

**HISTORIC URBAN CHARACTER AREA 21:  
FORMER NORTHERN CITY DITCH – BROAD 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: Post-medieval.
- Designations: Two Grade I and thirty-eight Grade II listings. Part of the medieval town wall and bastion a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Central Conservation Area.
- Archaeological interest: Potential for Saxon, medieval and post-medieval remains, including remains associated with St Michael at the Northgate, its tower, cemetery and the outshot of the town wall built to enclosure it. The area encompasses the line of the Late Saxon and medieval defences (including related medieval bastions and the former north gate and its gate prison the Bocardo). It includes tenements established over the in-filled town ditch and along the inside of the town wall in the post-medieval period.
- Character: Large and small Post-medieval townhouses, mix of wide and narrow streets.
- Spaces: The bulbous Broad Street is an important semi-pedestrianised paved open space. Adjacent college gardens enclosed by railings add to the sense of space.
- Road morphology: Includes the wide, sinuous, partially encroached, extra-mural thoroughfare of Broad Street and the narrow intra-mural Ship Street. The area also includes part of the pedestrianised Cornmarket Street.
- Plot morphology: Mostly post-medieval intra- and extra-mural short narrow plots constrained by the limited space available adjacent to the town wall. The area includes a small group surviving town houses located on the north side of Broad Street which was settled in the medieval period.
- Located primarily on the central ridge of the Summertown-Radley Second



The former northern city ditch (Zone J)



© Crown Copyright and database right 2011. Ordnance Survey 100019348.

HUCA 21	OAP Characterisation
	Mixed townhouses/shops
	Mixed Housing & Shops
	Narrow plots
	Medieval long distance route
	Medieval medium distance route
	Lane
	Church pre 1086

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

Terrace the natural topography of the area is largely flat at a height of around 65m OD.

- Survival of townscape elements:
  - The morphology reflects medieval block and street patterns and the line of the former defences.
  - Ship Street preserves part of the line of the intra-mural road.
  - Part of the out-shot wall around St Michael at the Northgate can be viewed in current Fair Trade shop.
  - St Michael's at the Northgate- Late Saxon Tower, medieval church and churchyard.
  - Well preserved group of post-medieval buildings in Ship Street.
  - Well preserved group of Georgian buildings on Broad Street.
  - Stretches of the town wall and a number of its bastions survive to the rear of Ship Street properties.
  - An arrangement of bricks in Broad Street marks the supposed spot of the martyrdoms of three Anglican bishops (Latimer, Ridley, Cranmer) burnt at the stake for heresy in 1555-6.
  - A Victorian furniture warehouse is preserved north of Ship Street (now accommodation for Jesus College).

## Description

This character area is broadly defined by post-medieval infilling of the space along the inside of the medieval town wall and the in-filled town ditch. It encompasses the wide expansive Broad Street, the narrow intra-mural Ship Street and properties located around the former north-gate at the end of the pedestrianised Cornmarket Street.

Broad Street is defined by a curving row of mixed shop-fronted townhouses along its southern frontage with tall stone built monumental college buildings located further east and along the northern frontage. The street is semi-pedestrianised with a central short stay car parking spaces at its eastern end, and with north-south arrangements of bollards and blocks of student cycle racks at its west end. A pinched west end is formed by post-medieval tenement plots established on the backfilled town ditch which followed the line of a forward walled enclosure (or out-shot) of the town wall that was built around the churchyard of St Michael in the Northgate.

The Broad Street townhouses are of varying height, shape, form and design indicating independent development. Building density is high within the plots and there is little open space to the rear. A few narrow passageways provide access to small yards.

The medieval tenement plots and later post-medieval townhouses along the



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

---

northern frontage of Broad Street have largely been removed by the expansion of the Trinity College, however a small group remain and are included in this character area.

Broad Street is a major visitor thoroughfare and meeting place which provides views of Balliol and Trinity Colleges, their railing enclosed gardens and also eastwards towards the striking arrangement of medieval and post-medieval University buildings located around the Divinity School and later Bodleian Library.

