

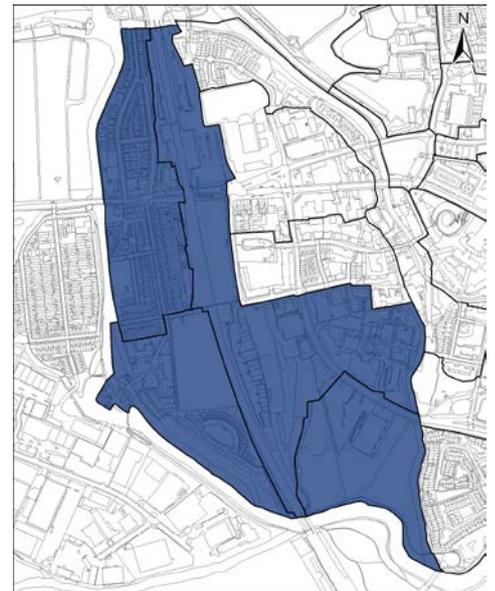
**HISTORIC URBAN CHARACTER AREA 1:  
OSNEY ISLAND - MILL STREET AND BOTLEY ROAD**

**The HUCA is located within broad character Zone A: Osney Island**

*This broad zone comprises of the bulk of Osney Island, a sub-oval Island between two channels of the Thames River (although also part of Osney, the parish of St Thomas and land to the north has been separated into a different zone). This part of Osney consists of Victorian and 20<sup>th</sup> century development around the railway and the site of medieval Oseney Abbey.*

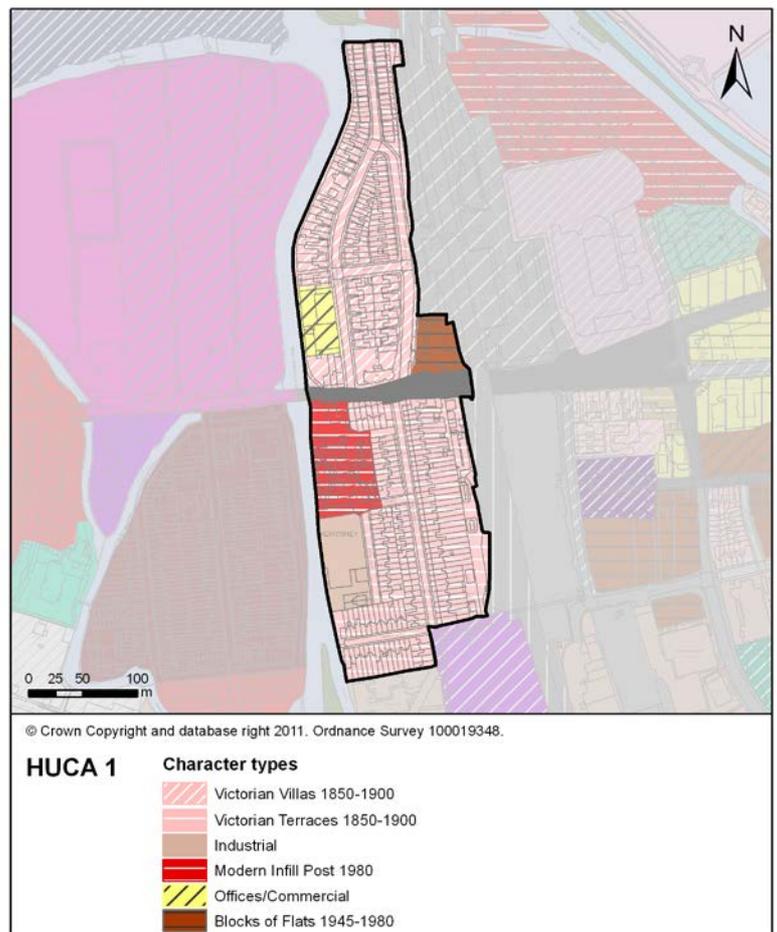
**Summary characteristics**

- Dominant period: Victorian.
- Designations: None.
- Archaeological Interest: Localised potential for remains relating to the precinct of medieval Oseney Abbey, the 16th century Botley Road Causeway and the site of the 19<sup>th</sup> century electricity works. Only limited archaeological investigation has been undertaken in this area.
- Character: Victorian residential terraces and semi-detached villas.
- Spaces: planned residential area with narrow terraced streets and low visibility between buildings. Green space is limited to private gardens and verges on the riverside walk.
- Road morphology: Crossed by a major post-medieval east-west routeway. Otherwise largely comprised of straight modern roads at right angles to one another.
- Plot morphology: short narrow regular plots reflecting planned development.
- The natural topography of the area is low lying on the alluvial floodplain of the River Thames at a height of around 57m OD.
- Survival of townscape elements:
  - The former Botley Turnpike Toll House (now The One, Chinese Restaurant).
  - 19<sup>th</sup> Century Electricity Works now in use as University Science Laboratory.
  - The Kite, late Victorian public house.



