habitat (a priority habitat). Small areas of woodland in the southern parcel (along the eastern boundary and a pocket in the southwest of the site) are also included on the priority habitat mapping from DEFRA. These would require a detailed botanical survey to confirm presence/absence.
- The close location of the site to large areas of green space and the presence of various green features on the site means that potential protected species constraints are likely, including foraging and commuting bats, roosting bats (trees and buildings), badgers, and nesting birds.

- The site is within 600m of New Marston Meadows SSSI which could be impacted by changes to surface water or groundwater conditions. The site is also within 200m of the Long Meadow, a designated Local Wildlife Site. There is also an Oxford City Wildlife Site (Headington Hill Viewpoint OCWS) to the northeast.
- Small section of LNRS mapping for areas that could become important to biodiversity cuts into eastern boundary of part 2 of the site.

Blue infrastructure

- The site lies within Flood Zone 1 with safe access and egress to surrounding areas.
- There are patches of surface water flood risk around the southern half of part 2 of the site.

Land quality

- Potential for contamination at part 1 of the site (although site previously remediated). No known issues on part 2.

Analysis and urban design implications

- The site's various green features including mature and protected trees are likely to influence the developable area and these will need to inform the design and layout any development.
- The predominantly green character also contributes to a UGF score above the proposed policy threshold. In practice this will mean:
 - Higher quality features should be retained where possible to help maintain score, such as mature trees (particularly TPOs), boundary features that also serve to protect amenity such as hedgerows, as well as areas of priority habitat, particularly the woodland.
 - Where green features are lost to development, this will need to be mitigated through enhancement of existing features or provision of new green features. Inspiration could be taken from the use of rooftop spaces via green roofs such as can be seen on the nearby Clive Booth Halls development.
- The setting of the adjacent Headington Hill Park and the importance of green features in this area to the character of the Headington Conservation area should be considered in the design process, with buildings blending into the verdant surroundings and retained and new on-site green features.
- There are various biodiversity/ecology sensitivities which proposals will need to take into account. For example, potential for protected species or priority habitat will need to be assessed through appropriate surveys and responded to appropriately.
- The size of the site will require new public open space provision of 10% as per the Local Plan policies. Proximity to the nearby park suggests that new park-like open space may not be as necessary. Approach to design of public open space could instead be more linked to nature, encompassing wilder areas, guided by biodiversity value of particular areas of habitat where possible, as well as the potential presence of protected species. Existing green features that are retained, alongside planting of new features, would create an opportunity for wildlife corridors to permeate through the site, or the creation of other wilder/natural pockets of space on the site that will allow people to connect with nature.
- Whilst flood risk is not a major concern, issues of surface water flooding may need to be addressed, e.g. through SuDS.
- Development proposals will also need to ensure no adverse impacts on the nearby SSSI due to changes in relation to surface water and groundwater, and use of appropriate types of SuDS could also assist with this.
- Whilst there are no known land contamination issues on part 2 of site, and remediation has previously been carried out on part 1, further investigations may be required.

C) Historic environment, character and local context

Description of current context

Historic environment

- Parcel 1 is adjacent to the Headington Hill Conservation Area and parcel 2 is entirely within it. The whole site is opposite the St Clements and Iffley Road CA.
- There are no listed buildings on the sites but the Grade II* Headington Hall sits within the park and St. Clements Church is nearby.

- Cuckoo Lane is recorded on the Oxford Heritage Asset Register and is a historic carriage road linking Oxford and Headington. It follows an east-west linear route through Headington Hill to end at Marston Road and intersects the two parcels comprising this site. Its importance has also been noted in both the Old Headington and Headington Hill Conservation Area appraisals.
- Archaeological remains could be present on the site as the Civil War Parliamentarian siege line has been identified in Headington Hill Park, suggesting that it runs through the northern part of the two plots.
- The Headington Hill view cone passes through Part 1 (Government Buildings) and South Park view cone passes to the south, outside of, Part 2 (Harcourt House). Additionally, significant view lines are indicated in the conservation area documents from Headington Hill Hall towards the site and along the paths at the back of Part 2 (Harcourt House).

Built environment

- Whilst there are no buildings on Part 1 of the site at present, just hardstanding, Part 2's small business estate and cadet accommodation consists of 1-3 storey, buff brick buildings with grey tiled pitched roof. The Conservation Area Appraisal does not list them as a positive contributor, they are not considered high quality design and there could be a more efficient use of the site, which is dominated by hard surfacing.
- The urban character of the wider area is defined by large, often modern institutional buildings set in open grounds with views over Oxford such as the Oxford Centre for Islamic studies. These buildings are typically characterised by palettes of high-quality materials and distinctive design.
- The site is within the 'Open Hills (with Institutions)' townscape category defined by prominent hillsides and open, undulating topography, which slopes down from East to West on this site. More specifically, Headington Hill (7A), which is distinctive for its topography, open spaces, parkland and mature trees which lend a rural feel to the area. It is of a high landscape quality and historic integrity (due to survival of historic features, conservation area designation) and moderate biodiversity value because of presence of deciduous woodland. It is noted to be sensitive to various threats including breaking of historic connections and footpaths like Cuckoo Lane as well as fragmenting ecological networks.

