

Introduction

North Oxford's wide roads, large red and yellow brick villas in spacious gardens and tree-lined avenues only form one aspect of the special character of this suburb. Undervalued for many years, the elegant houses of North Oxford had to fight for survival against potential university expansion. Their attributes finally won public acceptance in the mid-20th century with a proportion of the St John's estate, mainly that of Norham Manor and Park Town, being designated as Oxford City Council's first conservation area. Since its initial designation, the suburb's appeal has continually increased and is now regarded as one of the most complete Victorian suburbs in England. On first sight, North Oxford may appear to be a Victorian gothic suburb but there is far more to it. Behind the main roads lies a myriad of housing characterised by size, design, materials and age of development.

Reason for Appraisal

Oxford City Council is required under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 s.69 to designate areas of "*special architectural or historic interest, the character of which it is desirable to preserve, as conservation area*". The Act further states that local planning authorities are to review their conservation areas from time to time and to formulate and publish proposals for their further preservation and enhancement.

This conservation area appraisal has been undertaken in accordance with the provisions set down by the Act. It should be read in conjunction with the policies for the Historic Environment as set out in the adopted Local Plan 2001-2016 and will be used to inform decisions on planning, listed buildings and conservation area applications.

Additional government guidance regarding the management of historic buildings and conservation areas is set out within '*Planning Policy Guidance 15: Planning and the Historic Environment (PPG 15)*'.

In line with the recommendations by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), the Appraisal has been carried out with support and contribution from the local community. Meetings and consultations have been held throughout the Appraisal process.

The Appraisal can not make mention of every building or feature within the conservation area but any omission should not be taken to imply that it is not of any interest or value to the character of the area.

Dates and key issues arising from consultation

1. North Oxford is more than a gothic suburb, greater emphasis should be given to the later phases of development.
2. Railings should be reintroduced to North Oxford. The styles should be architecturally and historically correct and specific guidance should be produced.
3. Consideration should be given to the introduction of an Article 4 Direction withdrawing certain permitted development rights, especially with regard to uPVC windows, roof lights and solar panelling, demolition and replacement of original conservatories.
4. Low boundary walls need to be retained as these were an essential design feature of St John's estate. Guidance should be produced on the correct forms of boundary treatments.

Location

The southern boundary of the conservation area is approximately 0.5 miles from the city centre, just to the north of the St Giles intersection. The boundary incorporates two of the main routeways out of Oxford: Banbury Road and Woodstock Road, providing access to the north and west of the county via the A34 and A40. The River Cherwell and Oxford canal run up the eastern and western edges respectively of the conservation area.

Boundaries and Designation

The designation of North Oxford as a conservation area was quite a significant milestone in the acceptance of North Oxford as an area of architectural and historic importance as well as in terms of planning legislation.

The architectural significance of the estate had had been questioned post WWII. Proposals were being put forward for relief roads running through the centre of the suburb; St John's were considering plans for wide-scale redevelopment of their

estate; changes in ownership and use, together with mounting pressure from other colleges and the university for additional accommodation, all of which were placing North Oxford in a very vulnerable position. The residents and preservation bodies were becoming increasingly concerned that North Oxford would be sacrificed in favour of development and set about trying to save the suburb.

The event which was instrumental in securing the City's first conservation area designation was the proposal by the University for the new Pitt Rivers Museum on Banbury Road. The university had acquired nos. 56 – 64 Banbury Road from St John's in the early 1960s and despite the provisional listing of nos. 60 (considered to be Wilkinson's finest North Oxford work) and 62 under the 1962 Town & Country Planning Act, the proposal included demolition of these properties. There was considerable local objection to the proposals in terms of potential demolition, the replacement building and proposed use. The development would alter the character and appearance of Banbury Road and the use was at odds with the City's Development Plan as North Oxford had been zoned as residential. Despite the proposal being granted planning permission, the scheme did not materialise but the ferocity of the opposition from local residents and amenity groups, including the emerging Victorian Group, resulted in Oxford City Council considering how they could give protection to whole areas and not just individual buildings. As they were drawing up a scheme to designate Park Town, Norham Gardens, Canterbury Road, North Parade (amongst others in the same vicinity) as an area of significance, Duncan Sandys 1967 Civic Amenities Act was passed enabling the Council to formally designate the same block of streets as a conservation area.

