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Cowley Branch Line Densification Study

Stage 2

Developer Guidance - Appendices

Appendix 1: Stage 1 Report

March 2026



Alan Baxter
50 YEARS
IN PRACTICE

LD&DESIGN

»» Cowley Branchline Densification Study

» Stage 1 Report
JULY 2024
FINAL



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St Mary's Church

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1 Introduction



View northwest from St Mary's Church

Background

There is a requirement in Oxford City to carefully balance the need for housing and employment growth against respecting the need to protect Oxford's views. This balance has an obvious impact on the densification of development proposals that are submitted, negotiated during pre-application and then subsequently approved by the Council.

Homes England in partnership with Oxford City Council and Historic England is seeking to undertake townscape analysis in relation to the proposed upgrade to the Cowley Branch Line railway (Figure 1.1) to accommodate passenger services and likely development change anticipated in the area as a result.



Objectives

The overall aim of the project is to:

“understand what extent of development is possible by providing further guidance on appropriate massing (including heights) in the area of change around the Cowley Branch Line stations that balance heritage considerations (understanding and appreciating its significance) with other planning considerations (e.g. economic considerations) to aid in the delivery of good growth”.

To deliver good growth, London has defined what good growth is within the London Plan and the Mayor’s Good Growth by Design programme – which seeks to promote and deliver a better, more inclusive form of growth on behalf of all Londoners.

The objectives of this first stage of work (Stage 1) is to understand in further detail the heritage, townscape and visual baseline environment and context of the Cowley Branch Line area, with particular focus around the station areas and heritage views in, out and across the area.

It is the intention the Stage 1 work will inform part of future multi-stage analysis for the densification of the Cowley Branch Line area to ensure change is sensitive to its context.

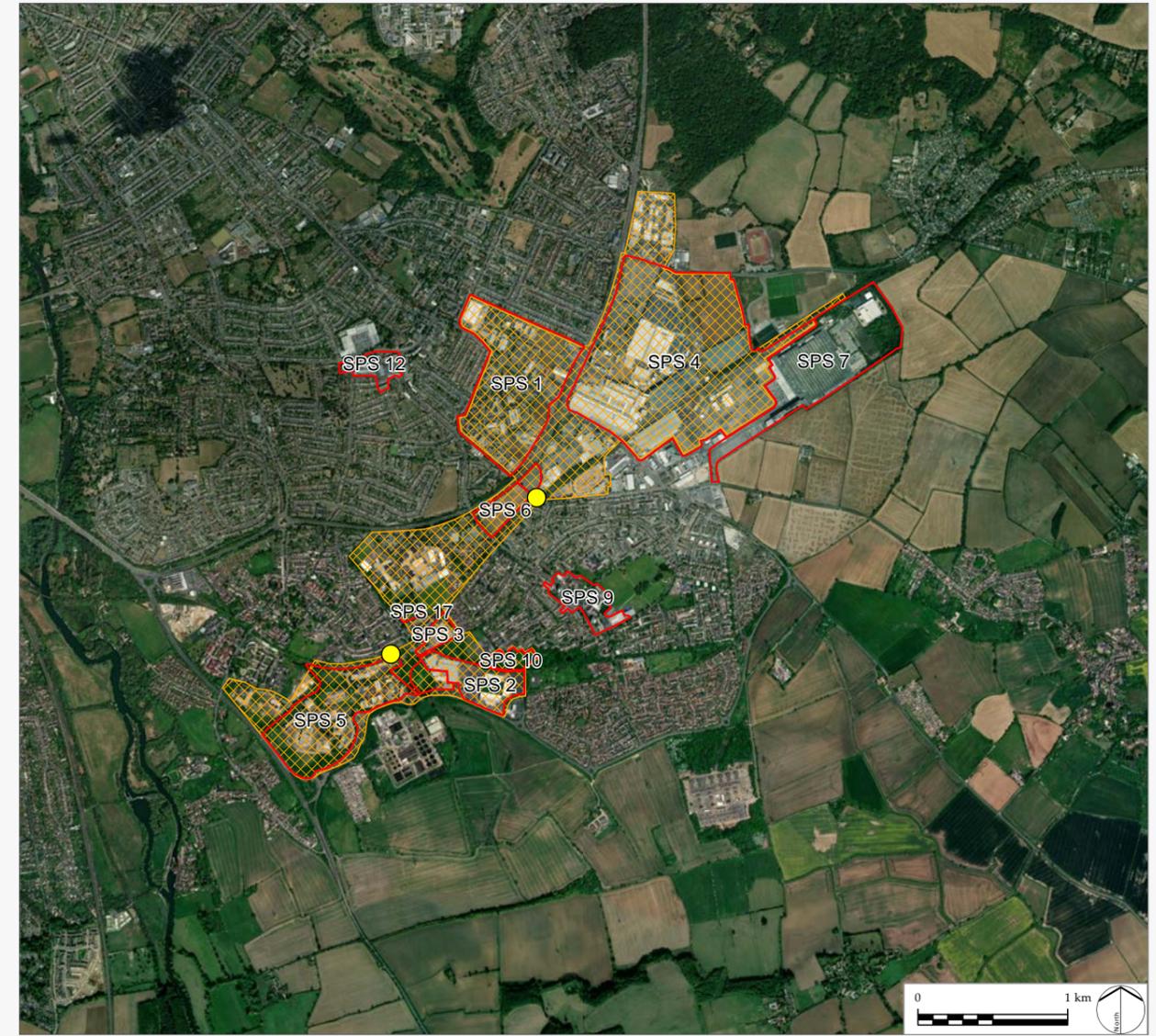


Figure 1.1: Study Area

- Site Allocations - Oxford Local Plan 2040
- ▨ Cowley Branch Line and Littermore Area of Focus
- Proposed Station

Relationship to other Other Studies

The High Buildings Study commissioned by Oxford City Council and produced by LDA Design in 2018 provides a high level analysis of the heritage and townscape of the City and framework guidance for the management of tall buildings and densification. Whilst the Cowley Branch Line area is located within an 'Area of Greater Potential for High Buildings' and 'Dynamic Areas' identified in the Oxford High Buildings Technical Advice Note (TAN) suitable for densification, this was a high-level analysis and there is now the need to look in more detail at this specific area.

The High Buildings Study Evidence Base Report (EBR) with accompanies the High Buildings TAN provides further analysis in relation to heritage considerations. Those aspects relevant to the Cowley Branch Line area are referenced within this Stage 1 report and reference to the Oxford High Buildings TAN and EBT should be made when reading this Stage 1 report.

Other documents of relevance include (but not limited to):

- ▶ Oxford Adopted Local Plan 2016 -2036.
- ▶ Oxford Local Plan 2040 (submitted for Examination in Public at time of Stage 1).
- ▶ Oxford Infrastructure Delivery Plan (2023).
- ▶ Assessment of the Oxford Viewcones Study (2015).
- ▶ A Character Assessment of Oxford in its Landscape Setting (Update Addendum 2022).
- ▶ Littlemore Conservation Area Appraisal.
- ▶ Oxford Stadium Conservation Area Appraisal.

This Stage 1 analysis looks in more detail at the Cowley Branch Line area in terms of its existing heritage, townscape and visual amenity. The Stage 1 analysis seeks to identify a common baseline for the area and importantly the contribution the townscape and visual amenity makes to the setting and consequently the significance of heritage assets.

The Stage 1 assessment does not seek to go beyond a baseline assessment and testing of development scenarios. The identification of potential height and scale thresholds is likely to form part of any future stages work.

Study Area

The study area for the Stage 1 analysis is illustrated in Figure 1.1 and is based on the Cowley Branch Line and Littlemore Area of Focus as identified within the Oxford Local Plan 2040. It includes the Cowley Branch Line area, adjoining suburbs of Cowley, Littlemore, Blackbird Leys, and Oxford Science Park.

It also encompasses the nearby allocated sites within the Oxford Local Plan 2040 including (noting that the plan is yet to be adopted):

- ▶ SPS1: ARC Oxford.
- ▶ SPS2: Kassam Stadium and Ozone Leisure Park.
- ▶ SPS3: Overflow Car Park, Kassam Stadium.
- ▶ SPS4: MINI Plant, Oxford.
- ▶ SPS5: Oxford Science Park.
- ▶ SPS6: Sandy Lane Recreation Ground.
- ▶ SPS7: Unipart (south area site allocation outside Area of Focus).
- ▶ SPS9: Blackbird Leys Central Area.
- ▶ SPS10: Knights Road.
- ▶ SPS12: Templars Square.
- ▶ SPS17: Edge of Playing Fields, Oxford Academy.

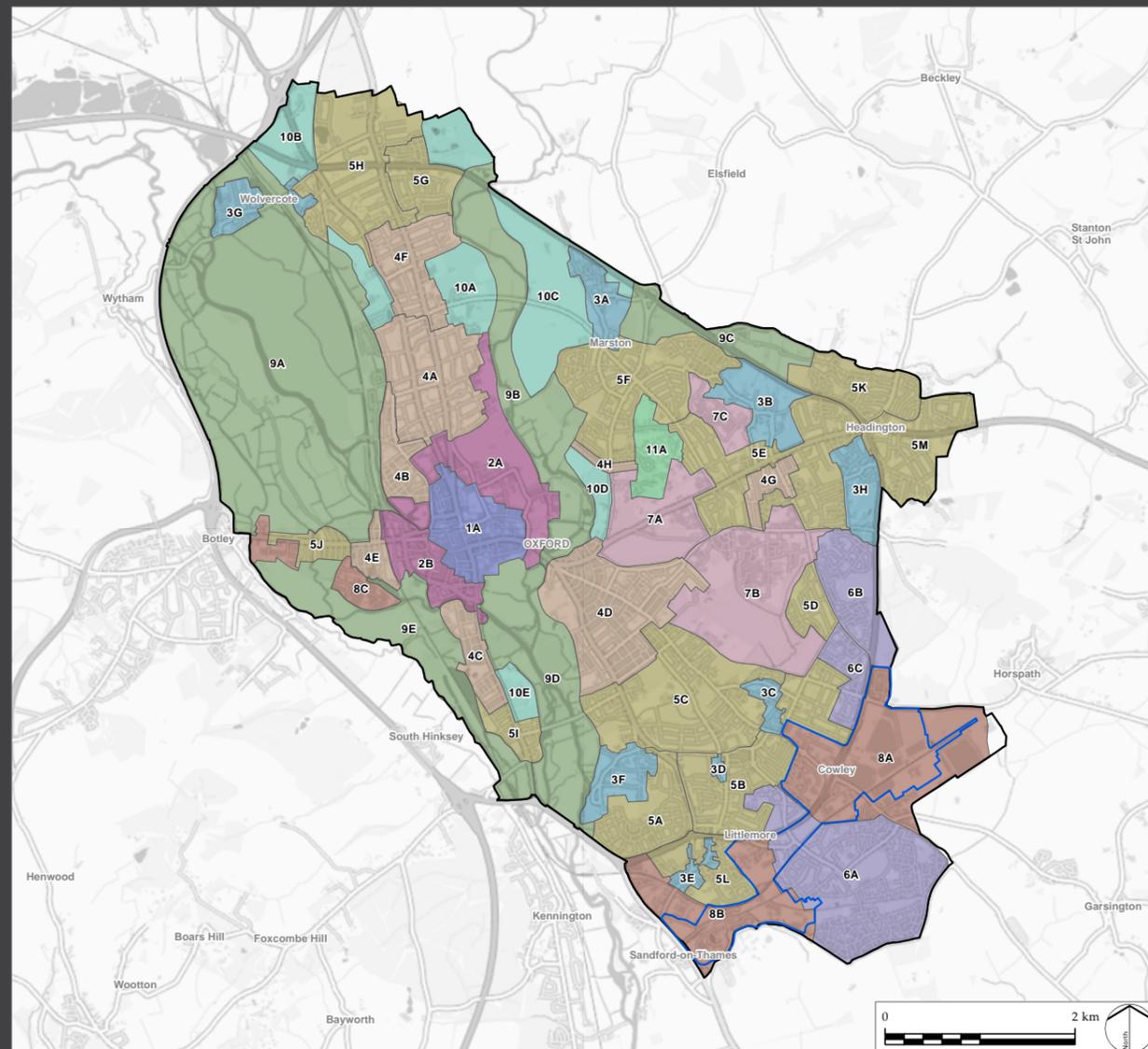
Allocated sites within South Oxfordshire District Council have not been considered as part of the Stage 1 study but it is recommended that they are considered in future stages.

