

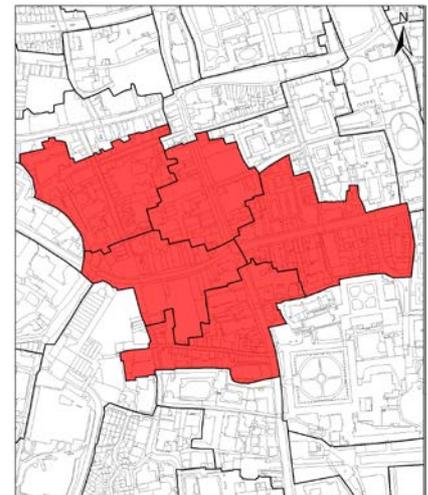
**HISTORIC URBAN CHARACTER AREA 18:
CITY CENTRE COMMERCIAL CORE- CORNMARKE STREET**

The HUCA is located within broad character Zone E: City centre and commercial core.

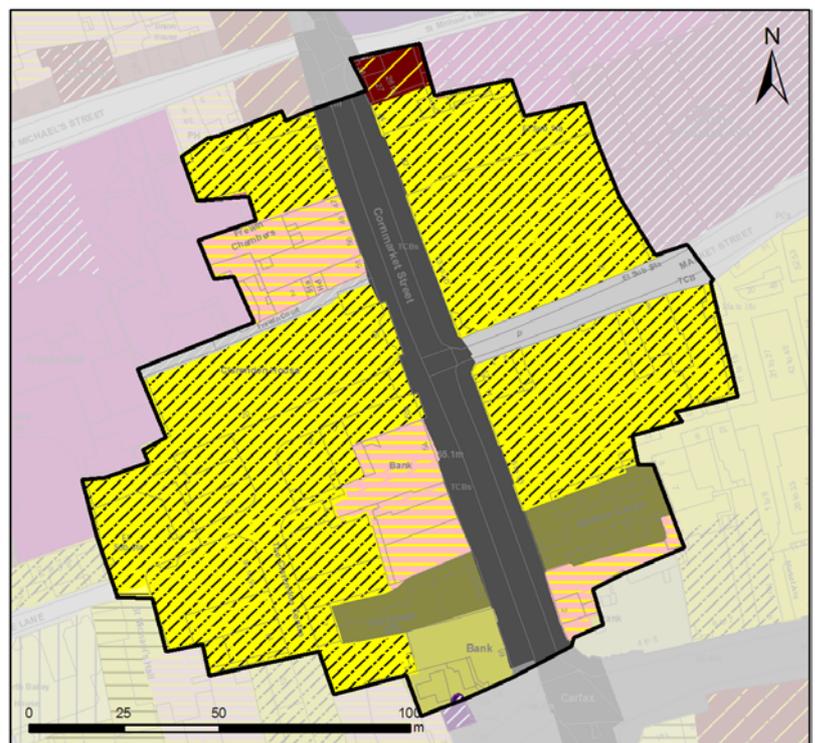
The broad character zone consists of the central historic core around Carfax crossroads linking main axial north-south and south-west Late Saxon streets. The zone forms a coherent central area in the city where the roads, lanes and tenements broadly reflect a history of medieval to modern commercial activity.

Summary characteristics

- Dominant period: 20th century.
- Designations: One Grade I, two Grade II*, six Grade II listings. Central Conservation Area.
- Archaeological Potential: Previous archaeological investigations have recorded significant evidence of Late Saxon, medieval and post-medieval activity. Cornmarket Street was an important axial market street in the Saxon and medieval town.
- Character: Primarily modern shops with some notable medieval yards and buildings.
- Spaces: There is a high density of development in this character area with no green space and only limited open space provided by the wide Cornmarket street.
- Road morphology: Historic axial route across the gravel terrace becoming Saxon axial street. Late Saxon and medieval side streets, lanes and yards. Tenement yards survive at the Golden Cross and the Crown Inn. The historic line of Shoe Lane is captured by the covered walkway of the Clarendon Shopping Centre.
- Plot morphology: Mostly large irregular modern plots, but some survival of medieval tenement boundaries.
- The area lies on the Summertown-Radley Second Terrace at a height of around 66m OD.
- Survival of townscape elements:
 - Courtyard inns and tenement yards survive at the southern end of Cornmarket.



