

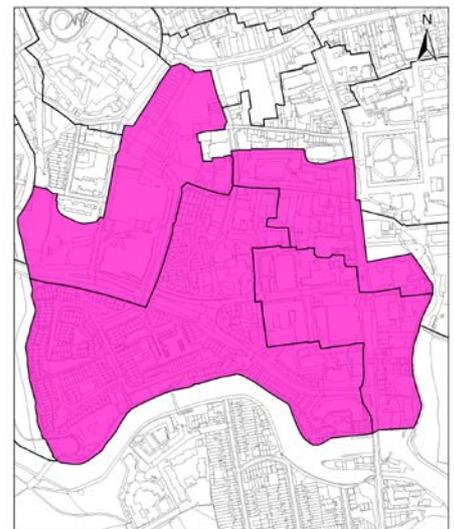
**HISTORIC URBAN CHARACTER AREA 9:  
THAMES CROSSING - ST ALDATES**

**The HUCA is located within broad character Zone C: Thames crossing and floodplain.**

*The broad character zone comprises of the southern suburb and historic route over the Thames floodplain along St Aldates combined with reclaimed floodplain land south of the medieval City walls. It includes the 1960-70s Westgate shopping centre and car park complex which occupies reclaimed floodplain and encompasses parts of the now largely redeveloped intramural and extra mural parish of St Ebbes.*

**Summary characteristics**

- Dominant period: 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Designations: Three Grade II Listings. The Norman Grandpont Causeway (Scheduled Ancient Monument). Central Conservation Area.
- Archaeological Interest: The character area encompasses part of the Saxon Causeway and later Norman stone Causeway (Grandpont) across the Thames floodplain. The remains of Saxon, medieval and post medieval occupation along St Aldates can be anticipated. The area also contains part of precinct of the medieval Black Friars, the Trill Mill Stream and Shire Lake channel. The presence of well preserved environmental and waterlogged remains has been demonstrated by previous investigations.
- Character: Largely modern civic and residential buildings located along a wide historic routeway and crossing point with notable views of the Thames and Christ Church.
- Spaces: St Aldates is a wide street with long views creating a sense of space. The forecourt of former warehouse near to the river now the Head of the River pub provides a viewing platform across the Thames. Green spaces is minimal and primarily located to the rear of the continuous street frontage.
- Street morphology: Long linear route way over Thames of Saxon (and



Thames crossing and floodplain (Zone C)

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HUCA 9 OAP Characterisation	
Private housing 1945-1980	Utilities
Civic	Water feature
Blocks of Flats	Bridge
Social housing	Medieval long distance route
Offices post 1945	Major road scheme
Pubs post 1800	Modern Roads

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

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perhaps prehistoric) origin. A modern link road joins at a right angle.

- Plot morphology: large regular plots, mostly Victorian or modern. Poor survival of medieval plot morphology.
- The natural topography of the area is low lying alluvial floodplain and a height of around 56m OD.
- Survival of historic townscape elements:
  - The Norman Grandpont Causeway survives beneath the current modern St Aldates.
  - Parts of medieval Folly Bridge are visible from the towpath at the southern end of the current bridge.
  - The early 20<sup>th</sup> century façade of Morris Garages Ltd car showroom, now the Crown Court.
  - The 19<sup>th</sup> century Isaac King's wharf (later Salter's boatyard) and the adjacent warehouse at Folly Bridge were converted into the Head of the River Public House and garden. A number of industrial elements remain including a loading crane.
  - A former Toll House is located near to the bridge (Listed).