2 Townscape Character

The Character of Oxford in its Landscape Setting (update Addendum 2022) provides a detailed description of the townscape character for Oxford.

Figure 2.2 illustrates the topography of the wider area and the 'bowl' in which Oxford lies and Figure 2.3 the existing built form heights as identified within the Oxford High Buildings TAN.

Figure 2.1 illustrates the Cowley Branch Line Area of Focus overlaid with the Townscape Character Areas identified within the updated Addendum.



- Cowley Branch Line and Littlemore Area of Focus
- Oxford District Boundary

Townscape Character Areas

- Historic Core:
1A Historic City Core
- Historic Fringe:
2A University Fringe
2B Western Fringe
- Historic Village Cores:
3A Old Marston Core
3B Old Headington Core
3C Temple Cowley
3D Church Cowley Core
3E Littlemore Village
3F Iffley Village
3G Wolvercote
3H Headington Quarry
- Victorian Suburbs and Villages:
4A North Oxford
4B Jericho
4C Grandpont
4D East Oxford
4E New Osney
4F Summertown
4G New Headington
4H New Marston Village
- Inter-war / Post-war Suburbs:
5A Rose Hill
5B Cowley Residential Suburb
5C Florence Park and Cowley Marsh
5D The Slade
5E New Headington
5F New Marston
5G Cutteslowe / Sunnymead
5H North Oxford Fringes
5I New Hinksey
5J Botley Road
5K Barton
5L Littlemore
5M Sandhills and Risinghurst
- Post 1960s Suburbs:
6A Blackbird Leys
6B Wood Farm
6C Horspath Road Area
- Open Hills (with Institutions):
7A Headington Hill
7B Southfield Park and Hospitals Complex
7C John Radcliffe Hospital
- 20th Century Fringe Business, Industry and Retail:
8A Cowley Motor Works
8B Littlemore Business and Science Parks
8C Botley Industrial and Retail Parks
- Pastoral Floodplains:
9A Thames (Isis) north
9B Cherwell Valley
9C Bayswater Brook
9D Thames (Isis) south
9E Hinksey / Bulstake Streams
- Open River Terraces:
10A North Oxford Open River Terrace
10B Peartree Open River Terrace
10C Marston Open River Terrace
10D St Clements Open River Terrace
10E New Hinksey Open River Terrace
- Garden Suburbs:
11A Headington Hill

Figure 2.1: Townscape Character Areas



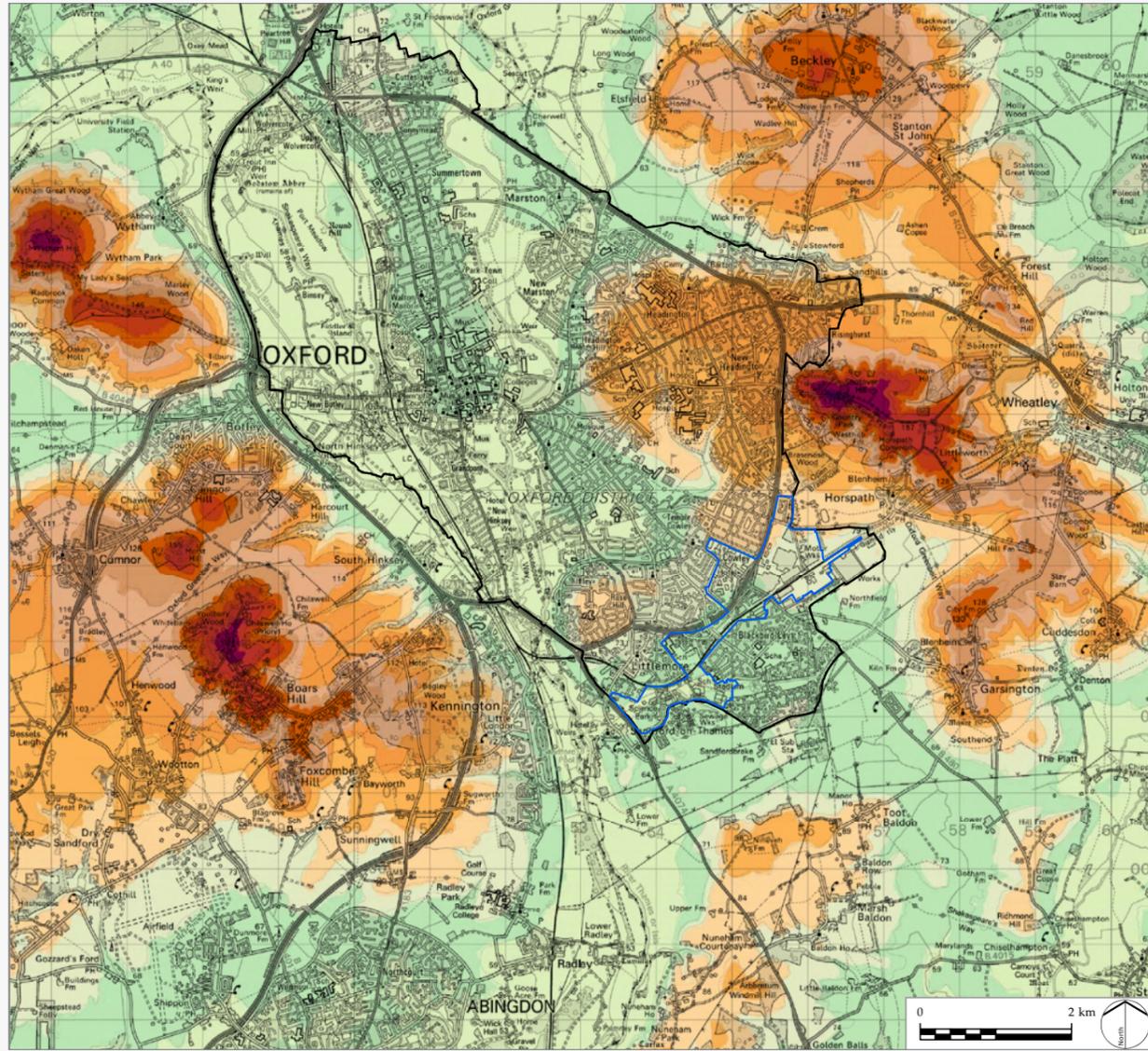
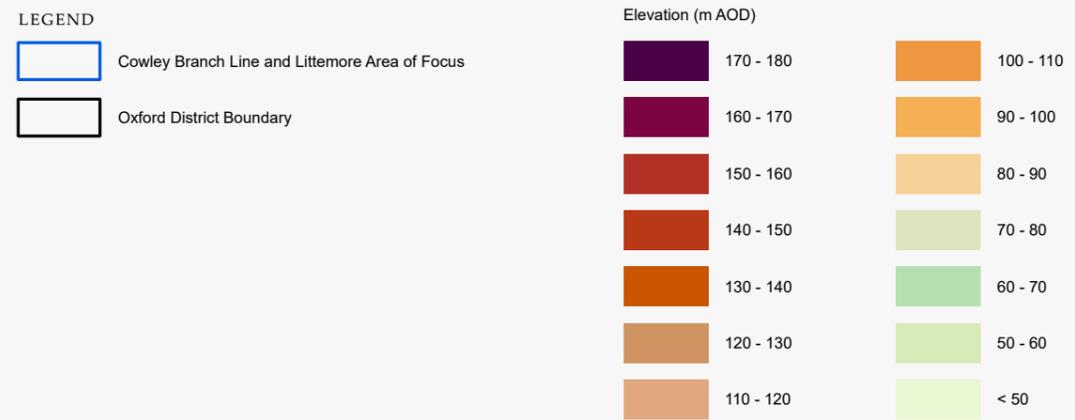
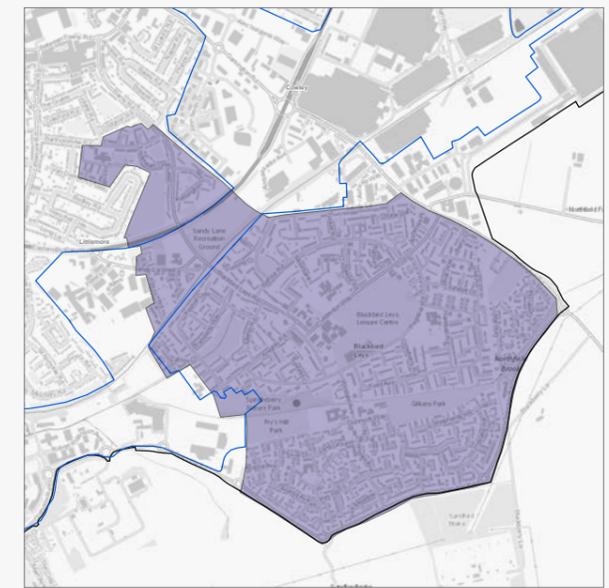


Figure 2.2: Topography



The Cowley Branch Line Area of Focus lies within the following Townscape Character Areas:

6A: Blackbird Leys



a characteristic feature through this area. The central open space provides a large recreation area with occasional groups of mature trees. There is a variety of facilities, including newly built health centre, library, recently extended leisure centre, a row of shops and schools at the centre of the estate.

Northfield Brook flows through the character area east-west, identifiable by a distinctive belt of trees between the two housing areas. Areas of connected public open space either side of the brook include areas for recreation and of nature conservation interest such as Spindleberry Nature Park. The southern residential area is relatively more recent and is typified by a maze of short cul-de-sacs with interconnecting pedestrian routes. This area is mainly accessible from Grenoble Road to the south, although one connecting street, Windale Avenue links this area across the Northfield Brook to the north of the character area.

General Description

The Blackbird Leys character area is the largest post 1960s suburb of Oxford. It is divided into two parts: a large 1960s development in the north of Northfield Brook, and to the south a more recent residential area.