The first designation came into effect on 6 May 1968, extended in 1972, incorporating Fyfield Road and included the previously omitted sections of Norham Manor and to consolidate the boundary along Banbury Road. Rawlinson Road, in the northern sector of the estate, was designated as a separate conservation area in 1973 reflecting the "*complete and unspoilt area of Victorian character*". At the time of the this designation, Rawlinson Road was mainly unchanged and was one of the last roads to be developed under Moore's supervision but was beginning to come under threat from developers. The boundaries were further consolidated in 1976 to merge the two North Oxford designations and expand the boundary to incorporate all of the 'Wilkinson-Moore' area, as well as the post-WWI developments in the eastern section of the suburb.

The boundary now extends from St Giles in the south, to Frenchay Road, Lathbury Road and Belbroughton Road in the north; the River Cherwell in the east and the Oxford Canal in the west. The boundaries were drawn to include the Victorian development of the St John's College estate. The northern boundary was drawn along its present line as these roads marked the most northerly developments of Wilkinson and Moore encompassing the 'essential North Oxford'¹. The Cherwell and Canal provided obvious and natural boundaries to the east and western fringes.

Topography

The conservation area is situated upon the dry gravel terrace located between the River Cherwell and Oxford Canal, giving rise to a gently domed topography.

Archaeology

Late Bronze Age finds to the north in Summertown. On the site of St Philip and St James's church a Briton or Dane was found buried with his head between his knees². A few Roman coins and bricks were found close to the church.

Executive summary

Summary of significance

1. Predominantly an evolved mid-to-late Victorian garden suburb, although significant residential development took place post WWI up to the 1930s in the north-east quarter of the suburb.
2. Generous loose grid formation throughout the suburb with large blocks reflecting the significant plot and property sizes in the east, with narrower roads and smaller plot size in the west.
3. Gentle curve on some streets adding to interest and character, enticing the passer-by in eg Staverton Road.
4. A number of large detached properties with substantial gaps between buildings, enabling glimpses through to the hidden rear gardens.
5. To the east of Banbury Road, the houses are generally well set back from the front garden boundaries.

¹ Taken from OCC's North Oxford conservation area leaflet

² The Oxford Centre for Mission Studies (www.ocms.ac.uk/about/history)

6. Wide roads create an open character.
7. Predominant building materials of yellow and red brick with contrasting brick detailing, carved stone capitals, ashlar lintels and mullions adding to decoration.
8. Some houses are characterised by gables, turrets and pointed arches all influenced by the Gothic movement.
9. Mature vegetation softening the hard architecture and creating a leafy image.
10. Low boundary walls of red brick, a few of which still incorporate the original cast-iron railings.
11. Open space is mainly privately owned in the form of gardens and college grounds, but the high degree of visual access enforces the impression of spaciousness.
12. Quiet residential suburb once away from the main Banbury and Woodstock Roads.
13. The area has established strong links with the University.
14. The prominent spire of St Philip & St James's church can be seen from a number of viewpoints across the city.
15. Views within the conservation area are limited due to the layout of the suburb and high degree of greenery but this adds to the special character of the area.

Vulnerability

16. The area is highly sensitive to change due to its distinctive street and block pattern, its architectural fabric and its long-standing relationship with the University.
17. Designation as a conservation area has helped preserve the area's character. Incremental changes have taken place in response to new ownerships, modern trends and change of use, but on the whole, they have been minimal, retaining the overall character and integrity of the area. Any

future changes should be carefully managed in order for this integrity to be retained.

18. Increased car usage and change of use into multi-occupancy dwellings and institutional/commercial use have led to removal of some traditional features. Appropriate materials and landscaping treatments should be employed to reduce further deterioration and loss.
19. Condition of the original fabric eg. vulnerable boundary walls, windows, doors etc. Repairs should be undertaken using historically correct materials and construction methods in keeping with the age of the properties.
20. Change should respect and respond to local character so that it enhances the townscape rather than detracting from it. North Oxford's appeal was a long time being recognised with poets and architects seemingly keen to belittle its style and attributes, especially Thomas Sharp who claimed it to be a "*dismal and grotesque*"³ suburb. Victorian architecture is now more highly valued and steps have been taken to preserve the integrity of the suburb as much as possible. All new development should seek to enforce this integrity rather than reduce it.
21. Development pressures on gaps between buildings and backland sites. Building on these gaps and sites can be detrimental to the open character of the suburb.
22. Elevational changes should be resisted and traditional architectural features such as porches, window openings and door openings should be retained. The situation regarding uPVC windows, solar panels, skylights (especially on street frontages) should be monitored.

Enhancement opportunities

23. Where planting has been removed or trees have died, they should be replaced with appropriate species to maintain the leafy character that is so strongly associated with North Oxford. Additional planting may also add to the streetscape in some places, especially where there has been new development.

