

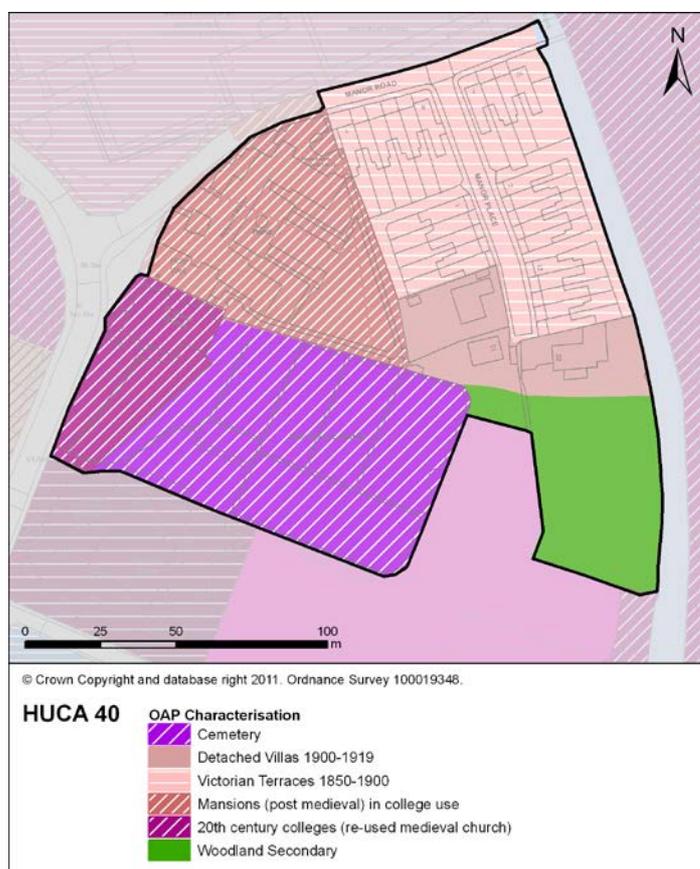
**HISTORIC URBAN CHARACTER AREA 40:  
HOLYWELL MANOR and ST CROSS CHURCH- HISTORIC CORE**

**The HUCA is located within broad character Zone I: Holywell Manor and St Cross Church.**

*Part of the historic suburb of Holywell that retains medieval, post-medieval and later residential character.*

**Summary characteristics**

- Dominant period: Mixed medieval, Victorian and 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Designations: One Grade I, two Grade II listings. Central Conservation Area.
- Archaeological interest: Potential for medieval remains related to the suburb, the church and its cemetery. The Royalist Civil War defences also cross through the area.
- Character: Church pre 1086, medieval and 19<sup>th</sup> century cemeteries, post-medieval manor house, terraced housing 1900-1919.
- Spaces: The large tranquil walled Victorian cemetery contains notable poets, authors and academics and overlooks grassed open space adjacent to the wooded banks of the river Cherwell.
- Road morphology: narrow, winding historic lane and linear estate road.
- Plot morphology: Mixture of large irregular historic plots and smaller regular modern housing plots.
- The natural topography is Northmoor First Terrace at a height of around 62-61m OD.
- Survival of townscape elements:
  - Saxon-Norman Church.
  - Post-medieval manor.
  - Historic Yew trees in churchyard.
  - Walled Victorian cemetery containing a number of with notable academic and literary figures.