Ship Street represents a narrow intra-mural street, largely now comprising of college accommodation, offices and food outlets. On the southern frontage of Ship Street the medieval tenement pattern has been mostly replaced by Jesus College. The northern frontage comprises of three to four storey stuccoed post-medieval town houses which colonised the space inside the medieval city wall in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The northern end of Cornmarket is dominated by the distinctive late Saxon architecture of the tower of St Michael at the Northgate and large stone fronted shop ranges which flank the end of the street (the curving Edwardian Ionic colonnades of William Baker House and six-storey turreted office and retail range of St George's Mansions (c1910)). Along with the adjacent churchyard of St Mary's these buildings frame the road junction with Broad Street, Magdalen Street and George Street.

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

A defended burh was established at Oxford by the early 10<sup>th</sup> century and the early 11<sup>th</sup> century tower of St Michael at the Northgate Church, along with the later Saxon tower of St George at the Castle, are the last remaining standing structures in the town from this period. The tower formed part of a gate church of the Saxon burh, the current church being of post-Conquest date. In the later Norman period the town defences were extended creating a forward enclosure or out-shot around the churchyard. The Late Saxon defences and Norman improvements were subsequently replaced in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by a new town wall and ditch. In the medieval period a jail known as 'The Bocardo' was located at the north-gate next to the tower. A cell door, reputedly from the former prison, is on display in the church.

The northern suburb of Oxford expanded in the 12<sup>th</sup> century when the town enjoyed notable Royal patronage and benefited from a buoyant cloth trade. Drapers (cloth merchants) associated with this trade are known from documentary records to have been concentrated along the Cornmarket. Settlement expanded along the northern frontage of Broad Street in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Broad Street is recorded as Horsemonger's Street in 1235 reflecting its use as a horse market). The economy of Oxford subsequently faltered in the late 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century, with the emerging University colleges and halls taking advantage of lower property values to expand and build over existing tenements on Broad Street and Ship Street.

Turl Street was extended through to Broad Street in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, cutting through the line of the town defences and reflecting their diminishing significance. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century Broad Street still consisted of a broad continuous thoroughfare with Holywell Street. A brick cross inset into the tarmac surface of Broad Street records the supposed spot where the Anglican Bishops Cramer, Latimer and Ridley were burnt during the Catholic rule of Queen Mary 1<sup>st</sup> in 1555-6. The available evidence suggests that the town ditch was filled in by the late medieval period, however it was subsequently re-cut in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century by the Royalists garrison during the Civil War. The ditch was again refilled in the 1650s and the resulting corridor of central real estate was rapidly developed in the latter half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which saw an economic revival and building boom in the town driven by the growth of the University.

The character area presents opportunities to appreciate the Late Saxon and Norman morphology of the town and view standing Late Saxon remain. It area is illustrative of the expansion of medieval college precincts north of the walled town and the subsequent post-medieval encroachment and colonisation of the town ditch and intra-mural space. Access to the surviving stretches of medieval wall is restricted however a rebuilt bastion can be viewed to the rear of Morton's Sandwich Bar on Broad Street. The area contains numerous notable buildings, for example the property on the corner of Turl Street and Ship Street housed the city's first pre-war Indian restaurant.

---

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

The character area has the potential to preserve evidence of Saxon, medieval and post-medieval urban and suburban activity. Of particular interest are the remains associated with the gate church of St Michael at the Northgate, its tower, cemetery and the out-shot in the town wall built to enclose it. The area also encompasses the line of the Late Saxon and medieval defences (including bastions and the former gate prison 'The Bocardo'). Furthermore it includes tenements established over the in-filled town ditch and along the inside of the town wall in the post-medieval period and an important group of post-medieval buildings.

The Urban Archaeological Database records seventy-five archaeological events in the character area. Important observations of the Late Saxon and later town defences have been made at St Michaels at the Northgate and at other points along Ship Street. Evidence of post-medieval structural remains and features have previously been noted at several locations

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

The character area contains many notable and attractive buildings and retains important views into college gardens and along monumental street frontages. It provides one of the central visitor focal points in the city, as a meeting place, promenade and tour destination. The visual character of the area is strongly influenced by the wide curvilinear building line of Broad Street. The rendered and stuccoed townhouses on Broad Street contrast with the stone built monumental architecture of the University and Colleges and the purpose built Edwardian offices and shops at the head of Cornmarket. Street surfaces are modern tarmac with stone pavements.