The northern, 1960s area is typified by curvilinear road layouts with cul-de-sacs, centred on a large open area, shops and larger scale public facilities. It largely comprises continuous runs of houses and flats which are mostly two or three storeys as well as two tower blocks which are landmark features of the area. There is limited variety in the built form of the area, with red brick predominating and a mixture of semi-detached and short terraces of properties. Hanging tiles on frontages are

An avenue of trees including mature Horse Chestnuts along Windale Avenue defines the historic route between two farms either side of the brook, and now provides a well-defined route between the north and south of the suburb. Remnants of the southern farm are present, with some retained boundary walls and converted barns characteristic of rural Oxfordshire, incorporated within the surrounding late 20th century development. Built form through the southern area are largely built in orange and yellow brick with block paving as the dominant highway and footway material. There is more variation in house style, layout and rooflines in the southern area of the suburb. The area is characterised by pockets of public green space including equipped play areas, nestled within the residential estates.

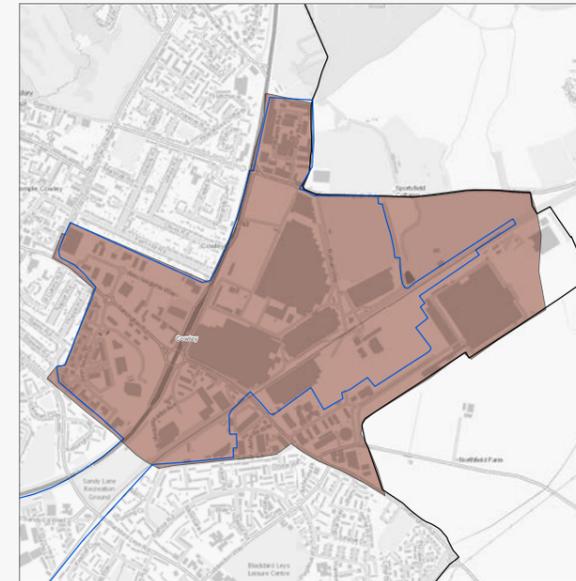


Threats to local character (identified in the 2022 update Addendum):

- ▶ New built development on the public green spaces that alters pedestrian and ecological connectivity through the area.
- ▶ New built development results in the erosion of quality landscape between the buildings.
- ▶ New infill development that does not have regard for the spatial characteristics of the townscape.
- ▶ New tall development that is highly visible, particularly on the urban edge.
- ▶ New housing infill that results in fragmentation of the area and loss of pedestrian access.
- ▶ Conversions, extensions or alterations to existing buildings which are poorly designed and out of context.
- ▶ Use of low quality materials in built development and the streetscape.
- ▶ Ageing and deterioration of the built fabric through misuse, air pollution, vibration from passing traffic and pedestrian traffic.
- ▶ Incremental addition of streetscape details such as signs, lighting, bollards and paving materials that do not respond to the local character and result in cluttering of the streetscape.

- ▶ Ageing, disease and subsequent loss of vegetation, in the public and private realm including the woodland edges.
- ▶ Fragmentation of ecological networks as a result of development, neglect or mis-management.
- ▶ Loss of green space including grass verges, public open space and private gardens that would alter the character of the area.
- ▶ Deterioration of front gardens of properties that result in a general degradation in streetscape quality and diminishing urban wildlife habitats.
- ▶ Abstraction or flood defence work upstream, or drainage associated with building works, resulting in changes in the brook flooding regime.
- ▶ Incremental erosion / graffiti / vandalism and neglect of public areas.

8A: Cowley Motor Works



General Description

The Cowley Motor Works character area is focused mainly on the Cowley Motor Works site, but includes a number of other large scale retail, business and industrial estates, including Horspath Road Industrial Estate, County Trading Estate, Chiltern Business Centre and the Oxford Business Park. These are identified as discrete units of different scales and styles. The Eastern Bypass passes through the area, dividing the industrial areas from business uses.

After the First World War, Morris bought up cheap areas of land in Cowley, creating a larger scale industrial area on the east of Oxford. The factory formerly covered a much larger area than it does today, with areas to the west of the existing works now housing the Oxford Business Park. The Cowley Motor Works has become a major landmark of Industrial Oxford, most recently with the mini a-top the tallest site building.

The area remains the largest industrial area of Oxford, dominated by the motor works. There is great contrast between the large scale, expansive works buildings and car parks in the north and east of the area, with the much smaller scale, formally laid out business park and leisure units to the east of the bypass.

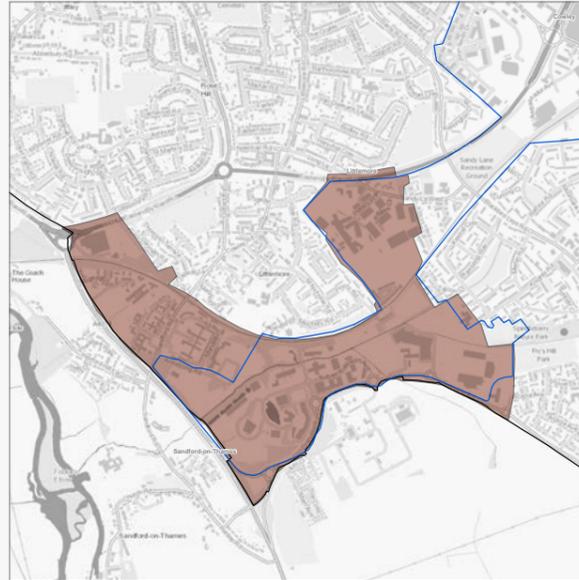
There is limited green space through this area, including some sports fields in the northeast, wooded railway embankments through the centre of the area and occasional pockets of amenity lawns and verges. Landscaping including avenues of trees and planted roadside gardens in the Oxford Business Park is more considered, softens the built form and breaks up the massing.

Threats to local character (identified in the 2022 update Addendum):

- ▶ New tall development that is highly visible, particularly on the urban edge and in the context of existing urban form.
- ▶ Extensions or alterations to existing buildings which are poorly designed and insensitive to the existing vernacular.
- ▶ Use of low quality materials in built development and the streetscape.
- ▶ Ageing and deterioration of the built fabric and replacement with other/ uncharacteristic styles and materials.
- ▶ Incremental addition of streetscape details such as signs, lighting, bollards and paving materials that result in cluttering of the streetscape.
- ▶ Demolition or redevelopment of historic buildings.

- ▶ Change of use of buildings that would alter the character of the townscape.
- ▶ New landscapes / land use changes that do not respond to their wider landscape context.
- ▶ Ageing, disease and subsequent loss of mature trees and boundary vegetation.
- ▶ Planting of inappropriate tree and shrub species for visual screening / boundary features that are out of character with the rural landscape to the east.
- ▶ Incremental erosion / graffiti / vandalism and neglect of public areas.

8B: Littlemore Science and Business Parks



General Description

The Littlemore Business and Science Parks character area is located on the southern urban fringe of the city and comprises a number of areas of commercial as well as ongoing residential development. The area is bound by the railway line to the north, the A4074 to the west, residential development in Blackbird Leys to the east and the link road around the south. The railway effectively severs this fringe area from the main urban area of Oxford.

The area has grown around the remains of the traditional stone farm complex of Minchery Farm, which includes the site of a 12th century Benedictine nunnery. Only part of the former farm remains, in a state of neglect and surrounded by large-scale modern commercial buildings. The site of the former nunnery is a substantial area of natural green space in the centre of the area, between developments. Former agricultural land is no longer farmed and consists of pockets of unmanaged and managed grassland between and within development areas.

The area has expanded through the late 20th century to present day and comprises a series of discrete development areas. There is a range of contemporary development styles, including the Kassam football stadium, science, business and industrial parks containing buildings of varying scales and styles, redevelopment of the 19th century hospital and more recently 21st century expansion of the science parks and ongoing, high density residential development in the west of the area. Development areas are separated by retained rural landscape features including hedgerows, trees and watercourses (Northfield and Littlemore Brooks), the latter being particularly important ecological features that thread through the neighbouring urban fabric. New and incorporated planting and landscape areas within the development areas provide valuable green links through this area, which connect to the surrounding countryside and contribute to softening the settlement edge.

Threats to local character (identified in the 2022 update Addendum):

- ▶ New built development on the green spaces and ecologically sensitive sites that alters pedestrian and ecological connectivity through the area.
- ▶ New built development results in the erosion of high quality landscape between the buildings.
- ▶ New built development that changes the clarity of definition of public and private areas.
- ▶ New tall development that is highly visible, particularly on the urban edge and in the context of existing urban form.
- ▶ Conversions, extensions or alterations to existing buildings which are poorly designed.
- ▶ Use of low quality materials in built development and the streetscape.
- ▶ Incremental addition of streetscape details such as signs, lighting, bollards and paving materials that result in cluttering of the streetscape.
- ▶ Neglect and demolition of historic buildings.
- ▶ New landscapes / land use changes that do not respond to their wider landscape context.
- ▶ Ageing, disease and subsequent loss of vegetation both in the public and private realm.

- ▶ Fragmentation of ecological networks as a result of development and / or neglect / mis-management.
- ▶ Rising water levels resulting in more frequent flooding.
- ▶ Removal of hedgerow boundaries.
- ▶ Abstraction or flood defence work upstream, or drainage associated with building works, resulting in changes in the river flooding regime.
- ▶ Incremental erosion / graffiti / vandalism and neglect of public areas.