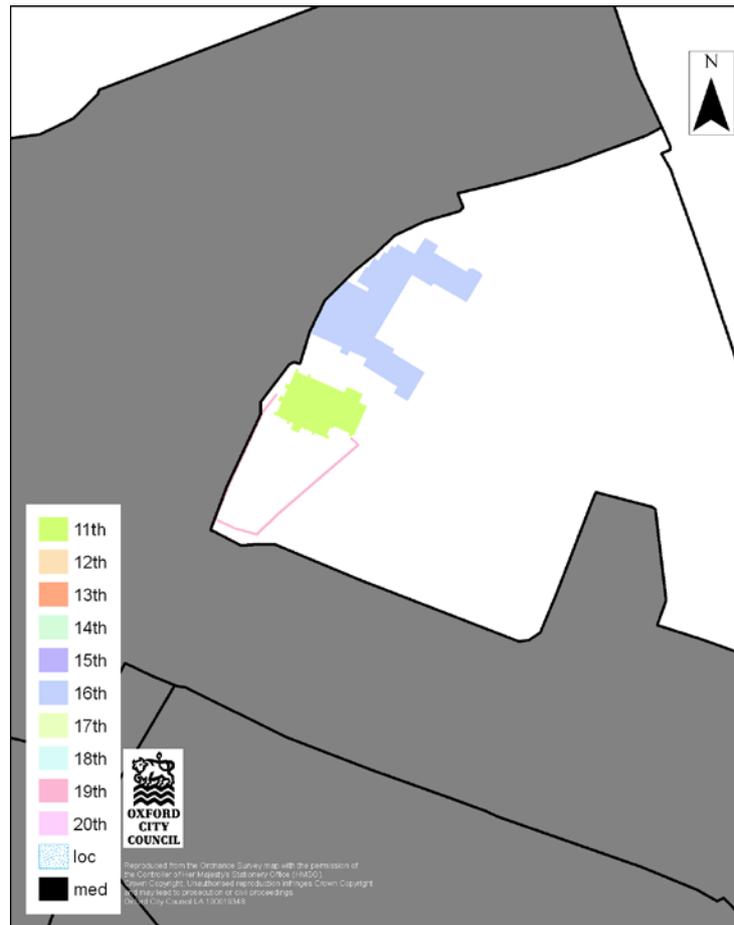


**Historic urban character area showing modern urban landscape character types.**

## Description

The Holywell character area is a mixed area of medieval, post-medieval and early 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings located on the south side of the St Cross Road, forming part of the medieval suburb of Holywell. The core of the area is the 11<sup>th</sup> century former St Cross church and graveyard. The church has now been converted into an archive store for Balliol College. Next to the church is a 19<sup>th</sup> century municipal cemetery and a substantially rebuilt and extended 16<sup>th</sup> century stone-built manor house also owned by Balliol College. The manor house incorporates a tree lined grassed courtyard with two-three storey post-medieval and modern extensions. The area also encompasses an early 20<sup>th</sup> century estate of uniform two storey brick terraced houses, now student accommodation and college offices, and an area of grassland next to the River Cherwell. Manor Road and the south part of St Cross Road maintain the line of the historic trackway from the town to the medieval suburb of Holywell.

The character area represents a block of medieval to early 20<sup>th</sup> century plots that retain a residential and village character in contrast to the surrounding large modern plots and buildings of University and St Catherine's College.



**Listed buildings by date of earliest identified fabric (based on listing description)**

## Historical value- means of connecting with the past

Holywell was an early suburb of the city, present at the time of the Domesday Survey when it was mentioned in connection with the church of St Peter in the East. The manor was recorded as having 23 men who held their own gardens. St Cross church was added in around 1100 and remained a dependent of St Peters. The medieval suburb remains poorly understood with limited reliable documentary evidence and few archaeological investigations in the area. Agas' map of 1578 depicts a small settlement comprising the church, manor and a few small houses clustered together some distance from the road. Logan's late 17<sup>th</sup> century map marks the site of the 'Holywell' surrounded by an



**St Cross Church and Manor House (on left)**

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emplacement located next to the line of the Royalist Civil War defences incorporated the suburb. Subsequently the settlement did not expand significantly. Even in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Holywell remained small and was subject to increasing encroachment from the colleges. A workhouse, and later a female penitentiary, occupied the 16<sup>th</sup> century manor house. The penitentiary was closed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The character area is illustrative of the relationship between the historic suburb and the walled town. The Victorian cemetery is illustrative of Oxford's rich academic and literary heritage, for example Kenneth Grahame, author of *Wind in the Willows*.

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

The character has good potential for medieval and post-medieval remains associated with the suburb and church, and for Civil War remains. The Urban Archaeological Database records eight archaeological events in the character area. Investigations to the north at Holywell Church have recorded a long tradition of localised gravel quarrying from the 13<sup>th</sup> until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Evidence of possible recreational activity has been noted to the rear of the manor house where a stone trough, similar in appearance to an 18<sup>th</sup> century cock fighting pit, was recorded. The church has also been subject to limited excavation and geophysical survey.