³ Thomas Sharp – Oxford Replanned 1948

24. Renovation and rebuilding of boundary walls to:
 - a. Maintain division between public and private realm.
 - b. Maintain continuity of street scene.
 - c. Retaining the original design features and layout as intended by St John's College
25. Encourage the reinstatement of architecturally appropriate railings. Railings were generally removed during WWII and in the majority of instances, have not been replaced. Where they have, they are often of an incorrect design and height.
26. The richness and diversity in architectural detailing should be conserved through the repair and, where necessary, reinstatement of traditional elements such as timber sash windows, appropriate doors, correct roofing materials, boundary walls etc. These changes not only harm the character and appearance of the property itself but the cumulative effect impacts on the visual continuity and integrity of a street and inappropriate replacements should be avoided.
27. Where infill projects are permitted, they should respond to the existing architectural scale, predominant building materials and character of the original buildings.
28. Rationalisation of street furniture would greatly enhance the street scene. There is a tendency towards cluttering with signposts, road signs, bollards, lights, and bus stops etc that are visually detrimental to the character and appearance of the area. An audit of street furniture should be considered to determine whether all existing signs etc are necessary and that some of the clutter on the pavements can be reduced.
29. Where street furniture is deemed necessary, the individual pieces should be of a style more appropriate to the character and age of the suburb.
30. Road and pavement surfaces are patchy in places and would benefit from being resurfaced, from both a visual and safety point of view. Any remaining historic road surface should be retained. Kerbs are generally of stone and

should be repaired on a like-for-like basis rather than introducing concrete kerb stones.

Historic Development

For what was to become 'one of the most complete Victorian suburbs in the country', North Oxford did not have the most auspicious of starts. St John's held the land for centuries before contemplating development and once they did embark on the creation of 'North Oxford', it was not the immediate success they had anticipated.

The majority of the land to the north of St Giles church by the turn of the 19th century was still open countryside. Woodstock Road had seen small pockets of development taking place including the Radcliffe Infirmary (1759), the Observatory (1772), and St. John's Terrace, nos. 47–53 Woodstock Road, built in the early 19th century for prosperous tradesmen. Banbury Road, at that time was nothing more than a country road full of pot-holes and grass verges⁴, with only a handful of houses having been built. North Parade had been constructed during the 1830s as a road of small terraced houses. Further north, Summertown was evolving into a self-sufficient village community but the main bulk of what was to become St John's College's North Oxford estate, was still a combination of fields and allotment gardens cultivating produce for the local market.

St John's had acquired the land in the 16th century. Previously it had been owned by both St Frideswide Priory and Godstow Abbey, and was conveyed to Henry VIII's physician George Owen following the Dissolution of the Monasteries. Owen's son subsequently sold it to Sir Thomas White, founder of St John's College, in 1573. The College therefore owned a large undeveloped part of the city but was restricted by the long leases already granted and were unable to consider any large scale development until reform was introduced by way of the Oxford University Act 1854. Following the introduction of this Act, leases were not renewed upon expiry and the College was able to consider ways of putting the land to its most economical use.

The College facilitated the enclosure of St Giles Field in 1828, regulating the field boundaries and ownership. This enabled other landowners to develop their land with a number of large houses being built for wealthy local businessmen eg: Thomas Mallam built the Shrubbery on Woodstock Road (now part of St Hugh's College); George Hester commissioned the Mount and it's lodge on Banbury Road and John

⁴ Oxford Street Names Explained – Paul Marriott 1977

Parsons (a local draper) the Lawn, Banbury Road all of which were Italianate in design.

Although freehold sites were being offered elsewhere in Oxford at this time St John's made the decision to offer their land on a leasehold basis only. Prior to the 1850s, only 40-year leases could be offered but having obtained an Act of Parliament in 1855, St John's were in a position to offer more competitive 99-year building leases.

Even before development was started, the potential suburb came under threat from two possible developments that if carried out, would have ended St John's plans for a middle class suburb. The first was the proposed railway line running across St Giles by the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway. The proposal was thoroughly debated in the House of Commons, and was subsequently dismissed in 1853.

The second threat came from the Board of Guardians. Having approached St John's for a plot of its land to the west of Woodstock Road and being refused, they acquired a 9-acre site from New College off Banbury Road, abutting St John's own land. Fortunately for the college, the Board began to question the suitability of this plot for the workhouse and delaying construction while they looked elsewhere. In 1852 the decision was taken not to develop the Banbury Road site, setting up a committee to consider suitable ways of disposing of the land and inviting architects SL Seckham and EG Bruton in 1853 to submit proposals for the best use of the site.