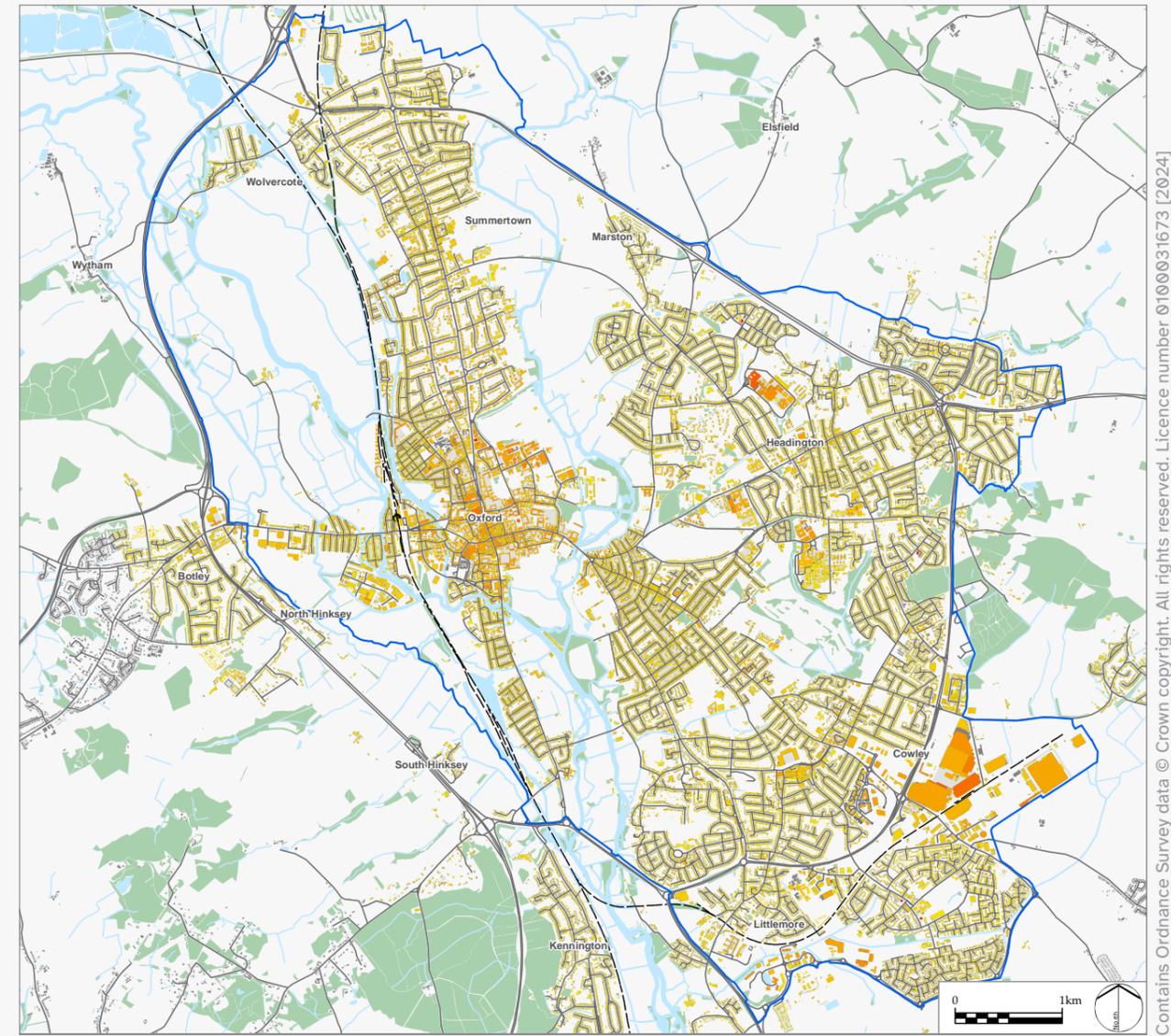


Figure 2.3: Existing Building Heights (extract from Oxford High Buildings TAN 2018)



3 Heritage

⤴ Methodology and sources

This baseline heritage assessment draws upon best practice methodology and a range of sources. Where possible, it is based on existing information with the aim being to adopt and build on the findings of previous studies and existing advice and policy documents.

It is important to note that protected views identified within the view cones study exemplify important views. They are not intended to represent a comprehensive set of views that enable appreciation of the city's skyline.

Methodology:

- ▶ Historic England's Advice Note 12: Statements of Heritage Significance: Analysing Significance in the Historic Environment (2019).
- ▶ Historic England's Good Practice Advice in Planning: The Setting of Heritage Assets (GPA3, 2017).
- ▶ Assessment of the Oxford View Cones, 2015.
- ▶ Site visit.
- ▶ Literature and policy review.
- ▶ Map regression.

Sources:

- ▶ Assessment of the Oxford View Cones, 2015.
- ▶ Buildings of England: Oxfordshire: Oxford and the South-East (2023).
- ▶ Character Assessment of Oxford in its Landscape Setting (2002, updated 2022).
- ▶ Conservation area appraisals (various).
- ▶ Heritage of Oxford, A Preliminary Statement (2011).
- ▶ Ordnance Survey, historic mapping.
- ▶ Oxford High Buildings Technical Advice Note (and evidence base, 2018).
- ▶ National Heritage List for England.
- ▶ Planning applications (various documents and reports).



Historic environment of the study area

Heritage assets

Figure 3.1 illustrates designated heritage assets and protected viewcones within the locality.

The study area contains only two designated heritage assets:

- ▶ Minchery Farmhouse, Grenoble Road (Grade II*).
- ▶ Oxford Stadium Conservation Area (designated 2014).

There are other assets in close proximity:

- ▶ Blackbird Leys: Church of the Holy Family (Grade II).
- ▶ Littlemore: Conservation Area and listed buildings.
- ▶ Sandford-on-Thames: eight listed buildings including the Church of St Andrew (Grade II*).
- ▶ Temple Cowley: Conservation Area and listed buildings.

History of the site and surroundings

The study area is a part of the Mid-Vale Ridge south east of Oxford city centre. Section 2 of this report summaries the character areas of relevance from Oxford in its Landscape Setting Study (updated Addendum 2022).

The topography of the area is presented in Figure 2.2. and illustrates the prominent platform of sand and calcareous sandstone to the south-east of the East Oxford River Terrace. This plateau is significantly lower than Headington, which forms a wooded backdrop to east Oxford, the sandy soil supporting Scots Pine as landmark features. The southern edge of the plateau is incised by Northfield Brook. An outcrop of Amphill Clays from a prominent wooded hill at Rose Hill.

A Roman road ran north south through the study area from Alchester near Bicester southwards via Roman Way in Cowley to Dorchester-on-Thames and remains were uncovered during the construction of the Eastern Bypass (Oxoniensia Vol. XXIV, 1959).

Until the 20th century it was farmland and countryside south and east of the villages of Temple Cowley, Littlemore and Sandford-on-Thames. Enclosure occurred in the early 19th century.

During the 19th century, the suburban and extra urban expansion of Oxford began approach the site from the north, expanding the villages and along the approach roads.

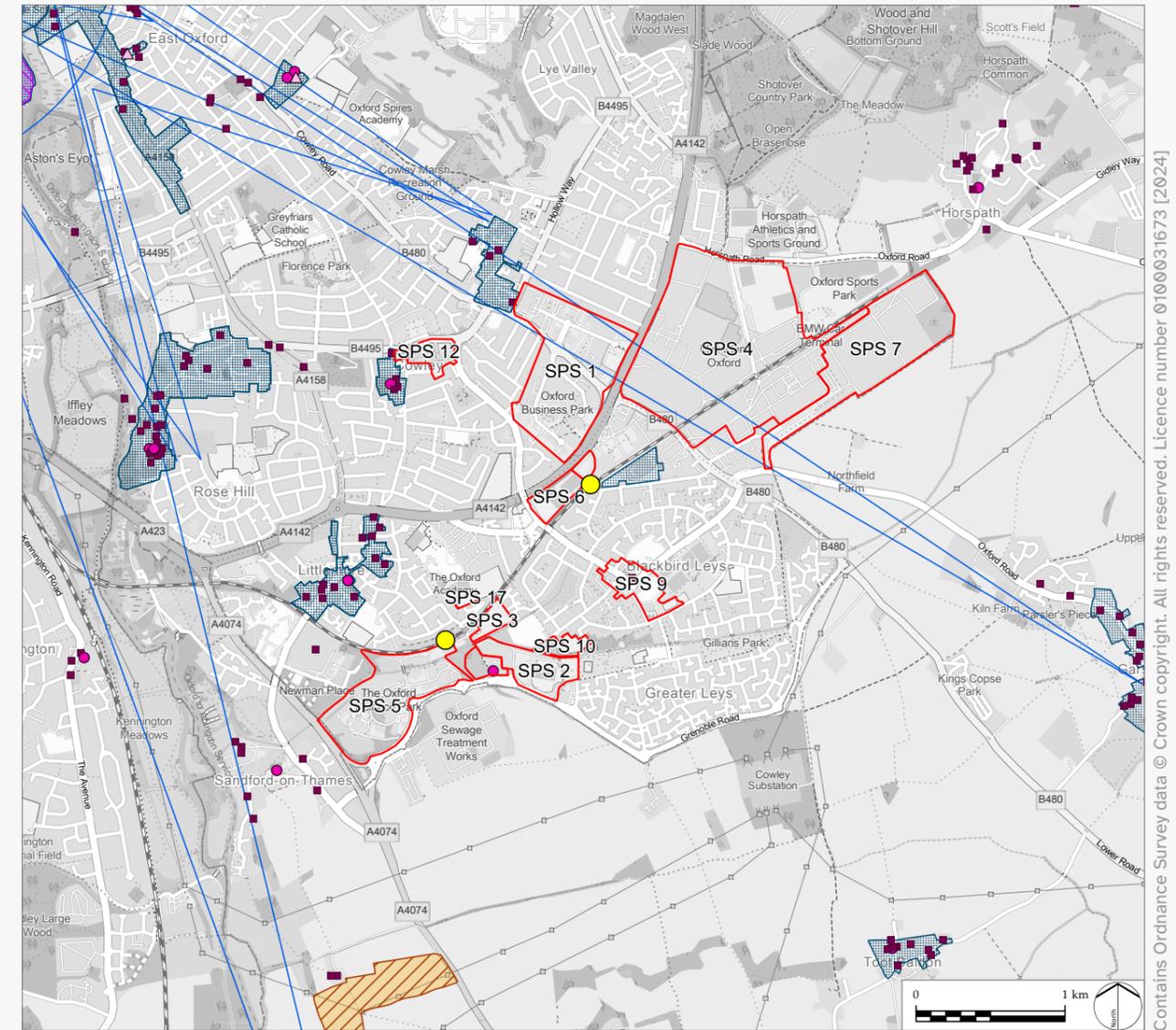
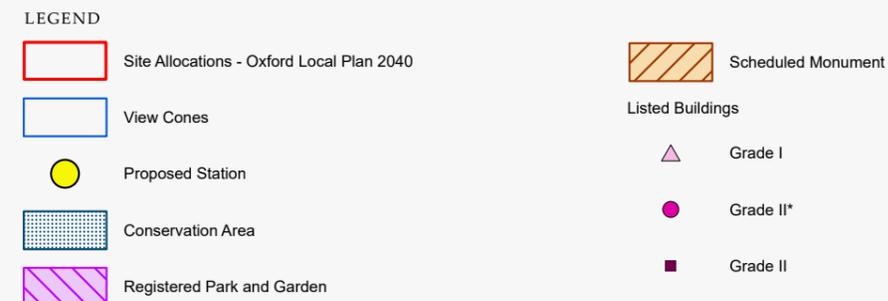


Figure 3.1: Designated Heritage Assets and Protected Viewcones



Most notably, John Henry Newman became vicar of Littlemore and established his college there in 1842.

The Oxford County Lunatic Asylum opened at Littlemore in 1846 and the Wycombe Railway from Oxford to Thame opened in 1864 (absorbed into the GWR in 1867, shortened to the Cowley Branch in the 1960s).

Development in 20th century was associated with the two related projects: the Morris Motor Factory and the Blackbird Lees housing scheme. Morris opened a motor factory here in 1913; it and associated factories grew in size over the century and at their peak employed over 20,000 people.

Blackbird Lees was planned in the 1950s to rehouse residents city centre housing clearances and to accommodate the motor industry workforce. It was built out in phases between 1958 and the 1970s.

The Eastern Bypass (A4142) section of the ring road was completed here in 1959 to support both industry and the new housing.

In 1993 the oldest parts of the Motor Works, inside the ring road, were closed and the site redeveloped as the Oxford Business Park. The Oxford Science Park was opened in 1991 to the west, between the railway line and the city water treatment plant.