### Description

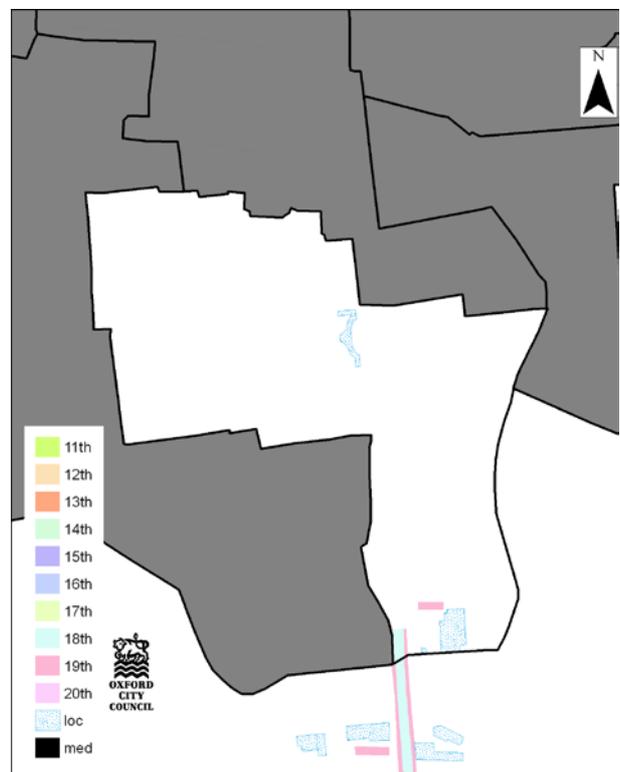
The character area comprises of a series of modern civic and residential buildings providing a continuous frontage along St Aldates. The large 20<sup>th</sup> century three and four storey civic structures are rectangular and flat roofed in design, comprising of the former Telephone Exchange, the Police Station, The Crown Court (formerly the Morris Garage Car Showroom) and County Council Offices at Speedwell House. The area also contains student accommodation blocks, a long narrow block of flats and the Head of the River Public House.

This section of St Aldates retains important views north to the front of Christ Church and south towards Folly Bridge and the Thames. Despite high continuous frontages the area retains an open feel because of the width of St Aldates. The area borders open space to the east on Christ Church Meadow and modern suburban residential settlement to the west.

There are small pockets of trees on Speedwell Street, Cromwell Street and outside Trill Mill Court also there is a notable mature tree by the Head of the River Pub. Green space is limited to a small area of residential lawn is located between St Aldates and the Trill Mill Stream to the east.

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

By the Late Bronze Age to Early Iron Age much of St Aldates had been subsumed under a large swamp like lake that stretched from Osney Island to Christ Church Meadow, creating a series of islands between the Southgate and the Hogacre Ditch. In the Roman period, deposition of alluvial clay gradually began to infill much of this drowned landscape although in the medieval period further significant land reclamation was required to facilitate the expansion of the southern suburb. Archaeological evidence indicates the presence of a middle-late Saxon causeway across the Thames Floodplain along the route of St Aldates, with land reclamation and the creation of

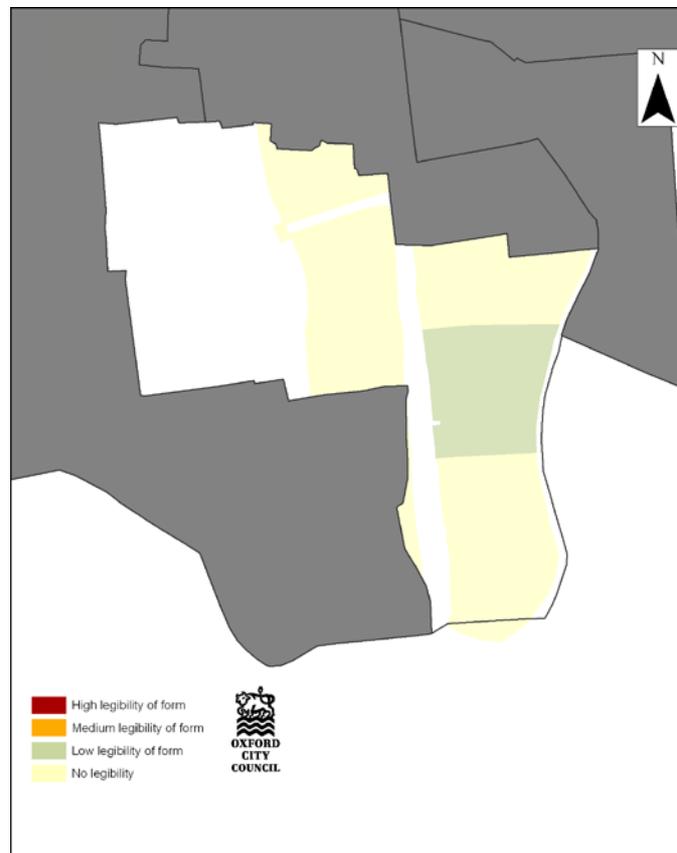


**Listed buildings by date of earliest identified fabric (based on listing description)**

tenement plots on the floodplain evidenced from the 10<sup>th</sup> century. In the Norman period the Saxon causeway was replaced by a massive stone causeway, the Grandpont, which survives beneath the modern road.