Although St John's College is synonymous with the development of North Oxford, the first planned development in the suburb was not within their control. Samuel Lipscomb Seckham was appointed by the Board of Guardians in response to his proposal for a development of substantial houses for the emerging middle classes: Park Town. Initial investment in the development was slow but all the houses were occupied by the 1860s.

Although the small houses of North Parade had been built in the 1830s – 1840s, Park Town was perceived to be an area of urban development surrounded by a rural landscape with no sense of identity. The nearest church was in St Giles and Summertown to the north was virtually a self-contained village, Park Town belonged to neither one nor the other. In an attempt to try to alleviate the problem of isolation and to encourage further development, FJ Morrell (churchwarden and College steward) petitioned St John's for the establishment of a parish to provide a free church (ie. one where pew rents were not charged) to serve the new community of

North Oxford. St John's eventually agreed to provide the land for the church, and appointed Seckham to draw up plans for the layout of new residential streets.

Seckham's proposals of 1854 were based around the Walton Manor Estate with grand Italianate villas along Woodstock Road, a church and smaller terraced houses to the west. The scheme was not a success with only two houses being constructed, 121 and 123 Woodstock Road. The proposal for a church in the centre of this development was not acceptable to Morrell who preferred a more central location to provide a 'heart' to the new community and be within easy reach of all sectors of the new suburb.

By 1860 Seckham had lost interest in developing St John's estate with William Wilkinson taking over as supervising architect. Wilkinson's gothic preferences were more in keeping with the overall vision St John's had for their land, his initial auctions to dispose of plots were not successful. Despite the release of new land in Norham Manor, development was slow with only 37 houses having been built by the mid-1860s.

The slow pace of development was partially blamed on the fact that St John's were not developers and they were not building for the mass market. They wanted to create a suburb of housing suitable for the middle classes that provided them with a secure long-term income and would not compromise their ideals in order to secure immediate income from their land.

Despite their vision for a middle class suburb, the College had allocated the western portion of the estate for lower middle-class/working class housing which would be more readily developed. Due to its proximity to the canal and Tagg's Garden⁵, the western section of the estate already had an established character of smaller housing and was deemed unsuitable for the larger houses St John's planned elsewhere. Wilkinson prepared a plan for Kingston Road in 1865 and by providing plots for smaller, lower class housing, St John's could justify its decision to reserve the vast proportion of the estate for its more substantial developments.

The 1870s finally saw a marked increase in the pace of development. The custom-build sector had virtually been exhausted being replaced by speculative development. With the availability of loans from local financial institutions, the new

⁵ Tagg's Garden was to the north of the Radcliffe Observatory stretching up to Leckford Road and had been leased to Thomas Tagg and others who in turn sublet smaller plots. The land was rapidly developed in the late 1820s and 1830s and was growing into a working class suburb. The area now forms part of Jericho and Walton Manor.

wave of developer was no longer reliant upon attracting investors and could build houses at a much faster rate.

As a result, by the early 1880s over 660 building proposals had been received by the College, one third of which were being financed by the building societies.⁶ Through loans from the Oxford & Abingdon Building Society, Frederick Codd became one of the major developers of North Oxford during the 1870s beginning with custom-build projects along Banbury Road and in Norham Manor moving onto speculative building schemes including Canterbury Road and Winchester Road. Codd was initially successful with most of his houses being bought quickly, with his houses contributing greatly to the character and appearance of the estate, but by the end of the decade, he had gone bankrupt.

The other main building society, the Oxford Building & Investment Company, also suffered during the late 1870s and by the early 1880s had gone into liquidation. Walter Gray was appointed as liquidator and took on the unfinished projects being financed by the former building society. Over the next twenty years, he became the dominant developer in North Oxford. In 1881 he entered into partnership with HW Moore who as College architect ensured that his building plans were passed quickly, and went on to build over 200 houses, mainly in the north-western sector of the suburb (Kingston Road, St Margaret's Road, Polstead Road and Chalfont Road).

By the 1880s, over half the estate had been developed with a mixture of quality housing. St John's released Southmoor Road in 1880, running parallel with the railway and Kingston Road, and was to continue the small-scale housing dominating the adjacent roads. Wilkinson and Moore were responsible for the development but the College found the houses they built were too large and expensive for the occupiers they were intended for. Committed to providing smaller cheaper housing, St John's laid out Hayfield Road in 1886 ensuring the houses were kept small in line with their instruction.