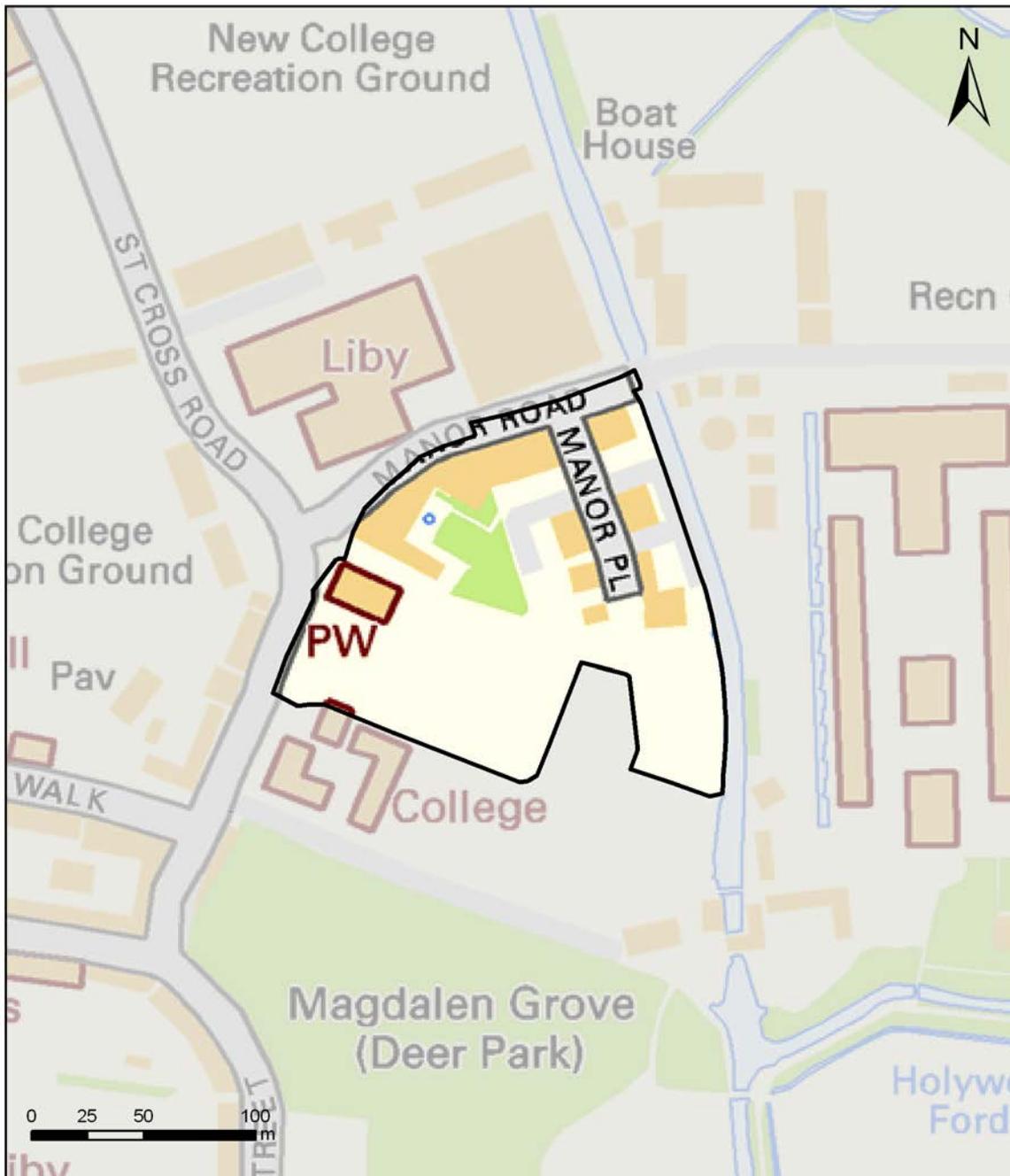
#### **Aesthetic value- sensory and intellectual stimulation**

The character area has a strong aesthetic value with an architecturally pleasing stone built medieval church, post-medieval manor house, tree lined graveyard and walled Victorian cemetery. The Victorian cemetery occupies an elevated platform overlooking the wooded banks of the Cherwell and the 15<sup>th</sup> century precinct wall of Magdalen College.

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

The character area is located away from the city centre on a route primarily used for access to St Catherine's College and University faculty buildings or as a vehicular route to north Oxford bypassing the traffic controls in the city centre. The church and manor are now used by the colleges. The municipal cemetery was closed in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, but remains an accessible and tranquil green public space.

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**HUCA 40 Orientation map**