By the 13<sup>th</sup> century a tenement pattern had been established along St Aldates had been with the Blackfriars Stream and the Trill Mill Stream running along the back of these plots to the east and west.

H E Salter's Survey of medieval settlement in Oxford records domestic activity in the area throughout the medieval period. A now demolished gate tower on Folly Bridge was known as Friar Bacon's study, although a link to the Franciscan friar remains unproven. Agas' 1578 map illustrates a low density of settlement along St Aldates. Loggan's 1675 records far greater density of activity with plots filling out to the rear. By the, the **OS Town Plan** records a variety of structures: three boathouses, two wharfs, three pubs and an inn, a school, a garage, timber yard, blacksmiths and warehouse and finally three factories. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century redevelopment began to replace the post medieval and Victorian buildings. The Neo Georgian 1930s Police Station and Morris Car Show Room (now the Crown Court) are illustrative of this redevelopment and the wealth brought to Oxford by the expanding car industry, bucking the wider national economic trends of the 1930s. The width of St Aldate's south of Christ Church owes much to 20<sup>th</sup> century demolition and the setting back of frontages.



**Assessment of medieval tenement survival**

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

The character area has the potential to preserve significant waterlogged archaeological remains relating to the prehistoric, Saxon, medieval and post-medieval Thames Crossing and its settlement.

The Urban Archaeological Database records thirty archaeological events in this character area. St Aldates has become one of the best studied cross sections across the Thames floodplain. Close dating of prehistoric antecedents and Middle Saxon crossing evidence has proved problematic, however a watching brief in 1991 recorded a channel lined with small stones interpreted as a possible Bronze Age ford.



**St Aldates looking north at flats fronting onto the pavement. Tom Tower in the distance.**

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Archaeological investigations in the St Aldates area have been used to create a reconstruction of the palaeo-hydrology of the area, the results suggesting that until the Late Iron Age much of this area was a broad shallow lake with deeper channels crossing it, the highest point being at Folly Bridge. By the mid to late Saxon period this shallow lake had developed into a series of wide channels creating a number of small islands between the Southgate and Folly Bridge. Middle Saxon wattle fencing has been recorded in several excavations along St Aldates. The exact purpose of the fencing is uncertain, it may have had a number of functions including trapping silt to protect the causeway and reinforcement to allow channel side activity. Evidence for late Saxon flax retting (the soaking flax so the fibres separate and can be used for weaving) and leatherwork has also been recovered.

The Norman Causeway that replaced the Saxon crossing in the 11<sup>th</sup> century has been recorded on a number of occasions. Marshy conditions continued into the medieval period. Evidence of 12<sup>th</sup> century land reclamation has been recorded with a subsequent planned layout of property divisions and the construction of a series of buildings employing stone footings. Several investigations along St Aldates have demonstrated that occupation intensified from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

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

The character area has a mixed aesthetic value being comprised primarily modern commercial and civic structures in a variety of architectural styles, with notable views to Christ Church to the north and Folly Bridge to the south. The modern Crown Court on the west side of St Aldates preserves the façade of the former Morris Motors showroom. This and the adjacent Police Station on the east side are of 1930s Neo-classical design. On Speedwell Street the County Offices are simple rectilinear concrete design. The 1950s Telephone Exchange is a substantial four storey building in red brick; originally in an E shape, this was later extended to the rear. The Head on the River Pub maintains some of the former wharf infrastructure, including the loading crane, creating an attractive riverside location.