Osney Island (Zone A)

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**Historic urban character area showing modern urban landscape character types.**

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## Description

The Botley Road character area is a coherent area of late Victorian housing with some modern development and industrial structures. The area is bordered by the River Thames to the west, the railway to the east and industrial land use to the south.

The urban topography is characterised by rows of late 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century terraced housing and semi-detached villas on a regular grid like street pattern. Open space is limited with narrow streets and a high density of settlement. The terraced houses have generous gardens, some small frontage gardens others open directly onto the pavement. An intermittent riverside path runs along the bank of the Thames. Distinctive structures include the former Electricity Works, now the University Southwell Thermo-fluids Laboratory. Although the overall character is reasonably coherent, each street displays variations in decoration, scale and form and there are clearer differences between the utilitarian Victorian terraces south of Botley Road and the more ornate Edwardian terraces and semi detached houses to the north. The Kite pub (built in 1900) on Mill Street retains its period character. The area contains a distinctive V shaped modern flat development facing the Thames, with paved recreation space.



**Barrett Street terraced housing.**

## Historical value- means of connecting with the past

Oseney or Osney Island is believed to have been formed in the late Saxon period as a result of artificial channelling of the River Thames to create the channel now known as Castle Mill Stream. The word 'Osney' is first mentioned in 1004 and is thought to be a personal name meaning 'Osa's Island' combining the name Osa or Osna with 'ey' the Old English word for an island. Alternatively the name may derive from the ancient British word for river - 'ouse'. Documentary evidence suggests a small settlement or manor existed here in the Late Saxon period. An estate at Oseney was devised by Archbishop Alfric of Canterbury (d. 1005) to St. Alban's abbey. The first firm evidence of settled activity occurs in the 12<sup>th</sup> century with the foundation of Osney Abbey and the subsequent development of the suburb at St Thomas's further to the east. Following the Dissolution, the abbey's land passed to Christ Church. The bulk of the character area remained as meadow or agricultural land until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when the establishment of the railway encouraged new settlement.

A route across the Thames floodplain towards Botley is recorded from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, however a raised causeway was not created until the 16<sup>th</sup> century. A bridge over the Thames on Botley Road is first documented in 1465. By the 17<sup>th</sup> century the bridge was stone and subsequently widened when the road was turnpiked in 1767. The present iron bridge just outside this character area dates to 1889. A toll house built on the roadside operated until 1868 when the building was converted into a public house.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the area to the south of the road was developed primarily into Victorian terraces on a regular grid like street plan with one pub. Several industrial sites bordered the residential area with a timber yard to the south and a builders' yard near the Botley Road. The Electricity Generating plant opened in 1892 and served the city until 1969. Its location, along with other industrial uses in this area would have benefited from the availability of both river and rail transport. It has since been used by the University Engineering Dept. By 1900, the timber yard had been replaced by terraced housing while to the north an area of Edwardian semi detached houses and short stretches of terraced housing had been developed along with another timber yard on the river bank and bounded by the towpath. The Area remained unchanged until recently when the

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builders' yard off Mill Street was replaced with residential development. The builders' yard off Abbey Road has been converted to new commercial use. The character area is illustrative of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century workers' housing and the late industrial development of Oxford's western suburb, including the influence of both rail and waterways.

#### **Evidential value- potential to yield primary evidence**

The area has an uncertain archaeological potential. The Urban Archaeological Database records six archaeological events in the character area. A small number of Roman, medieval and early modern artefacts have been recovered. A possible 13<sup>th</sup> century feature was observed in Russell Street. There is potential for archaeological remains to be preserved relating to the medieval precinct of Oseney Abbey located to the south of the character area, also the post medieval route to the Botley Causeway and the 19<sup>th</sup> century Electricity Works. This Character Area is well developed with commercial and small residential building plots, therefore opportunities to investigate coherent areas is likely to be limited. The area has general potential for waterlogged deposits given the proximity of the Thames.