Heritage significance

The study area

The course of the Roman road and associated activity may have archaeological potential, though throughout the study area the extent and nature of 20th century development may limit the survival of belowground remains and finds.

There is some historical interest associated with the motor industry: Morris Motors has contributed strongly to the development and character of Oxford for over a century, and the company is one of national historical importance. However, few motor work buildings survive from before the later twentieth century; none are known to be of historical or engineering interest.

Designated Heritage Assets

Minchery Farmhouse is of considerable historical and architectural interest as the surviving two-storey, 15th century dormitory range of Littlemore Priory, reconstructed c.1600 and later altered as a farmhouse.

The farmhouse (Grade II*) is currently on the national Heritage at Risk Register; archaeological remains associated with the former priory are also considered to be of national importance.

Oxford Stadium Conservation Area:

- ▶ The site has been used for greyhound racing and speedway since 1939.

- ▶ The location and character of the stadium illustrate the socio-economic character of Oxford's eastern suburbs during the 20th century; for this the conservation area has historical interest through their associations with its community. The area is representative of inter-war sport and entertainment within the city as part of Oxford's early 20th century growth in response to development as a manufacturing centre, representing an important stage in the development of the city as a whole.
- ▶ The Oxford Stadium is now a rare example of a greyhound/speedway track which is unique in the city and county; this is part of its historic interest. Its architectural interest lies in its form and the remaining concrete terraces.
- ▶ The significance of the conservation area does not derive from its setting, which is of 20th century development of no heritage interest.

Temple Cowley Conservation Area:

- ▶ An 18th century rural settlement surrounded by 19th and 20th century suburbs. Architectural character and historical interest is derived in particular from the several institutions that built impressive 19th century complexes, including the former Salesian College and the former Military Academy, later William Morris' first car factory and then the Nuffield Press (grade II). A school, St Christopher's, was erected in 1877 to serve the expanding population and St Luke's Church (non-designated heritage asset) was erected in 1937-8 through the benevolence of Lord Nuffield.
- ▶ As this conservation area is no longer experienced in its former rural setting, none of its significance is derived from the wider landscape.

St Luke's Church (Oxfordshire History Centre), Oxford Road

- ▶ Unlisted church built in 1937-38 to ease the pressure on the parish of Cowley St James, and deconsecrated in 1994.
- ▶ The church tower is a key visible key feature projecting above surrounding roofscape (visible in views from St Mary's Church, on the High Street, and has local significance, signalling the early 20th century Cowley expansion.

Nuffield Press building:

- ▶ Grade II listed, former school building constructed for the Cowley College in 1851, extended by TG Jackson in 1877 and converted in a Military College. In 1912 the site was converted by William Morris for his car factory and later in 1925 the college buildings were converted as offices for his publishing company, the Nuffield Press. In the late 20th century the site was converted into residential properties.
- ▶ With a high level of historic significance in its associations with Morris, and a medium level of architectural significance, the Nuffield Press buildings have seen their setting change from semi-rural village characteristics to an area of 20th century suburban expansion and industrial development with urban characteristics.

Littlemore Conservation Area:

- ▶ The special character of Littlemore derives from its retention within the modern settlement of a village atmosphere and its traditional buildings surviving in much of the original street pattern with representative types of structures from several centuries that are archetypal to an evolved village settlement. In addition, the Rev. John Henry Newman’s association with the village, where he was vicar and created his “College” in the early 1840s, adds both architectural interest and national historic interest. In summary:
- ▶ Long views along Sandford Road and Oxford Road together with gradually unfolding views along the curving Cowley Road.
- ▶ Organic building pattern representing various development periods.
- ▶ Characteristic coral ragstone boundary walls and buildings.
- ▶ Historic connections with John Henry Newman.
- ▶ Mature trees contribute to the skyline and streetscape.
- ▶ The village qualities survive despite suburban growth enveloping it as a part of Oxford.
- ▶ Survival of spaces between buildings.

The College, Littlemore:

- ▶ Grade II listed former farm buildings converted by John Newman to create his college in 1842. The College, now cottages and a museum, face inward with a secluded and intimate garden to the rear.

- ▶ The building derives historical significance in its association with Newman and the survival of his room and oratory, where he was received into the Roman Catholic Church in 1845. Newham became the vicar of the Church of St Mary (Grade I), Oxford, in 1828 and he became highly influential in the Catholic Revival after 1833, otherwise known as the Oxford Movement, in which Church of England priests called for a return to the Catholic heritage of the church.
- ▶ The setting of the College contributes positively to its significance as a former farm building in providing historic context.

Former Littlemore Hospital:

- ▶ Opened as the Oxford County Pauper Lunatic Asylum in 1846 and closed as the County and City Mental Hospital in 1998
- ▶ The majority of the buildings survive, preserving the layout out well. These are solidly built of brick or stone and predominantly two or three storeys high.
- ▶ The central building is listed at Grade II.
- ▶ The once landscaped grounds are now being developed for new housing at medium density. That plus mature trees around the perimeter limit views in and out of the historic buildings.

The Church of the Holy Family, Blackbird Leys:

- ▶ The Church of the Holy Family is a Grade II listed building, built in 1964-65 to designs by Colin Shewring with a sweeping timber hyperbolic paraboloid (hypar) roof designed by Hugh Tottenham. The church is situated in the Blackbird Leys District Centre

and occupies a prominent position on the corner of Blackbird Leys Road and Cuddesdon Way. It was built to serve the expanding surrounding housing estate, and in 1973 Blackbird Leys was declared an Area of Ecumenical Experiment.

- ▶ The church was added to the statutory list of buildings of special architectural and historic interest in August 2019 for the following reasons:
 - ▶ as a largely intact example of an innovative 1960s church with an unusual heart-shaped plan;
 - ▶ for its carefully considered interior, with high quality, architect-designed fixtures and fittings;
 - ▶ for the technical interest of its hyperbolic paraboloid roof, an early surviving example by Hugh Tottenham, the principal exponent of the technology in England; and

▶ as being illustrative of the boom in post-war churches, often serving new towns and new suburban estates, designed to the principles of the Liturgical Movement.

- ▶ The immediate setting of the church comprises green open space, with low rise buildings to the north. This contributes positively to its significance as an integral community facility at the heart of the new suburb.
- ▶ The building is in a state beyond repair and listed building consent for its demolition has been made (LPA ref. 20/00688/LBC).



Figure 3.2: Captured view from VUCity illustrating local view from the B480 looking southeast

Views out from the City Centre

Oxford's landscape setting

Oxford's character is strongly influenced by its physical and topographical environment, which is explained in the documents an Assessment of the Oxford View Cones and the Oxford High Building documents. These explain how the historic environment including its central core and surrounding townscape are intrinsically linked to its landscape setting.

The City is in a valley bottom and straddles two rivers, the Thames and the Cherwell, which flow north to south to the west and east of the city centre respectively. The City's historic core developed on the dry terrace of higher land at the confluence of these rivers (Figure 2.2).

The river flood plains and meadows form green fingers that permeate the city north to south extending right into the historic city core (Figure 2.1).

The surrounding hills have often been described as an amphitheatre, but it is more accurate and helpful to distinguish between:

- ▶ Wooded hills and valley sides nearby to the east and west, part of the 'Midvale Ridge'.
- ▶ Agricultural vales to the north and south of the city centre, that signal the location of the rivers.

Figure 3.3 and 3.4 help understand the views out from the City's historic core.



Figure 3.3: Captured view from VUCity illustrating the view south from St Mary's Church

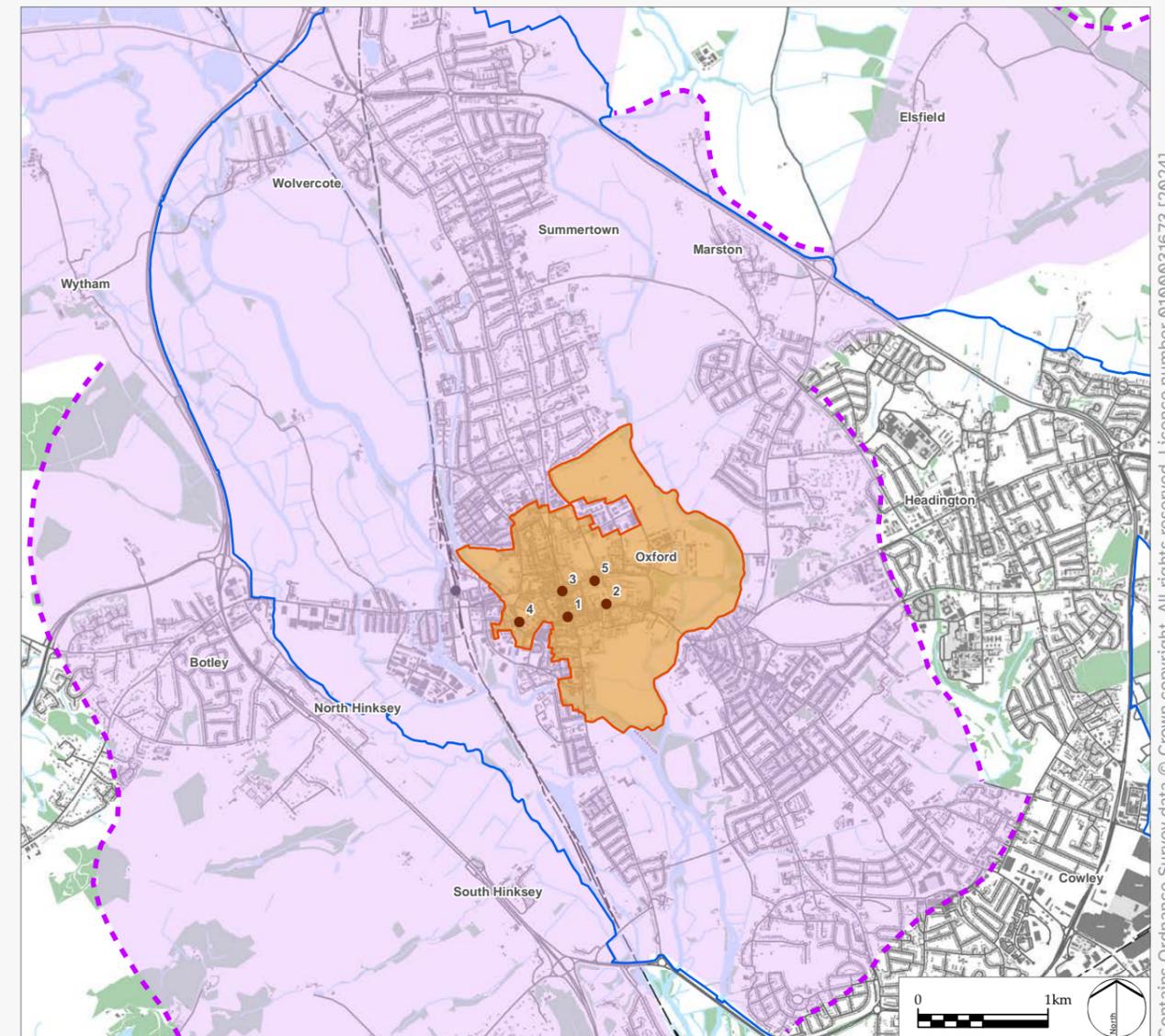
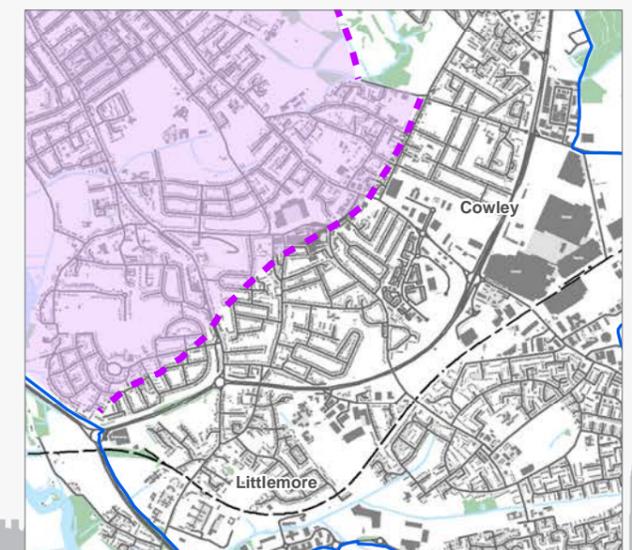
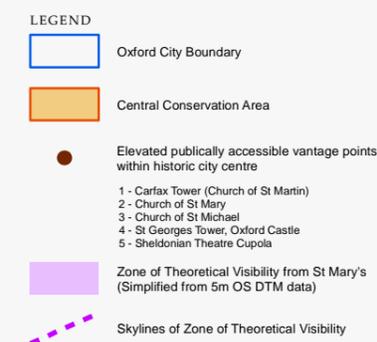


