

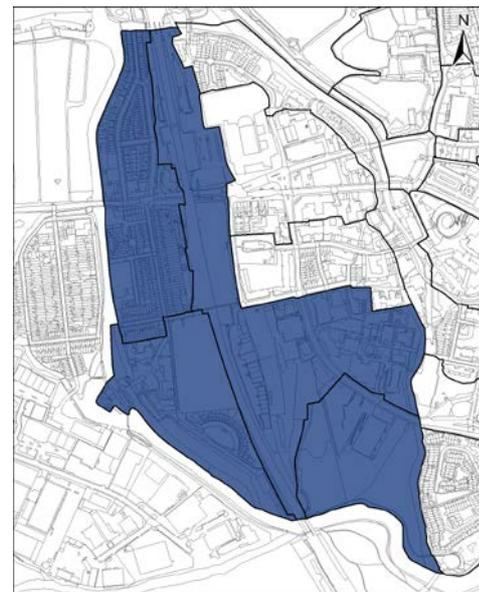
**HISTORIC URBAN CHARACTER AREA 2:  
OSNEY ISLAND - OSENEY ABBEY**

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

*This broad character zone comprises of the bulk of Osney Island, a sub oval Island which formed by two channels of the Thames River (the parish of St Thomas and land to the north, although also part of Osney, 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.*

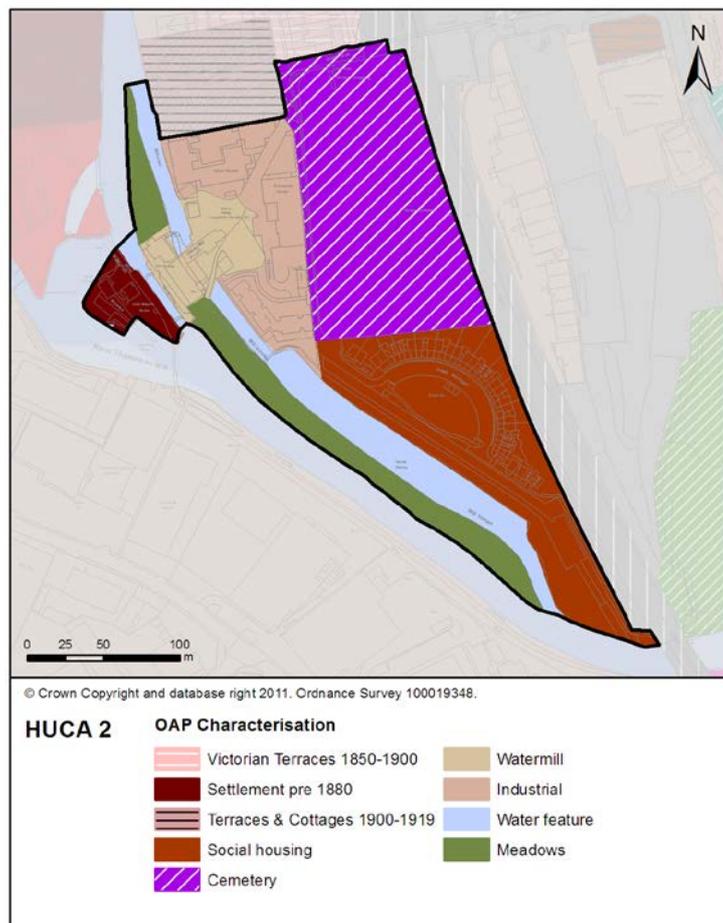
**Summary characteristics**

- Dominant period: 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Designations: Osney Abbey Scheduled Ancient Monument; Two Grade II listings; Osney Island Conservation Area.
- Archaeological Potential: Previous archaeological investigation has demonstrated good preservation in this area which includes most of the precinct of medieval Oseney Abbey, Osney Mill, the mill stream and the 19<sup>th</sup> century Osney cemetery.
- Character: Mixed modern industrial units, boatyard and residential development with medieval abbey building, converted post-medieval mill and Victorian lock cottage.
- Spaces: There is a low density of development with sizable areas of green space; the cemetery, the lawned court at Gibbs Crescent and a strip of grass along the mill island.
- Road morphology: irregular modern roads, mostly private access.
- Plot morphology: large irregular plots.
- The natural topography of the Area is flat and low-lying at a height of 56m to 57m OD.
- Survival of townscape elements:
  - Medieval building and archway from Oseney Abbey.
  - Post-medieval converted mill.
  - Osney Mill Stream.
  - 20<sup>th</sup> century marina and boatyard.
  - Late 19<sup>th</sup> century walled cemetery.
  - Osney Mill cottage Grade 2 19<sup>th</sup> century building.



Osney Island (Zone A)