City Centre and Commercial Core (Zone E)
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HUCA 18 OAP Characterisation			
	Mixed townhouses/shops		Banks pre 1945
	Mixed Housing & Shops		Inns pre 1800
	Church pre 1800		Medieval long distance route
	Modern shopping centre		Lane
	Mixed Shops/Offices		Alley

Historic urban character area showing modern urban landscape character types.

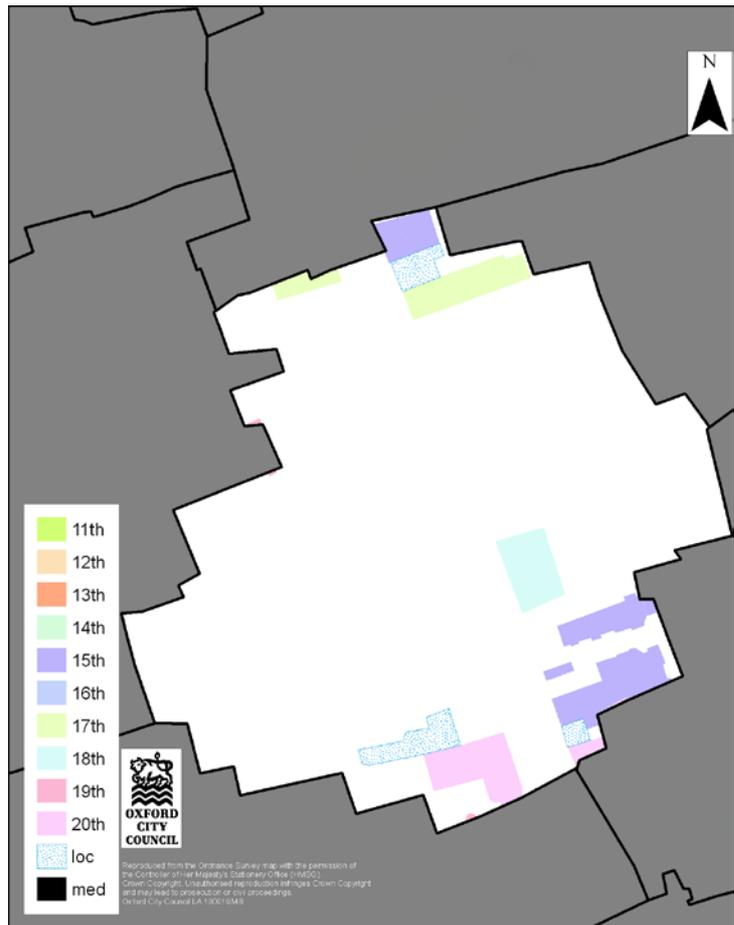
- Late Saxon street grid.
- Some medieval tenement plot survival.
- Notable listed buildings of late medieval- modern date.
- The Golden Cross contains a 15th century range with 16th century wall paintings
- The Painted Room at 3 Cornmarket Street has well preserved 16th century wall paintings
- The former New Inn on Cornmarket Street is a good example of a reconstructed medieval Inn with a front range of shops (currently Pret a Manger)
- The Crown Inn, Early 19th century coaching Inn.

Description

The character area comprises of mostly modern retail development in an area defined by the extent of former tenements, associated yards and side streets fronting onto Cornmarket Street. It is a wide pedestrianised street reflecting its role as a location for the weekly medieval town market. It has a near continuous frontage punctuated by narrow side streets, yards and alleyways.