#### **Aesthetic value- sensory and intellectual stimulation**

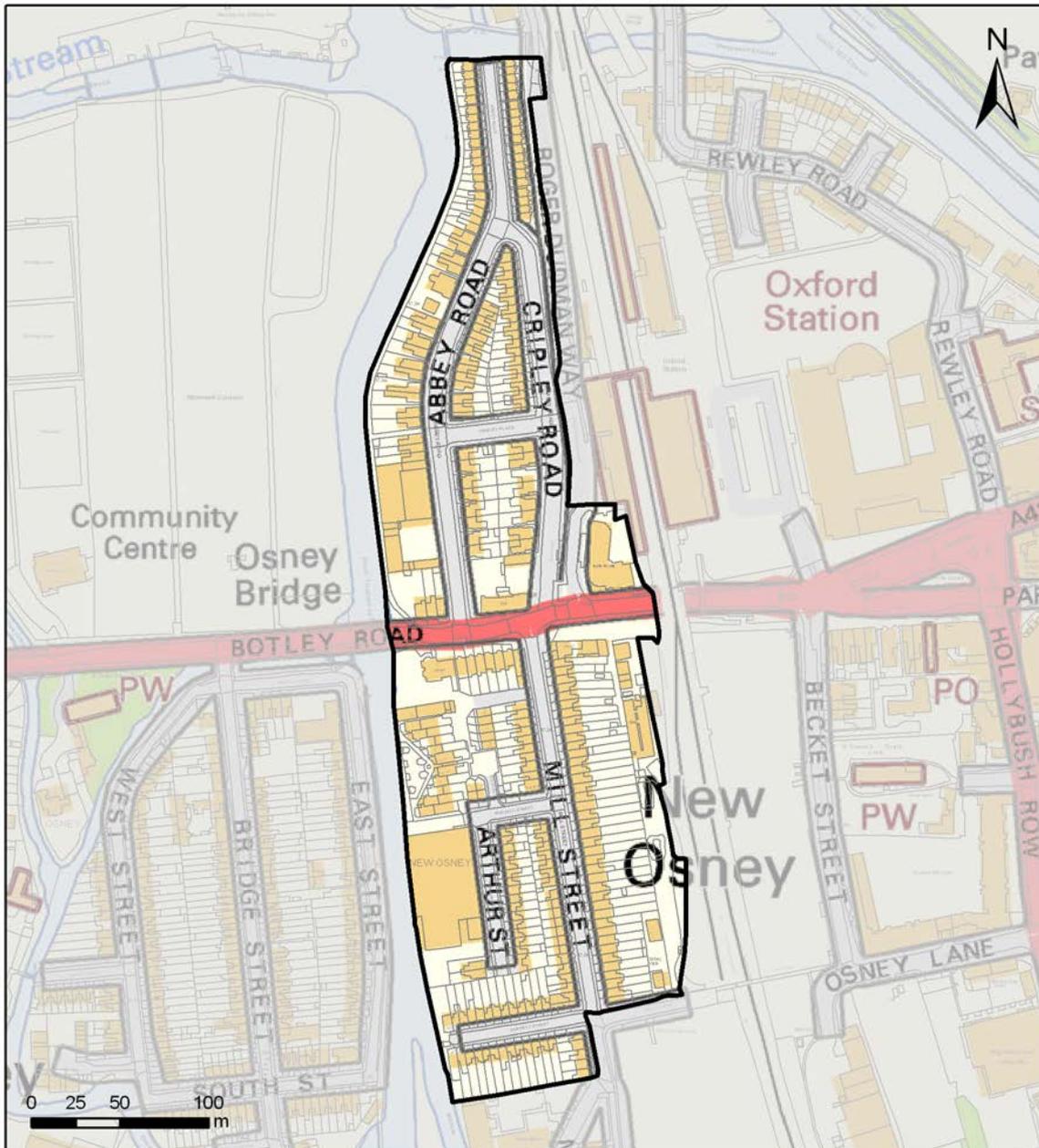
The area is comprised of largely coherent residential development providing a tranquil environment to the north and south of the busy arterial Botley Road. The built character comprises high density Victorian working class housing to the south of the Botley Road and more decorative medium density Edwardian housing to the north. The former Electricity Works fronting onto the river is the largest structure and provides a focal point for the area. The principal open spaces are the narrow roads and the garden spaces in front of the houses although the river and towpath on the western border of the Character Area opens up the space and wider vistas. There is a reasonable amount of greenery and landscaping with garden spaces both in front and behind many of the houses. To the west, the greenery along the banks of the River Thames contributes to the aesthetics of the character area while, to the east strips of semi mature and mature trees screen the escarpments of the railway.

The modern settlement to the rear of Mill Street, unobtrusive from inside the Character Area, was designed to be viewed from the other side of the river where it reflects the style of the Electricity Works to the south. Street furniture is sparse in this area, parking spaces are well defined and primarily for private use. The Toll House on Botley Road is an attractive historic structure and has recently been sensitively renovated. The rundown condition of the town houses overlooking Botley Road somewhat diminishes the aesthetic value of the area.

#### **Communal value- meaning for collective experience and memory**

The character area has a moderate communal value as a well established residential zone near to the city centre, station and River. An intermittent public towpath and walkway along the Thames contributes to the public enjoyment of the area.

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**HUCA 1**      **Orientation map**