Figure 3.4: Designated Heritage Assets (extract from Oxford High Buildings EBR 2018).

NOTE: the ZTV indicated is for ground level visibility and visibility beyond the skylines of taller buildings may be possible dependent on their height.



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Oxford's historic environment

Oxford's historic built environment features an architectural history that spans nearly 1000 years and comprises:

- ▶ Medieval historic core, originating from 9th century Saxon burgh, built on a raised gravel terrace at the confluence of the rivers which contains a cluster of tall buildings of exceptional architectural significance that form its iconic skyline and are collectively known as the 'dreaming spires'. The historic core is designated as Oxford's Central (City and University) Conservation Area.
- ▶ Surrounding outlying villages of medieval origins, designated as individual conservation areas, which have been subsumed by later 19th and 20th century development.
- ▶ 19th century suburban expansion which subsumed the outlying villages and forms, which the poet Matthew Arnold termed "Oxford's base & brickish skirt".
- ▶ 20th century expansion including the residential development of Blackbird Leys and the industrial development of the Cowley Motor Works to the south of the City.

Contribution of setting to the significance of the historic environment

The relationship between the historic core and its landscape setting contributes strongly to the significance of the City's Central Conservation Area and can be appreciated from a number of views, both from viewpoints outside of the City looking in (e.g. the view cones) and from public high level viewpoints within the City looking out (the landscape setting of the City is not visible from the city centre at street level because of intervening development and trees).

The character of the urban centre as a low-rise city punctuated by towers and spires has meant that since the 16th century, views of Oxford from the surrounding hills have become an important part of the national and international image of Oxford. Local artists like J-B Malchair and William Turner have celebrated the distant views of Oxford, while JMW Turner made the Oxford view his own. Writers have described the approach to Oxford, and walking in the hills. With Matthew Arnold's poetry the western hills of Oxford achieved iconic status, and led to the growth of Boar's Hill as a literary community.



Figure 3.5: Captured (zoomed) view from VUCity illustrating the view southeast from Wolvercote

The elevated public viewing points in the city centre include the tower of St Marys on the High Street, Carfax Tower and the Mound and St George's Tower at Oxford Castle. From these locations there are panoramas in which the character of the historic core and its relationship to landscape can be understood and enjoyed. The views south and north along the river vales are longer distance than to east and west, where the valley sides screen more distant landscape.

Views towards the study area from the city centre elevated view points: St Mary's church tower

The study area lies to the south and south east of the city centre (Figure 1.1).

Looking towards the study area (Figure 3.6), the east and west hills fall away to a much lower ridge / hill line upon which Cowley sits, with the backdrop of the Chiltern Hills beyond. Further round to the west the land drops to gap indicating where the River Thames flows south, where the Berkshire Downs and the line of the Ridgeway are discernible in the distance in good weather. These are the longest distance views from the city centre; the ability to visually appreciate the location, extent and forms of the hills and ridgelines that surround the city is central to understanding its historic development and heritage significance.

In these views south and south east, the development and character of the City is experienced as a series of concentric rings that explain much about Oxford's history, growth and location:

- ▶ Closest, the historic core, with the historic buildings and urban layout of the colleges and High Street. The towers of Magdalene, Merton and Christ Church colleges and Oxford Cathedral are prominent and significant landmarks.
- ▶ Beyond, the river flood plain and meadows, specifically Christ Church Meadow and the confluence of the Thames and Cherwell.
- ▶ Beyond that, the 19th century suburbs of the City. These are largely inferred because tree cover obscures most of them, contributing to the green setting of the historic core.
- ▶ Further out, the low, wooded, east – west ridge on which Cowley stands and from which Rose Hill rises, and the dip through which the Thames flows, the river's course indicated as an unbroken green corridor from the city centre southward and out between hills.
- ▶ Lastly, the distant Chilterns and Berkshire Downs National Landscape. A number of 20th century structures rise in front of these hills, including the residential towers at Blackbird Leys and high voltage power pylons.

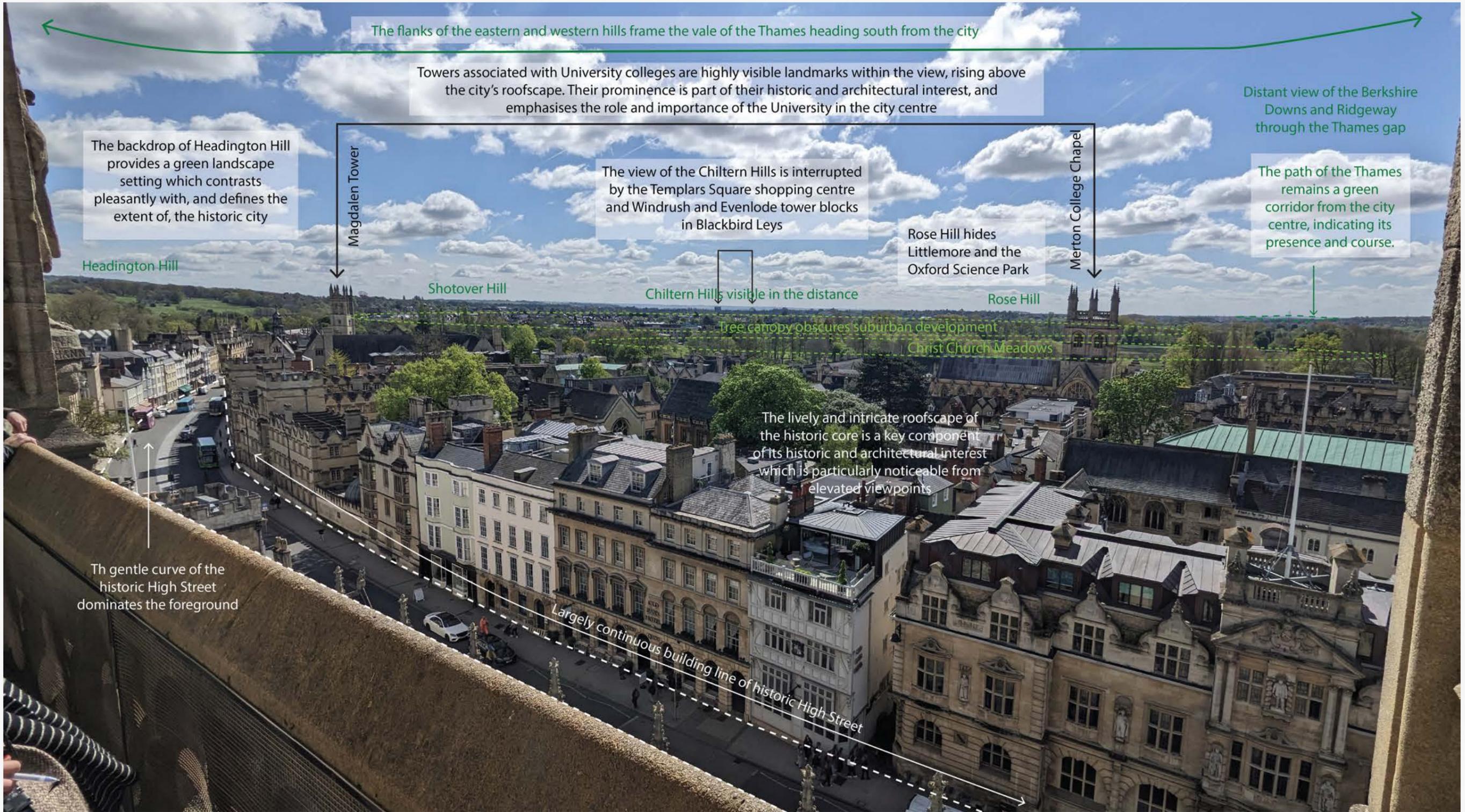


Figure 3.6: View from St Mary's Church

A panoramic view of south and south-east Oxford is available from the top of St Mary's Church, a publicly accessible, highly elevated viewing place. The foreground is dominated by the curve of the historic High Street and its largely continuous building line of four-

storey blocks. Beyond that, the view is predominantly green and stretches as far as hills ten kilometres away.

In the winter, because of the lack of leaf cover, the southern suburbs are more likely visible.

Views toward the City Centre

Oxford View Cones

The study area is visible in the view cone identified from Garsington where the Cowley Motor Works dominates much of the view and also the western area fall within the view cone from Nuneham Courtney. It should be noted these are views identified in the Character Assessment of Oxford in its Landscape Setting 2002 document and not in the Assessment of the Oxford Viewcones Study document (2015).

Although not visible from Wolvercote, the study area is in the theoretical backdrop of this view across Port Meadow towards the city centre (Figure 3.5). Therefore, development could become visible in this view if it were tall enough. This could be harmful because of the high significance of the silhouette of the towers and spires of the historic centre against the sky, in the view across Port Meadow.

South Oxfordshire District

St Mary's Church, Garsington:

- ▶ Grade II* listed, situated on a projecting hillside with panoramic views across the surrounding Oxfordshire countryside with Oxford and the Cowley Motor Works to its northwest. Its positioning and wider setting contributes to its heritage significance.
- ▶ The historic buildings of Oxford city centre are not visible because they are obscured by the low southern ridge in the City (Rose Hill – Cowley).

Garsington and Toot Baldon Conservation Areas:

- ▶ The spectacular positioning and location of the village of Garsington means that views into and out of the conservation area are fundamental aspects of its character and interest. Especially impressive are views of the village from the direction of Chiselhampton, Oxford and the Baldons with the prominent landmark of St. Mary's Church standing out against the hillside and a backdrop of trees.
- ▶ The Cowley Motor Works and Unipart buildings are prominent. The large, long, pale and unbroken form of their industrial modern buildings do not contribute to significance or make a positive contribution to character or setting.
- ▶ The historic buildings of Oxford city centre are not visible because they are obscured by the low southern ridge in the city (Rose Hill – Cowley).