The current buildings are mostly three-five storey shops and offices, including a number of well known national retail chains. At the southern end of the street The Crown Inn and The Golden Cross are notable for preserving the once common arrangement buildings set back from the street frontage arranged around tenement yards. A small number of notable medieval and post medieval buildings survive in the street.

The Golden Cross Yard provides access to the covered market to the east. A modern shopping arcade (the Clarendon Centre) is on the south side of Cornmarket and links through to Queen Street and New Inn Hall Street.



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

Oxford may have its origins as a defended settlement or religious centre (minster) located close to a crossing point over the Thames at St Aldates. A defended Late Anglo-Saxon burh was established here by the early 10th century. Cornmarket has formed part of the north-south axis through the town since the Saxon period and may have formed part of a prehistoric routeway across the gravel terrace towards the Thames floodplain. Cornmarket Street was originally known as Northgate Street and took on its current name in the 16th century when a roofed building for grain storage was constructed in the street.

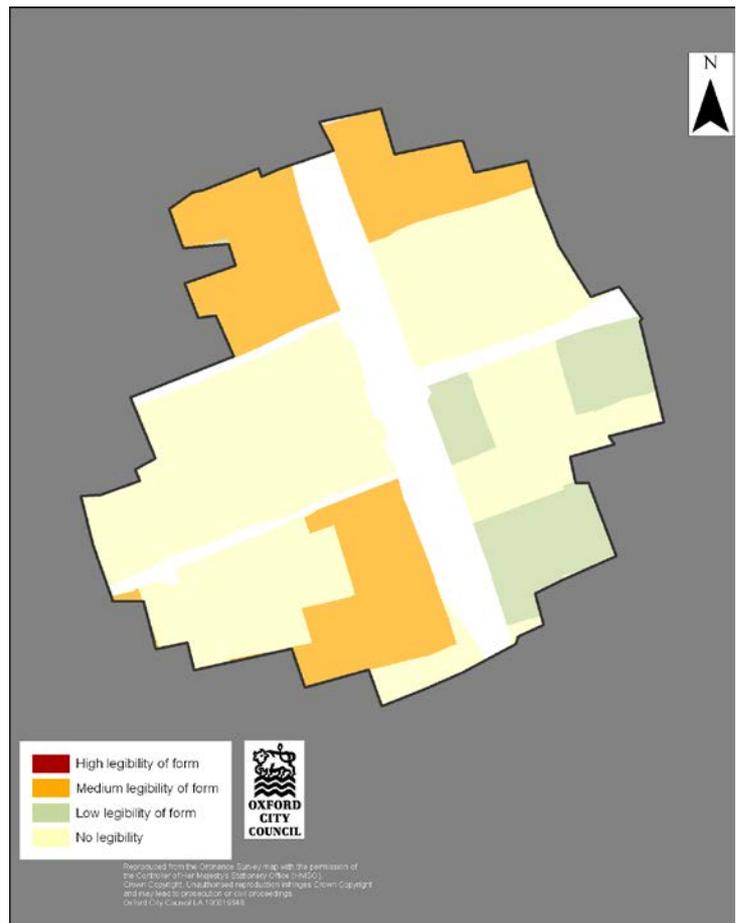
The Norman Conquest saw infrastructure investment and the expansion of the towns economy with the cloth and leather trades driving 12th and early 13th century growth. At this time the Cornmarket Street was known for its concentration of merchants dealing in cloth (drapers). The

growth of the town led to the subdivision of Late Saxon and Norman tenement plots, especially along the street frontages associated with the weekly market which extended along the road leading of the central crossroads at Carfax. Evidence from archaeological excavations suggest that the property boundaries did not become fixed until the 12th-13th century. The wealth of documentary evidence for the 13th century allows the partial reconstruction of tenement pattern. In Cornmarket Street the plots were long rectilinear blocks with subdivisions along the street frontage taken up small shop units. Significant redevelopment in the 20th century has meant a relatively low level of survival of the larger medieval plot boundaries however there are areas of reasonable survival between 59-61 and 51-42 Cornmarket Street. From the late 13th century and 14th century the cloth economy faltered. The halls and fledgling colleges of the emerging University took advantages of low property prices to expand, especially in the east end and northern parts of the town. As the University grew corresponding service industries developed, notably including victualing and brewing and during the medieval and post-medieval period. In the post-medieval period Cornmarket Street contained a number of notable Inns and taverns.