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

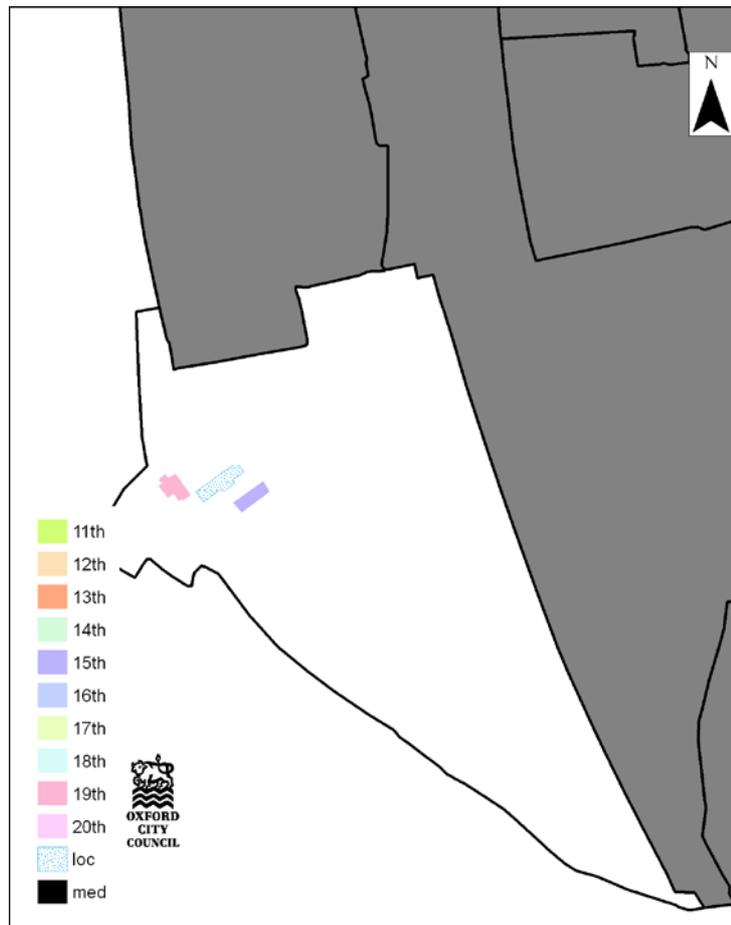
- Osney Lock.

### Description

The Osney Abbey character area comprises of mixed use development on the historic site of Osney Abbey next to the Thames. There are three distinctive areas; the 19<sup>th</sup> century former municipal cemetery, the modern flats at Gibbs Crescent and an area of commercial and boatyard development. Open space includes a strip of grass along the Mill Stream Marina and the tranquil cemetery next to the railway. The marina and boat yard include the standing remains of the post medieval/ modern Osney mill and a scheduled medieval building, the only standing remains from Osney abbey.

The urban topography is characterised by low rise industrial units, new residential flat units at Osney Mill, the modern three storey blocks of flats ranged around Gibbs Crescent and the disused and tree lined Osney cemetery.

There is good tree cover across the area. There is mostly young or semi mature tree planting along the railway and around the areas of new development.



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

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

Osney or Osney Island is believed to have been formed in the late Saxon period as a result of artificial channelling of the River Thames in order 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 likely existed here in the Late Saxon period, an estate at Osney 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



**Mill Place looking north.**

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the subsequent development of the suburb at St Thomas's to the west. The Augustinian Abbey was founded by Robert D'Oilly from his manor at South Osney. Roger D'Ivri was the other main landowner in Osney, his estate later known as North Osney, formed part of the foundation of Rewley Abbey in 1281. The early abbey layout is not known although its high medieval extent has been hypothesized, based on documentary evidence, cartographic sources and small scale excavations and observations. The abbey precincts were entered from Osney Lane, on which stood the great gate, smaller gates, the almshouse and St. Nicholas' Chapel. The mill at Osney is first mentioned in the mid 12<sup>th</sup> century when the abbey was granted permission to install a weir in the river with a watercourse serving the mill. By the mid 15<sup>th</sup> century milling operations had been expanded significantly with four newly built mills.

Following the Dissolution, Osney was granted the status of cathedral however its location away from the centre of town proved this impractical and the honour was moved to St Frideswide's Priory Church at Christ Church during the reign of Henry VIII. A guardhouse was built around the mill during the Civil War when it manufactured gun powder for the Royalist army. No visible traces of this survive. The abbey was subsequently demolished, with the exception of part of a 15<sup>th</sup> century range near to the site of the mill. The industrial function of Osney Mill and Lock ensured it was preserved following the Dissolution and the site remained in use until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when the modern mill house was damaged by fire.

The late 19<sup>th</sup> century cemetery placed over part of the Abbey precinct was closed to burials by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The mill compound became the focus of light industrial and commercial activity including a boat yard, bakery and furniture depository. The area to the south remained undeveloped save for a tree plantation until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century when the modern Gibbs Crescent was built.

The character area is illustrative of the severe impact of the Dissolution on the economy western and southern parts of the town, which never regained the status and wealth enjoyed by the important medieval religious institutions that had dominated these areas. It is also illustrative of Oxford's rich milling history, containing the one of Oxford's few surviving mill buildings, and of the distinctive boating infrastructure servicing the Thames and its users.



**Osney Cemetery looking north**

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

The area has good potential to preserve medieval and post medieval evidence relating to the abbey. The Urban Archaeological Database records twenty-five archaeological events in the character area comprising one borehole survey, four building surveys, eight chance finds, two recorded observations and ten archaeological excavations of various sizes. The main focus of archaeological investigation has been the site of the abbey with several investigations enabling a partial reconstruction of the monastic precinct. Investigations have examined water front development, several stream channels, a timber jetty, fishponds, slaughterhouse debris, abbey buildings and the precinct wall. A 15<sup>th</sup> century abbey building survives as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Both this and the post-medieval mill were subject to archaeological investigation and building survey prior to recent redevelopment of this site.

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

The aesthetic character of this area is strongly defined by the green space of the cemetery and the low density of structures around the mill. The area is primarily residential and industrial in appearance, the 15<sup>th</sup> century building and associated archway being largely hidden from public

view. The principal open spaces fall into two categories; urban open spaces including private car parks and access roads which dominate the area around the mill, and more informal open space characterised by grass with tree lined borders, located along the Mill Stream, its marina and in the cemetery. A notable feature is the extent of landscaping and greenery, particularly along the Mill Stream and its islands.

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

The character area contains important communal spaces at Osney cemetery and the public route across the lock near the mill. However whilst the area provides intermittent access to the Thames side path, the marina, boat yard and the abbey building are not publicly accessible. The boatyard is a family business which has a long history of boat maintenance and operating mooring facilities.

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