

**HISTORIC URBAN CHARACTER AREA 20:  
FORMER NORTHERN CITY DITCH - GEORGE STREET**

**This HUCA is located within broad character Zone J: Former northern city ditch.**

*The broad character zone is comprised of tenements and plots that broadly reflect the post-medieval colonisation the in-filled medieval city ditch and extra-mural land adjacent to it.*

**Summary characteristics**

- Dominant period: Late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century.

- Designations: One Grade II listing. Central Conservation Area.

- Archaeological Potential: Potential for evidence relating to the Late Saxon and medieval town defences, also for Late Saxon and medieval extra-mural activity along 'Irishman's Street' and for post-medieval colonisation of the town ditch.

- Character: Victorian to inter-war mixed use shops, offices and warehouses.

- Spaces: The character area is densely developed and there is little open or green space. The enclosed wooded grounds of the Social Science faculty provide an important visual component to the street scene. A wide paved access road to Gloucester Green is a semi pedestrianised space (taxis only) that adjoins the public square and occasional market space

- Road morphology: A linear medieval extra-mural street with medieval to modern side streets and alleys.

- Plot morphology: Some limited survival of post-medieval plots on the south side of road. Mostly large regular plots.

- Located primarily on the Summertown-Radley Second Terrace, the natural topography of the area rises gently from 61m OD in the west to 65m OD in the east.

- Survival of townscape elements:
  - Victorian and inter-war mixed use properties.
  - Fire station and Corn Exchange 1894-6.



The former northern city ditch (Zone J)  
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**HUCA 20**

**OAP Characterisation**

	Townhouses		Leisure
	Narrow plots		Modern shopping centre
	Victorian Terraces 1850-1900		Mixed Shops/Offices
	Mixed Housing & Shops		Alley
	Lane		Square or Place

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

- Former YMCA building, 1891.
- Former Lucas Clothing Factory, 1892
- Odeon Cinema, 1935

### Description

The George Street commercial character area is a coherent area of 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century development dominated by leisure and shopping facilities. The urban morphology is influenced by the medieval northern defences with George Street following the line of the city ditch. George Street is a busy thoroughfare linking the central shopping precinct of Cornmarket with the bus station and routes to the railway station. The area has a concentration of bars, restaurants, a theatre, cinema and other performing spaces. A number of historic yards and lanes run off at right angles to George Street.

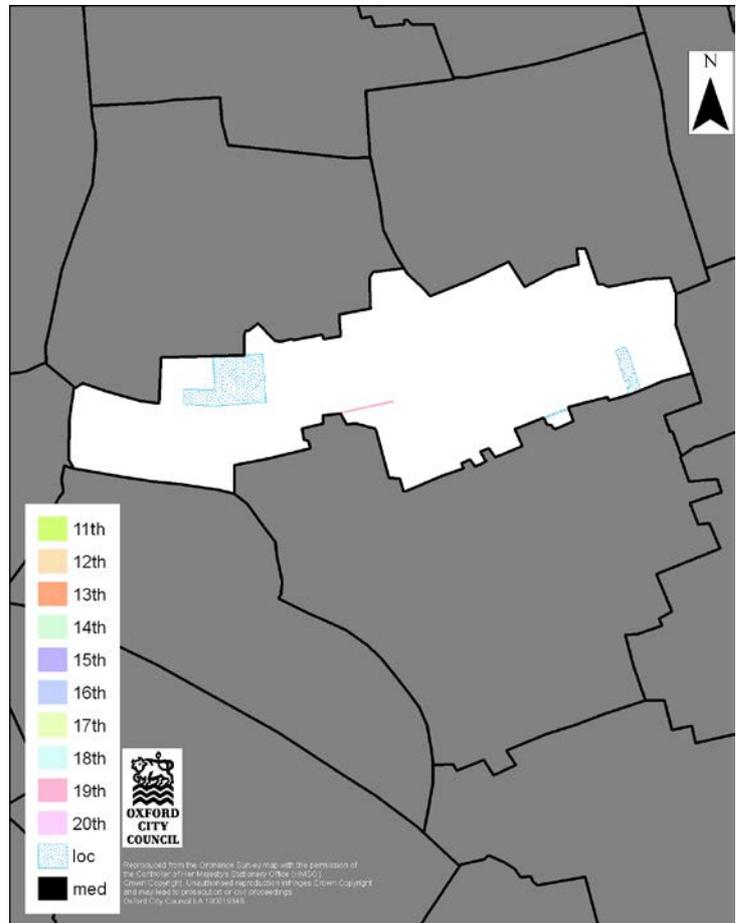
The built character comprises mostly continuous frontages of Victorian to modern three or four storey buildings fronting directly onto the pavement. The area is dominated by brick built Victorian to inter-war period properties. There are a combination of short or truncated narrow plots and broad rectangular plots. The post-medieval buildings in this area were notably removed in the Victorian period.

### Historical value- means of connecting with the past

This character area is located to the north of the Late Saxon burh, established at Oxford by the early 10<sup>th</sup> century, and subsequent walled medieval town. For much of the medieval period the western part of the modern street lay within Broken Hays (Broken Hedges) and large open space bounded by the town ditch to the south. A 12<sup>th</sup> century Inn 'The Jorge' may have given the later street its name, although the east-west route was also known as Irishman's Street. The north side of George Street was occupied by tenements in the 13<sup>th</sup> century but the area appears to have become waste in the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century when it was used for gravel digging. As George Street was located outside the lockable gates of the medieval town there was less security available to residents in this area.

The medieval town defences were briefly re-established during the Civil War by the Royalist garrison but the town ditch was subsequently back-filled in the 1650s. The resulting corridor of central real estate was rapidly developed in the latter half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century at which point the present urban morphology was established.