Fire was a constant threat to the medieval and post-medieval town and in 1644 a fire started in George Street affected much of the western half of the town between Cornmarket Street and New Inn Hall Street destroying perhaps 300 houses. The late 18th century saw renewed efforts to improve and re-organise the city. In 1773 the weekly market was moved to a permanent indoor location off High Street.

The 1st edition OS Town Plans (1876) records three hotels, four inns and seven pubs as well as a baths, a blacksmiths and a market house indicating a strong Victorian commercial character of this area. By the start of the late 20th century the street had been pedestrianisation and colonised by modern apartment stores and commercial chains.

The character area retains the Late Saxon Street layout and contains a number of alleyways and yards which are illustrative of late medieval tenement arrangements that have now largely disappeared from other parts of the City Centre. The rebuilt New Inn and the remodelled 15th century buildings around the Golden Cross Yard are important examples of late medieval urban town houses with exceptional interior post-medieval wall paintings.



Assessment of medieval tenement survival

Evidential value- potential to yield primary evidence

This character area has a high potential for Saxon, medieval and post-medieval remains subject to the extent of later basement and cellar construction. As a principal street of the burh and later medieval town surviving archaeological

OXFORD HISTORIC URBAN CHARACTER ASSESSMENT



The Golden Cross Yard

deposits have great potential to provide further insights into the evolution of Oxford. Furthermore whilst Cornmarket Street has been subject to significant archaeological investigation, few of these had access to the latest advances in environmental archaeology and scientific dating.

The Urban Archaeological Database records fifty-five archaeological events in this character. Previous investigations include the important early excavation on the site of the former Clarendon Hotel in 1954. This and later excavations at 13-21 and 44-46 Cornmarket have made a significant contribution to our understanding of the development of the town. Excavations on the west side of the street have demonstrated that during the Late Saxon period the building line was three meters further east than the current frontage. Late Saxon cellars, pits and wells have been recorded, with a dense strip of activity along the street frontage encompassing stake holes, pits and small cellar pits. A few larger cellar pits were set further back from the street frontage with open yards or gardens behind, stretching back perhaps 45m. Many of the rectangular cellar pits had wattle and daub lining. Finds from Cornmarket Street included a Late Saxon mould for casting silver ingots, also evidence for iron, bone and horn working.

Excavations have also recorded Norman stone vaulted cellars at five separate locations along Cornmarket Street and have produced evidence for subsequent domestic, commercial and manufacturing activity demonstrating an increasing density of settlement over time. One notable later find was an early 16th century hoard of money boxes that may be the property of a benefit club or guild.

Aesthetic value- sensory and intellectual stimulation

Cornmarket has been frequently criticised for its poor aesthetic, deriving from dense popular use, mixed modern chain store shop fronts and mixed earlier facades, also generic street furniture and surfacing. The visual character of Cornmarket Street is dominated by the view along the main street looking south towards the Town Hall and Christ Church Tom Tower and north towards St Michael's Tower and St Mary Magdalen Church. Although the built character is largely 20th century in design, particularly in the southern end at Carfax, there are a number of post-medieval mixed use townhouses to the north, and a number of notable medieval structures including the 15th century Golden Cross Inn which is currently a restaurant and the former 14th century New Inn, currently a coffee shop.