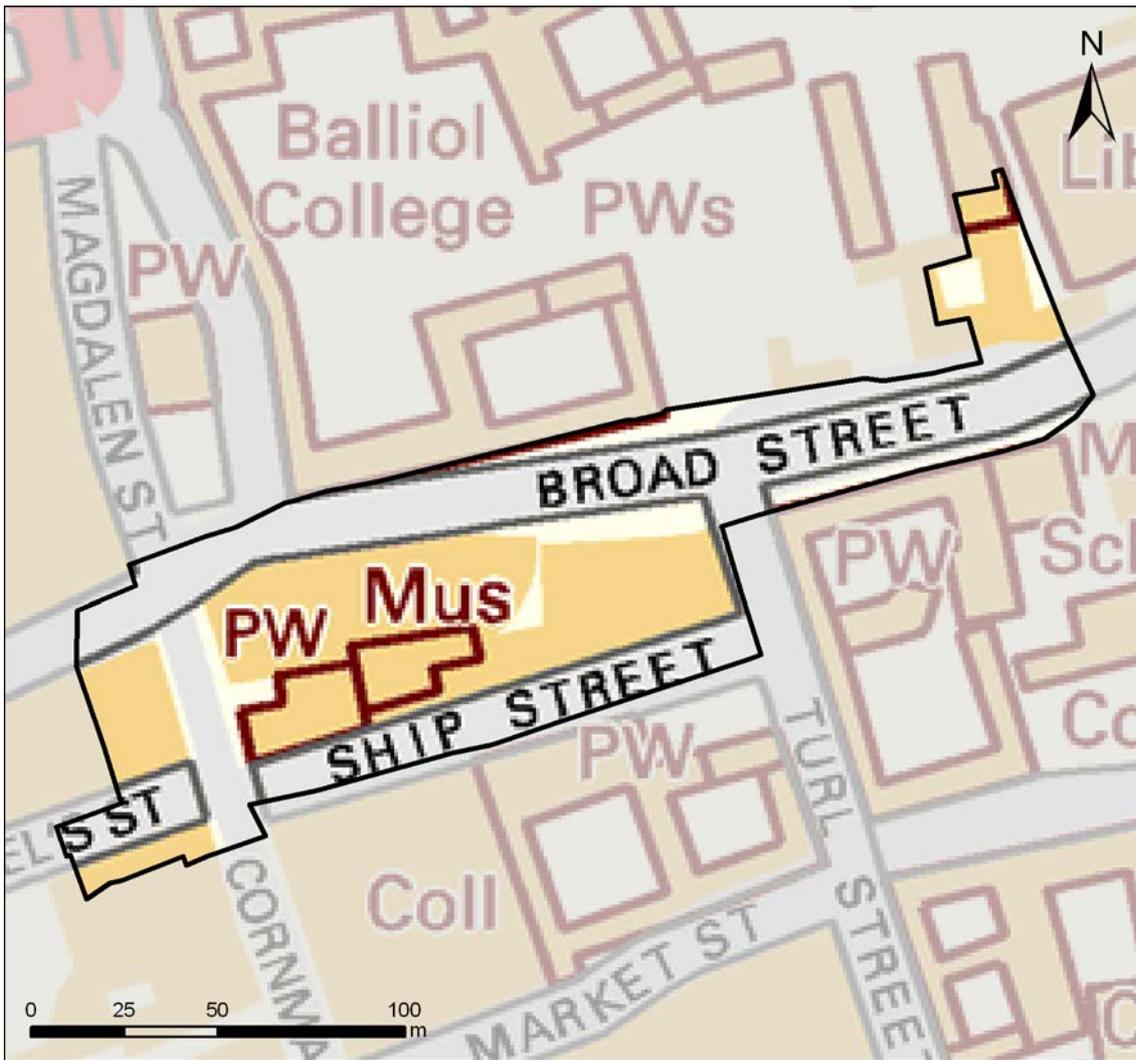
### **Communal value- meaning for collective experience and memory**

The character area is a busy central retail area and Broad Street is a major thoroughfare between the city centre, the Bodleian Library and the colleges and museums located north of the town. The area retains a number of independent oxford retail firms and one of the country's largest book shops. Broad Street has been a venue for numerous civic, artistic and political events in living memory and is a major visitor destination providing promenading, meeting and viewing adjacent to enclosed college gardens. There is public access to the tower of St Michael at the Northgate.



**Broad Street looking west**

**Version: 8/2/2013**



© Crown Copyright and database right 2011. Ordnance Survey 100019348.

**HUCA 21 Orientation map**