Green Belt Way views:

- ▶ Wide ranging views looking north towards the Oxford Business Park from the Green Belt Way (Public Right of Way) which extends from Shotover Hill to Toot Baldon with key views along the PRow at Shotover, near Horspath, Garsington and Toot Baldon.
- ▶ The Cowley Motor Works and Unipart building are highly visible from various points along this section of the PRow. The large, long, pale and unbroken form of their industrial modern buildings do not contribute to significance nor make a positive contribution to character or setting.

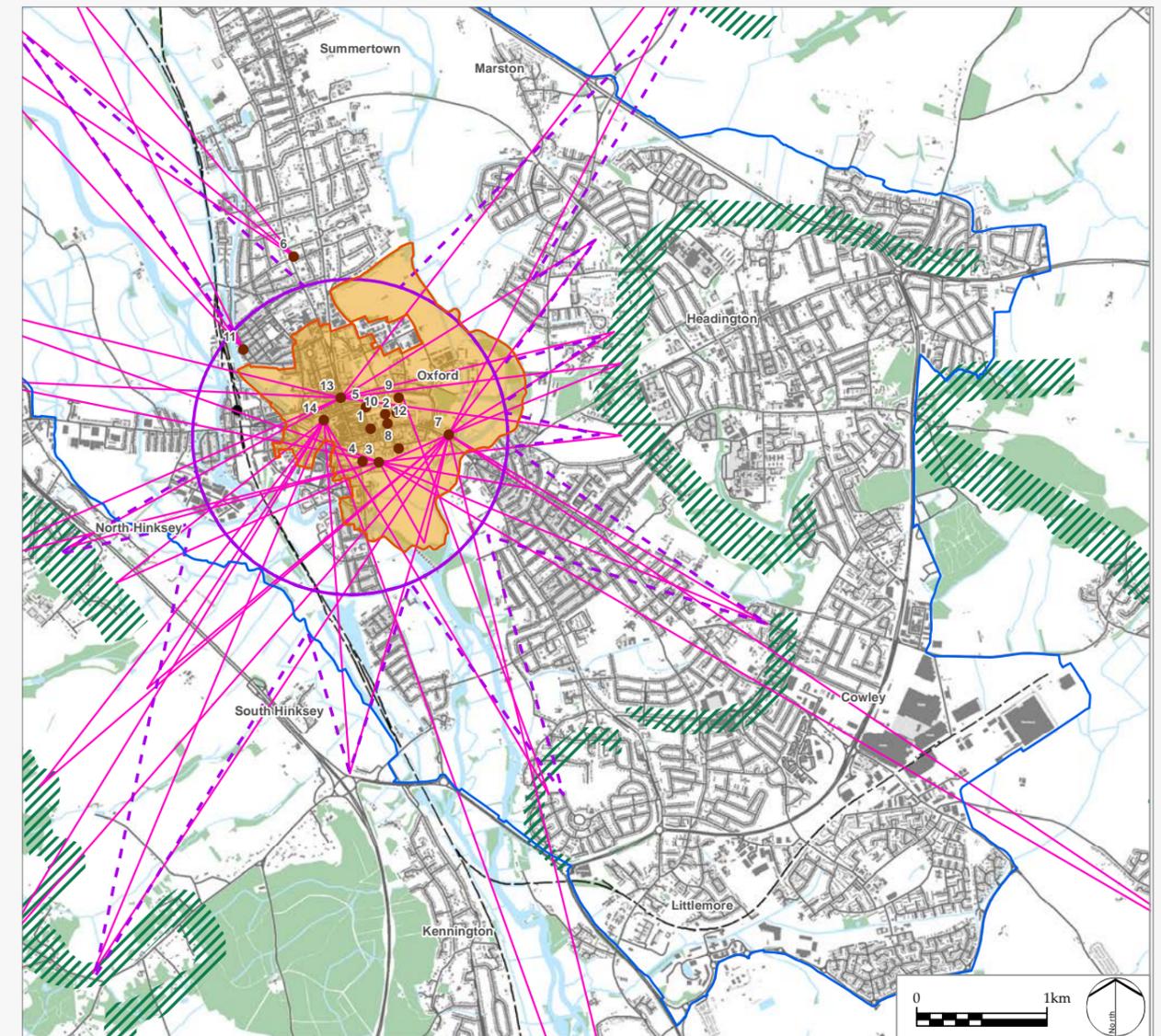
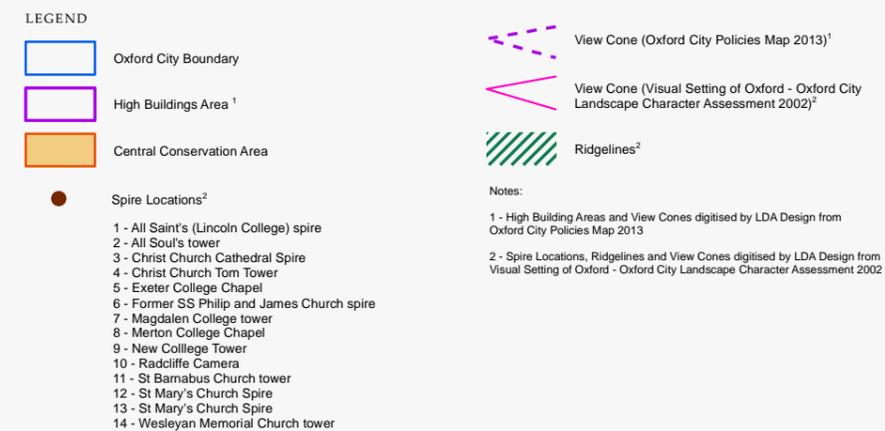


Figure 3.7: Views toward the historic core



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4 Known Development and Change

The Cowley Branch Line Area of Focus is earmarked for substantial growth over the next Local Plan period to 2040 under Policy CBLAOF of the emerging Local Plan. The Policy text notes the key objectives for the area “include improving and enhancing connectivity to this part of the city by modes other than by private car”.

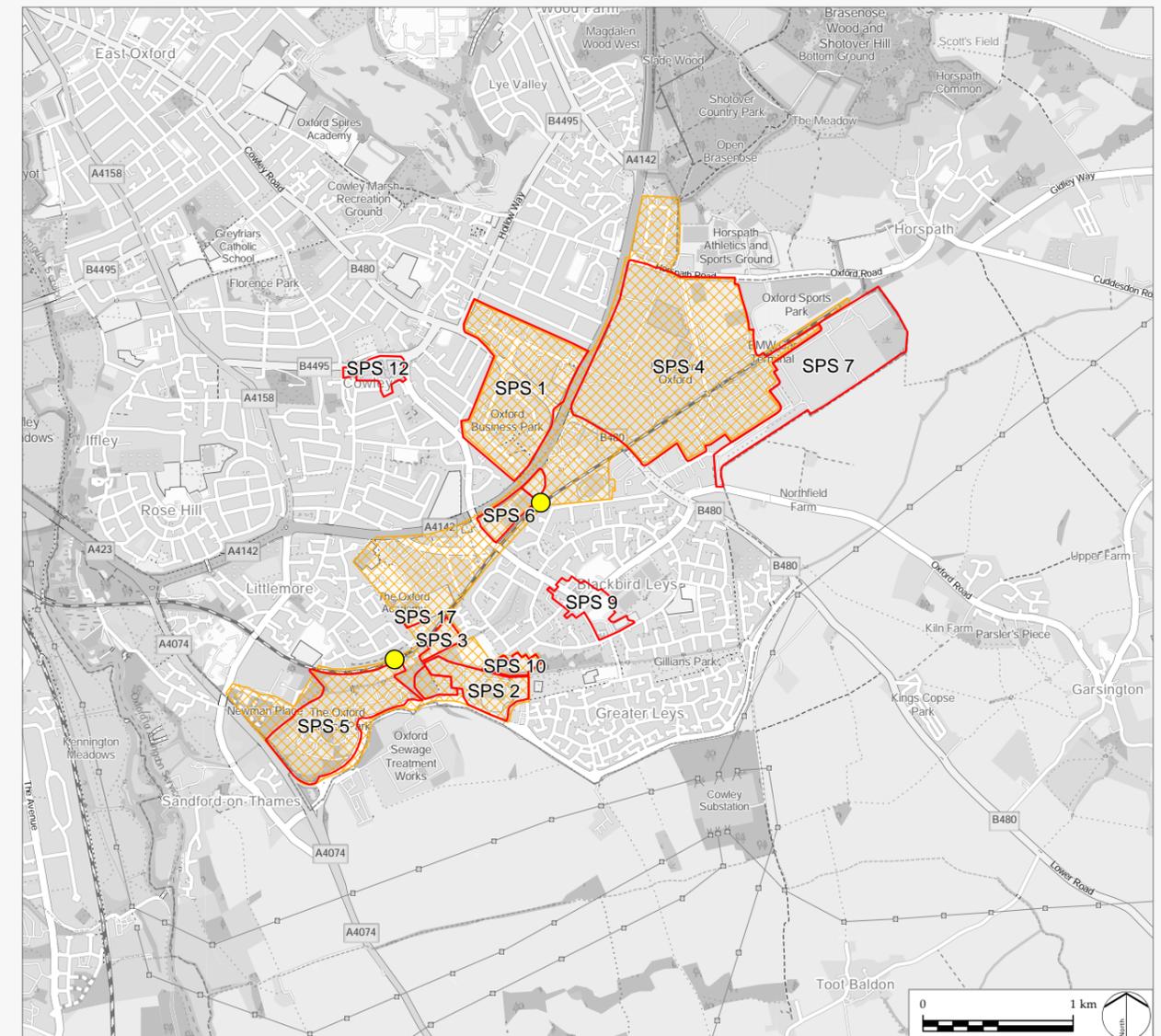


Figure 4.1: Site Allocations

- Site Allocations - Oxford Local Plan 2040
- Cowley Branchline and Littlemore Area of Focus
- Proposed Station

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“Policy CBLAOF: Cowley Branch Line and Littlemore Area of Focus

Planning permission will be granted for new development within this Area of Focus where it would ensure that opportunities are taken to deliver the following (where applicable):

- a) Pedestrian and cycling infrastructure improvements must be delivered in accordance with the requirements of the Oxfordshire Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan. Development proposals must take the opportunity to increase connectivity and permeability through developments so people can walk or cycle across the area and to other parts of the city including from the site allocations adjacent to the city which are in South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 (Strat 11 Land South of Grenoble Road and Strat 12 Northfield)
- b) Development sites coming across the area should seek to reduce car parking in line with Policy C8;
- c) New development must incorporate safeguarded land for pedestrian and cycle access to the proposed CBL railway stations as referenced in Policies SPS 5 Oxford Science Park and SPS6 Sandy Lane Recreation Ground and connections to bus stops;
- d) Enhancements to public transport both improving existing bus services and towards the proposed CBL. Improved accessibility in the southeast of the city is needed to support the anticipated intensification of existing employment use and to improve accessibility to new residential development. The CBL

would enable a reduction in car use to this area, supporting this employment use. Financial contributions from trip-generating uses within a 1,500m buffer zone of the proposed CBL stations will be expected in order to achieve public transport enhancements in this area, including, among other sustainable transport measures, the delivery of the CBL. Figures 8.5 and 8.6 shows the extent of this buffer zone around both proposed railway stations and the site allocations that lie within it;

- e) Good urban design and place making opportunities are taken for new residential areas to be brought forward across the Area of Focus which would include delivering new residential development on redundant retail parks; and
- f) Enhanced landscape planting and opportunities taken to increase tree cover and enhance existing public open space and develop new ones across the area.