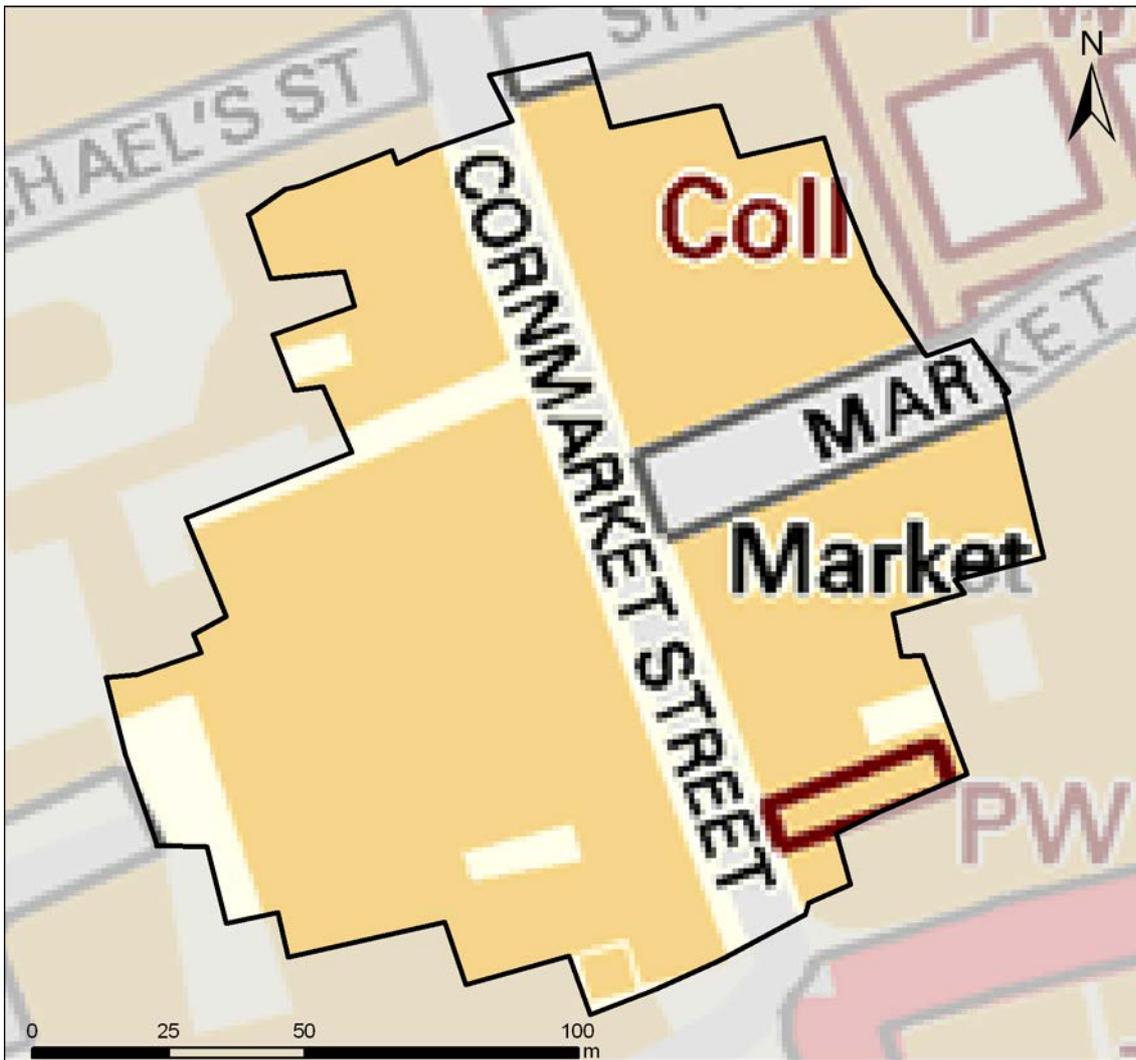
Communal value- meaning for collective experience and memory

The Cornmarket has communal value as the central shopping street of the town and the main tourist axis. Cornmarket Street is an important meeting place and venue for street artists and entertainers.

Version: 18/2/2012



Queen Street eastern frontage



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HUCA 18 Orientation map