

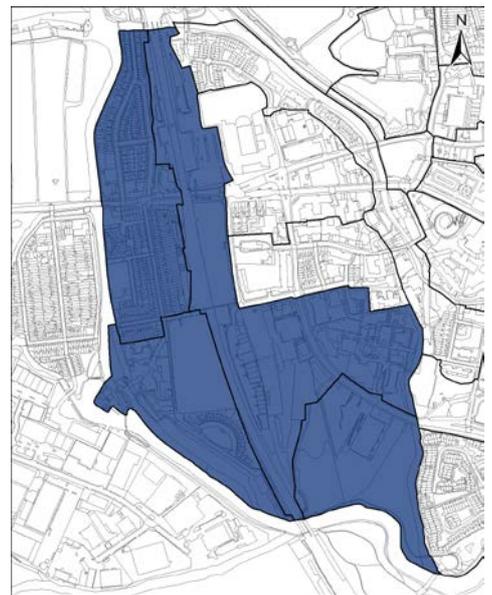
**HISTORIC URBAN CHARACTER AREA 4:  
OSNEY ISLAND - OPEN RECREATION**

**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 Osney Abbey.*

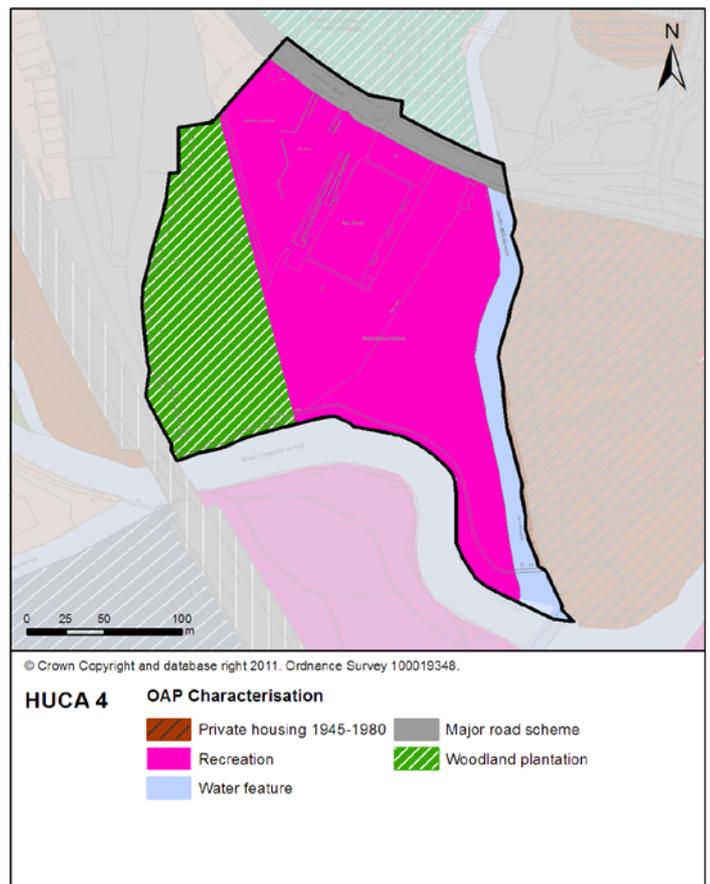
**Summary characteristics**

- Dominant period: late 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Designations: None.
- Archaeological Potential: The site of a Civil War defensive work ‘Harts Sconce’ (UAD Monument Number 443) lies within the open space.
- Character: The unusual design of the ice rink makes it a distinctive modern feature in the modern town.
- Spaces: Good large area of green space near the centre of the city.
- Road morphology: Modern, inner ring road.
- Plot morphology: Irregular large plot, low density.
- The natural topography of the Area is low lying at a height of around 55m OD at the river bank to a height of 57m OD on Oxpens Road. The underlying geology is primarily alluvial floodplain over the Northmoor First Terrace Pleistocene gravel.
- Survival of townscape elements:
  - Open landscape bordering the river.



Osney Island (Zone A)

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

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## Description

This character area comprises a modern Ice Rink and grass recreation area located on a tongue of land formed by the Thames River, Castle Mill Stream and Oxpens Road, forming part of Osney Island. Formerly an area of meadowland south of the suburb of St Thomas, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century a bathing place was created here followed by allotments in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. It remains one of the few substantial areas of undeveloped land immediately south east of the city. The area includes part of the east-west Oxpens Road, completed in 1931. A surfaced path runs along the wooded bank of the Thames providing the southern boundary of the character area. A fenced off area of semi mature trees and scrub is located in the western part of the character area next to the railway.

## Historical value- means of connecting with the past

Oseney 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 on the island in the Late Saxon period, an estate at Oseney was devised by Archbishop Alfric of Canterbury (d. 1005) to St. Alban's abbey. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century the island became more important with the foundation of the Augustinian Abbey, the precinct of which was located to the north-west. The earliest recorded evidence or activity in the character area dates to the Civil War when a guardhouse, known as Harts Sconce, was built on the peninsula of land between the River Thames and the Castle Mill Stream. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the OS Town Plans illustrates a bathing place called St Ebbe's Bathing Place on a narrow man made stream connecting the Castle Mill Stream and the River Thames while to the north a series of tree lined roads crossed the meadow. By the 1950s St Ebbe's Bathing Place had been filled in and the area was used as a recreation ground with a car park in the north west corner near the road. The ice rink was then built over part of the recreation ground in 1984.

## Evidential value- potential to yield primary evidence

The only archaeological event to be carried out within the area to-date was an excavation on Oxpens Road in 1967. No features were recorded although an 18<sup>th</sup> century glass bottle seal from the Mermaid Tavern was recovered. The area has good archaeological potential for remains associated with prehistoric activity near the Thames, also for medieval and post medieval channel management features and the Royalist Civil War remains.

## Aesthetic value- sensory and intellectual stimulation

The aesthetic character of the area is enhanced by the by the striking ship like concrete ice rink which is located within a pleasant area of green open space next to the Thames. The Ice Rink built in 1984 and designed by Nicholas Grimshaw belongs to the 'high tech' neo-modernist school of architecture. The river banks are tree lined while the former sidings area to the west has since become regenerated woodland (although this has now been partially cleared).



**The Ice Rink viewed from the Thames Path to the south.**

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

The character area remained largely undeveloped until the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the construction of the inner ring road. It has communal value as public open space next to the Thames although the location is rather peripheral to city centre activity. It forms part of an intermittent riverside walk along the north bank of the Thames. The Ice Rink is an important recreational facility enjoyed by residents.

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