Due to the nature of sites in this area, it is expected that some larger scale development proposals are likely to come forward within this AoF. As such, careful consideration must be given to the design and height of new buildings to ensure that their impact does not have a detrimental upon views from the historic core, or on surrounding lowrise residential areas.

Development proposals must be developed in accordance with Policy HD9 and the site-specific allocation where applicable. Development proposals that exceed the height that the High Buildings TAN states may have an impact on the historic core (which says skylining impacts from this area may be possible from 21m and above) will be required to provide extensive information so that the full impacts can be understood and assessed as listed in Policy HD9. When large scale buildings are proposed in the area, planning permission will only be granted where careful design mitigates the impacts of these large buildings upon the Oxford skyline and on existing neighbouring uses in terms of overbearing, overlooking and overshadowing, including:

- a) Setting back buildings away from the site boundaries and neighbouring residential areas/gardens boundaries; and
- b) Stepping back the upper storeys of proposals; and
- c) Ensuring windows in the proposal are angled away from the existing dwellings to reduce scope for overlooking into both houses and gardens; and

- d) Reinforcing or introducing landscape planting around the site boundaries to provide more screening and sense of separation between residential and non-residential uses; and
- e) Careful choice of materials including colour to mitigate glare and soften the visual impact of the proposal; and
- f) Varying the roofscape of the proposals to reduce scope for the merging of several taller buildings which prevent views across the city to the hills beyond; and
- g) Demonstrating consideration of the cumulative impacts of the proposal on views from the historic core area to the historic core area and across the historic core area.”

Central to regeneration of the is the re-opening of the Cowley Branch Line for passengers. The Oxford Infrastructure Delivery Plan (2023) identifies the re-opening of the Cowley Branch Line “as an important scheme to support growth in the south of the city, as well as on the unmet need sites in South Oxfordshire” and anticipates a delivery phase of between 2025 and 2030. Substantial work in relation to the feasibility of the re-opening of the line has already been completed by Oxford City Council and its partners.

Figure 4.1 illustrates the allocated sites in the emerging Local Plan within the Cowley Branch Line and Littlemore Area of Focus and Table 4.1 below provides summary details of their envisaged development and current planning applications as of May 2024.

Site Allocation	Name	Size (ha)	Landowner	Current Use
SPS1	ARC Business Park	35.4	ARC (majority)	Business Park
SPS2	Kassam Stadium and Ozon Leisure Park	8.48	Firoka Ltd	Football stadium, commercial, leisure, food and drink, retail and car parking
SPS3	Overflow Car Park at Kassam Stadium	2.29	Firoka Ltd	Car parking
SPS4	MINI Plant Oxford	82.13	BMW Mini	Car Plant

Local Plan Policy Aspiration	Current Key Developments
<p>Planning permission will be granted for new development, modernisation and intensification for research and development, offices and light industrial uses (Class E) and general industrial (Class B2) employment uses at ARC Oxford. Other complementary uses will be considered on their merits, such as amenity uses which support occupiers and the local area. An element of residential development within the defined threshold as specified in Policy E1 will also be supported.</p>	<p>Several applications currently live and approved for development on a plot by plot basis.</p>
<p>Planning permission will be granted for residential development, public open space and replacement community and/or sport and leisure facilities, and for commercial uses within the existing area of the Ozone Leisure Park only, on the Kassam Stadium and Ozone Leisure Park site. The football stadium should remain (unless it has been replaced elsewhere in Oxford or in proximity to Oxford). If the Kassam Stadium is replaced elsewhere and that part of the site becomes available for development, the minimum number of homes to be delivered is 275. Other complementary uses will be considered on their merits.</p>	<p>APPROVED: Unit 1 Ozone Leisure Park (23/01198/FUL) Demolition of existing Bingo Unit (Sui Generis, Classes E (b), (d), (e), (f), and (g) (i, ii or iii)); development of a new part-four/part-five storey (plus roof plant) building comprising laboratory and office space (Use Class E(g)) and a ground floor level commercial unit (Use Class E(a) or E(b)), with associated access road, public realm, hard and soft landscaping, cycle parking, EV charging, service yard, site infrastructure and associated works.</p>
<p>Planning permission will be granted for residential-led development and public open space on the Overflow Car Park, Kassam Stadium site. The minimum number of homes to be delivered is 77. Other complementary uses will be considered on their merits.</p>	
<p>Development and/or changes of use of buildings to Class B2 (general industrial), Class E (offices and light industrial) together with Class B8 warehousing uses or other complementary uses</p>	<p>APPROVED: BMW Works (23/02166/FUL) Demolition of Buildings 30.5 and 31.5, extension of Integrated Logistics Centre (Building 80.0) and Body-in-White/Logistics building (Building 31.0/31.3), provision of new lorry parking area, expansion of external waste storage area, realignment of internal road and installation of associated landscaping, delivery decks, canopies, shutter doors, windows, plant and equipment and all other associated works.</p>

Site Allocation	Name	Size (ha)	Landowner	Current Use
SPS5	Oxford Science Park	27.1	Magdalen College and Oxford City Council	Science Park and Vacant
SPS6	Sandy Lane Recreation Ground	5.15	Oxford City Council	Green open space with sports pitches; vacant car parking area off Ambassador Avenue currently used by a motorcycle training company.

Local Plan Policy Aspiration	Current Key Developments
<p>Planning permission will be granted for new development and modernisation for research and development and office employment uses (Class E) that directly relate to Oxford's key sectors of research-led employment at The Oxford Science Park. Other complementary uses will be considered on their merits.</p>	<p>APPROVED Plots 23-26 Oxford Science Park (22/02168/FUL). Erection of 3no. laboratory and office buildings with ancillary commercial uses (all within Use Class E).</p> <p>APPROVED Littlemore House (22/02969/FUL) Partial demolition of and alterations to Littlemore House. Erection of 1no. research and development building (Use Class E) at Littlemore House with ancillary accommodation, clinic, educational floorspace and restaurant and erection of 1 no. research and development building (Use Class E) and 1no. building to accommodate servicing plant and bicycle parking facilities at plot 18 of the Oxford Science Park. Erection of an elevated walkway, linking Littlemore House and plot 18 of the Oxford Science Park, new access arrangements, parking, landscaping, engineering and ground modelling works (amended address) (amended documents).</p>
<p>Planning permission will be granted for residential development and public open space at the Sandy Lane Recreation Ground. The minimum number of dwellings to be delivered is 120 dwellings although this would be expected to be higher if the outdoor sports facilities were relocated off site within the local area with a minimum number of dwellings of 300 dwellings. Land should be safeguarded on the site to allow for future access by pedestrians and cyclists to the passenger station for the Cowley Branch Line (CBL). Other complementary uses will be considered on their merits.</p>	



Site Allocation	Name	Size (ha)	Landowner	Current Use
SPS7	Unipart	30.63	Logicor Europe	Warehousing, industrial uses, offices
SPS9	Blackbird Leys Central Area	6.54	Various including Oxford City Council, Oxfordshire Council and Oxford and Cherwell Valley College	Mixed Use
SPS10	Knights Road	2.25	Oxford City Council	Open space

Local Plan Policy Aspiration	Current Key Developments
<p>Planning permission will be granted for new development, modernisation and intensification of office (Class E), warehousing (Class B8) and general industrial (Class B2) employment uses. New development needs to make the most efficient and effective use of the land in accordance with Policy E1 (employment sites) and in recognition of its importance as a Category 1 employment site. Other complementary uses will be considered on their merits. An element of residential development within the defined threshold as specified in Policy E1 will be supported.</p>	<p>AWAITING DECISION U Y S Ltd Garsington Road Oxford (24/00732/FUL) Development of up to 22,375sqm open storage (Use Class B8) together with associated highways works, site-wide hard and soft landscaping works, and boundary treatment.</p>
<p>Planning permission will be granted for a mixed-use development that includes town centre uses, start-up employment units, residential development and community and educational facilities at the Blackbird Leys Central Area site. The minimum number of homes to be delivered is 200 (net gain). Other complementary uses will be considered on their merits. Planning permission will not be granted for development that prejudices the comprehensive development of the whole site. Regard should be had for any regeneration plan for the Blackbird Leys area.</p>	<p>APPROVED Land At Blackbird Leys Road And Knights Road Oxford (23/00405/OUTFUL) Hybrid application for the redevelopment of Blackbird Leys District Centre and land off Knights Road, Oxford. Full planning permission is sought for the erection of up to 210 apartments and up to 1,300sqm of retail and commercial space (Use Classes E and Sui Generis) across four buildings on Blackbird Leys Road and the erection of up to 84 dwellinghouses at Knights Road, all with associated demolition of existing buildings and the provision of vehicular accesses, highway improvements, public open space and associated necessary infrastructure. Outline planning permission is sought for the provision of a community centre and public open space surrounding the community centre (Use Classes F2 and E) and block A (community square and green) in the District Centre with all matters reserved except for the principle means of access.</p>
<p>Planning permission will be granted for residential-led development and public open space. The minimum number of homes to be delivered is 80. Other complementary uses will be considered on their merits.</p>	

Site Allocation	Name	Size (ha)	Landowner	Current Use
SPS12	Templars Square	3.65	Oxford Re-Value Investments Ltd	Mixed use including retail, residential and car parks
SPS17	Edge of Playing fields, Oxford Academy	0.58	Oxfordshire County Council (Freehold) River Learning Trust (Leaseholder)	School Playing Field

Local Plan Policy Aspiration	Current Key Developments
<p>Planning permission will be granted for a mixed-use development at Templars Square that supports its ongoing role as a key part of the district centre.</p> <p>Development should include residential and retail development, and could also include a range of town centre uses, including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ commercial leisure; ▶ financial and professional services; ▶ learning and educational uses (e.g. Use Class F.1); ▶ evening economy uses such as cafes, restaurants and pubs; ▶ community facilities (e.g. Use Class D.1, Use Class F.2); ▶ other employment such as offices and small workshops <p>The minimum number of dwellings to be delivered is 350 (net gain).</p>	Currently in pre-application.
<p>Planning permission will be granted for employer linked housing in accordance with Policy H5. The minimum number of dwellings to be delivered is 20. Other complementary uses will be considered on their merits.</p> <p>The site to be developed is the playing field only and must not encroach upon the other playing pitches on the school site. The loss of part of the playing field will require qualitative improvements to be undertaken to the City Council's satisfaction to the remaining playing field.</p>	

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