Analysis and urban design implications

- New development will need to be designed sensitively and in a way that respects and enhances the nearby heritage assets, particularly the conservation areas and setting of nearby listed buildings with opportunities taken to retain and enhance the verdant character of Headington Hill.
- Whilst Part 2 of the site sits within the Headington Hill conservation area, meaning particular care will need to be paid to design of new development here, proposals on Part 1 of the site could also have impacts on its setting and will need to factor in the heritage sensitivities of surrounding assets similarly.
- View sensitivities mean that greater heights are going to be challenging to the north of the site due to the Headington Hill view cone, as well as at the eastern edge of the site fronting onto the park because of potential impacts on heritage setting of Headington Hill Hall.
- The layout of development blocks should respect the tree-lined character of Marston Road, whilst improving the site's relationship and engagement with it. Having blocks parallel to the road may be the most efficient arrangement and would help create a consistent building line within the setting of the trees.
- Variation can be introduced by dividing larger blocks into smaller ones and by varying the roofline between 3 and 4 residential storeys. Storey height should generally be higher facing the road and lower adjacent to the park as site topography slopes up.
- In relation to materials choices, a palette of robust materials such as high-quality brick or stone would sit comfortably with the park setting and the institutional buildings nearby, at the Oxford Centre for Islamic studies.
- Cuckoo Lane should be retained and the design of the parts of the site that front onto it should be carried out in a manner that is sensitive to it.

- Responding to the local vernacular, which features stone walls (many from stone quarried locally), hedges and mature trees as boundaries between properties, would give character to proposals and help maintain rural character boundaries to reinforce the rural character of the area in the Conservation Area Appraisal.
- The potential for archaeology will require further investigation as part of any redevelopment.

D) Access, movement and layout

Description of current context

Access into the site

- Vehicular access can be achieved to the site from Marston Road.
- Walking/cycling access is partial to the site via Marston road.
 - Part 1 (Government Buildings) has better pedestrian access alongside the existing vehicle entrance from the pavement that runs down Marston Road.
 - Part 2 (Harcourt House) is currently more challenging for pedestrian access as there is no footway along the eastern side of the Marston Road at the point where this parcel adjoins it (pedestrians would need to cross to use the pavement on the western side).
- There is the potential for pedestrian linkage between the sites, across Cuckoo Lane where it meets Marston Road.

Layout of the site

- The layout of part 1 of the site is largely open, but with some areas of trees permeating into the interior of the site from the vegetated boundaries. It is roughly square in shape.
- The layout of part 2 of the site is more rectangular in shape, forming a periphery between Headington Hill park and Marston Road. It is currently occupied by several rectangular footprint buildings and a couple of large areas of car parking. There are limited ways to circulate around the site due to its constrained nature.

Connectivity to wider area

- Good existing cycle connections from Marston Road to the city centre. Further plans to improve environment for cyclists from the County Council.
- This site is on the Marston Road with good public transport links to the city centre and hospitals. Bus stop outside site with buses 100 and X3 to city centre about 10min frequency.
- Cuckoo Lane is a cycleway/footway, though as noted earlier, lack of lighting can make this daunting from a safety perspective at night.
- The footway on the eastern side of the road only allows access to part 1 of the site and does not extend down to part 2 of the site as noted above, meaning pedestrian access relies on having to cross the Marston Road. There is, however, no infrastructure to facilitate crossing the road (e.g. zebra cross, traffic lights etc).

Analysis and urban design implications

- New pedestrian crossing will be needed to cross Marston Road and access part 2 of the site.
- There may be opportunities to open up additional access points to Headington Hill Park for occupants of the site.
- Cuckoo Lane should be retained as a green route as well as being enhanced for walking, cycling and wheeling, including potentially facilitating movement between the two parts of the site.
- The existing access points into each parcel of the site for vehicles are likely to remain the most suitable points and there are limited opportunities to change or create new ones. The constrained nature of the two parcels mean that circulation for vehicles will have to be carefully considered in order to achieve most efficient layout around buildings.
- Space for parking on the sites will be limited alongside new buildings, so applicants would need to consider what is most efficient in terms of needs for the development. There are

several areas of parking at the moment and there may be ways to consolidate this provision.

E) Other considerations

Other considerations to include in allocations?

Amenity

- Amenity impacts on Headington Hill park should be considered in designing the site, particularly the areas fronting most closely onto the park – this may need to include considerations such as lighting and noise.
- There may be some traffic noise arising from Marston Road, however, retaining and enhancing boundary green features could be helpful in addressing some of this.

Infrastructure needs

- Improved access for pedestrians into the site, particularly parcel 2 – e.g. new crossing point.

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 landowners have confirmed an intention to develop the site for mixed use which would include residential for staff and students, academic institutional and research/knowledge focussed commercial 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) identified the potential need for mitigation in relation to significant negative impacts (scored as --) against the following criteria:

- SA objective 11 – specifically, the impact on Conservation Areas due to part of the site being within one.

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:

- Varying densities per hectare across the two parcels, 60 dph on northern parcel, 30 dph on southern parcel (reflecting additional heritage sensitivities).
- TPOs on northern parcel are retained and the areas of priority woodland on the southern parcel, as well as boundary green features.
- The areas of higher quality green infrastructure that should be retained are assumed to contribute to the 10% open space provision.