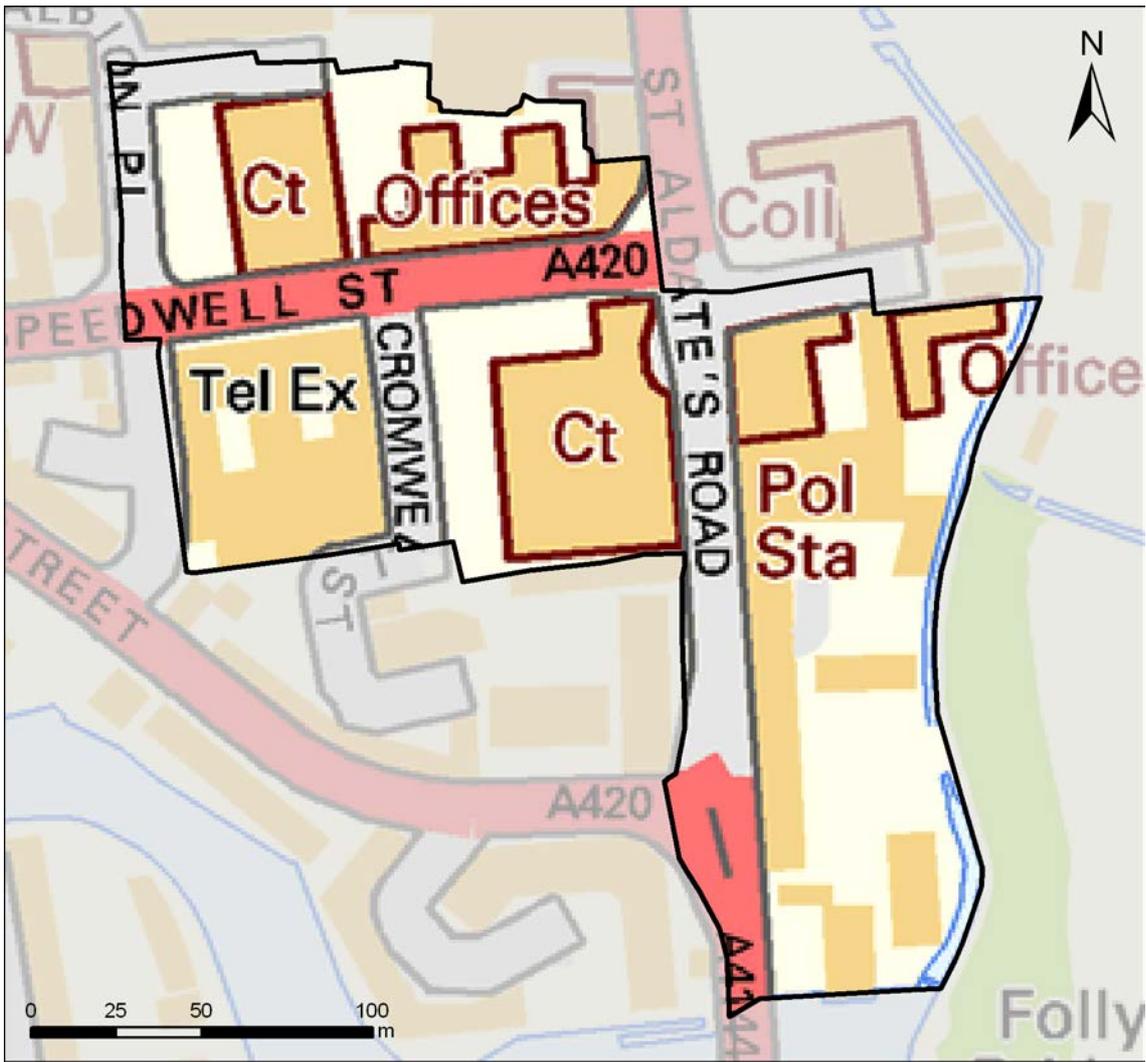


**Head of the River Pub with wharf infrastructure**

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

The character area has value as a residential and civic zone and as a principal route way leading to Carfax crossroads and Thames crossing. The area is a civic focal point containing the central police station, the Crown Court, the Magistrate's Court as well as county council offices. The large Head of the River pub and occupies a prominent location overlooking the Thames.

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**HUCA 9      Orientation map**