George Street is distinct in central Oxford for the extent of late Victorian – inter-war period redevelopment. The line of New Inn Hall Street, formerly an intra-mural street was extended to join George Street in 1872. The City of Oxford High School for Boys (designed by T.G. Jackson) was established in 1880-81, subsequently the street saw the construction of the W.F. Lucas 'ready to wear' clothing factory in 1892 (designed by H. Drinkwater) and a fire station and Corn Exchange in



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

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1894-6 (designed by H.W. Moore). Whilst these buildings no longer retain their original functions they are illustrative of a distinctive period of civic development and expansion.

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

The character extent of Late Saxon and medieval activity in this extra-mural area is poorly understood. The area has potential to preserve evidence for Late Saxon, medieval and post-medieval domestic and commercial activity and to preserve the in-filled remains of the Saxon and medieval town ditch. The Urban Archaeological Database records fifteen archaeological events recorded in the character area. Previously investigations have recorded sections of the Late Saxon burh defences and the town ditch, a 13<sup>th</sup> century pit, also small post-medieval gravel quarries and later Victorian walls and cellars. A large quantity of post-medieval clay pipes recovered from the rear of Debenham's in 1933 may indicate the presence of a pipe manufacturing site on the George Street frontage.

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

The area has a number of well designed and detailed Victorian buildings which, along with the wide slightly curving nature of the street, give it a character which is distinctive. The street is well served by access roads and alley ways which provide through routes to other parts of the city and access to the wider entertainment 'quarter' located within and around it.

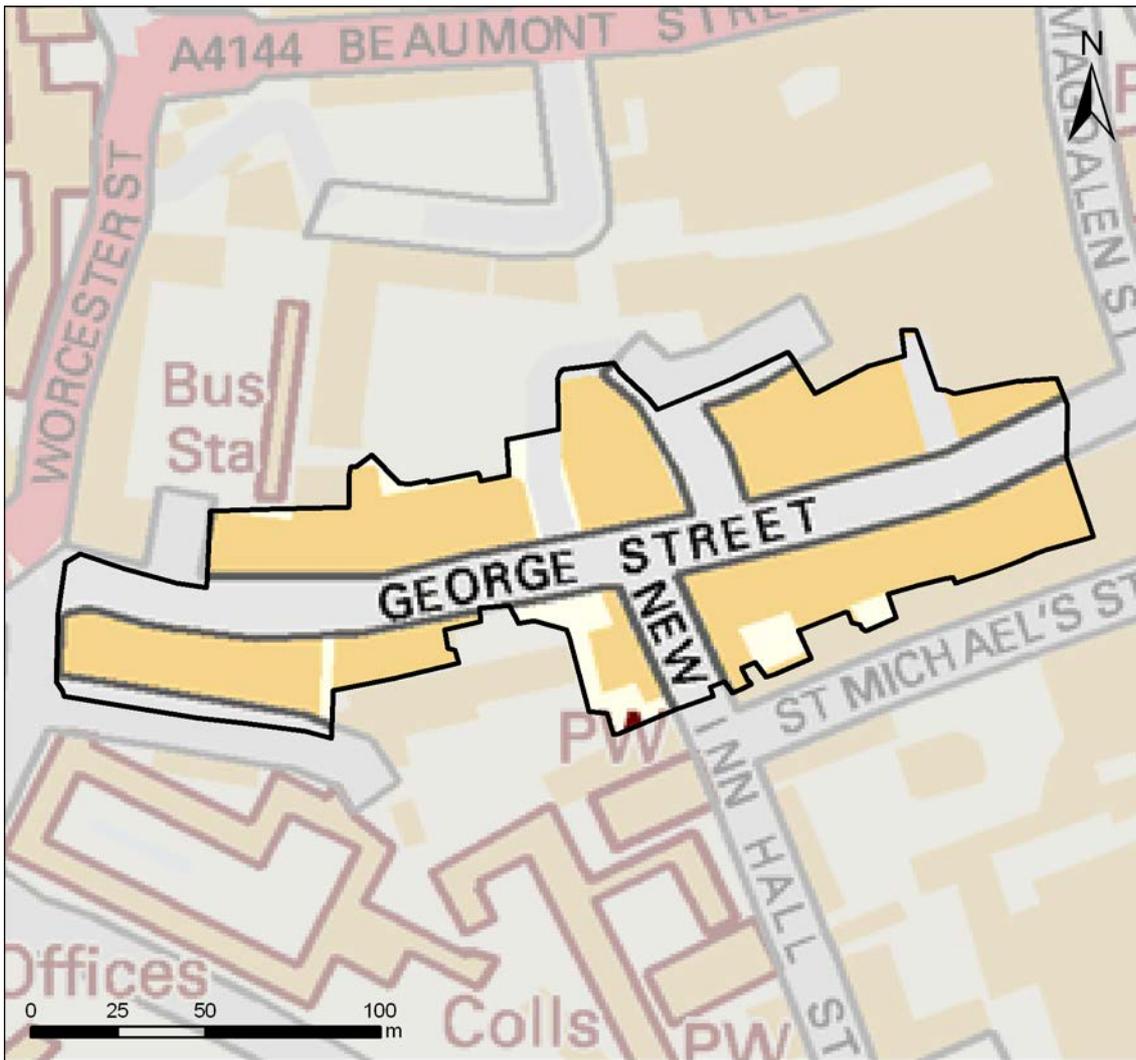
### **Communal value- meaning for collective experience and memory**

The character area has strong communal value being part of the 'entertainment quarter' of the city, housing bars, restaurants, clubs, the New Theatre and Odeon Cinema. The road is a major thoroughfare from the railway station and bus station to the centre of town.



**George Street looking east**

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**HUCA 20 Orientation map**