Although the majority of the western section of the estate had been developed by the 1880s, large parts of the eastern side remained rural in character. Wilkinson and Moore submitted proposals for the development of this land in 1883 and though the proposals were accepted in principle, permission was not forthcoming as the college could not afford to construct the road at that time. It was not until the 1890s that the Bardwell Estate was laid out. Wilkinson had retired, Moore was the supervising

⁶ Tanis Hinchcliffe

architect but was subsequently dismissed before completion, being replaced by NW Harrison, but still designed houses in the area. Harrison was given a much lesser role than his two predecessors with his work mainly being limited to Chadlington Road and Charlbury Road.

WWI interrupted development but resumed in the 1920s introducing a new wave of architects including Frank Mountain, Arthur Martin and Christopher Wright who developed the final portion of the estate. The new architects introduced new styles creating a totally different character area to the rest of the established suburb. Northmoor Road and Charlbury Road were extended together with a new connecting road, Belbroughton Road (1924). Christopher Wright was the dominating architect. Garford Road, on the eastern extremity of the estate, again developed by Wright, was one of the last roads to be completed. By the 1930s the estate's development was virtually complete.

Character Appraisal

There are three separate character areas within the conservation area:

- a. East of Banbury Road
- b. The central section between Woodstock and Banbury Roads
- c. West of Woodstock Road

Whilst each area is undeniably related to each other through use, architects, design and materials, Woodstock Road and Banbury Road do create a physical and natural division between the three sections.

East of Banbury Road

Banbury Road, one of the main gateway routes from the north of the county, is a rather spectacular sight. The wide tree lined road, boarded on either side by large, mainly gothic inspired villas, well set back from the road behind low boundary walls; it is not hard to imagine how the road would have looked 150 years ago. The volume of traffic has increased, houses have changed ownership and use, some have experienced a loss or deterioration of their decorative detailing but the overall development along Banbury Road has retained its integrity and still reflects its intended plan and design as set out by William Wilkinson and St John's College.

Out of all the roads in this character area, Banbury Road has possibly undergone the most change. Most of the houses have been converted from single family residences to educational/institutional use, front gardens have given way to much needed parking spaces, some back gardens have been built upon to provide extra accommodation. In some instances, neighbouring buildings have been linked together eg. 52 and 54 Banbury Road, Wycliffe Hall. No. 52 was a Codd house built in 1868, no. 54 by John Gibbs 1867, added to by Wilkinson and Moore in the 1880s and were joined by the chapel in 1896 by George Wallace with the whole structure now sitting in a very commanding and prominent site.

With few exceptions including Park Town, Banbury Road is a variation on a gothic theme with large red and yellow brick villas incorporating turrets, pointed arches, gables and very steep pitched slate roofs and each architect demonstrating his own interpretation of the gothic design. The emphasis was on the vertical, creating large foreboding structures bearing down onto luxuriously planted gardens, which themselves contained equally large and foreboding trees.

The exceptions to the dominating gothic included Park Town, which pre-dated Wilkinson's gothic suburb by approximately a decade. Outside the control and ownership of St John's, Park Town was Samuel Lipscombe Seckham's showpiece and its success encouraged the college to appoint him as their first supervising architect. Park Town is a cumulative picture of large Italianate villas, stone fronted classical crescents and smaller brick and stuccoed terraces packed into a compact 9-acre site, enhanced by a central formal garden. The villas are set in their own grounds, well planted each creating a statuesque image. To compensate for the lack of front gardens to the two crescents, the formal garden was built, surrounded by iron railings providing views through to the opposite crescent, the greenery effectively softens the built form and creates a focal point in the development.

Behind Banbury Road, a different story is told. The development of the whole of St John's North Oxford estate spanned from the 1850s to the late 1920s and this section of the conservation area is representative of the entire development period.

Norham Manor was Wilkinson's first development. Characterised by very large red and yellow gothic villas, again set in large gardens amidst wide avenues. The southern side of Norham Gardens was built to take advantage of its proximity to University Parks and therefore, their main façades do not look over the road. Since the planting between the development and the park has matured, the houses are well

screened and only enticing glimpses of their existence can now be seen from the park.

The long rear gardens and the gaps between the properties are important elements to the character of this area. The gaps enable views through to the planting in the gardens and the rear of adjacent properties, and are important in strengthening the sense of openness that prevails throughout the suburb. It is a planned suburb; the plots were large with the extensive gardens often dwarfing the actual houses. Change of ownership and use together with different lifestyles and needs have resulted in plots being subdivided, with additional buildings being built as backland and infill development. Whilst the original layout of the estate can cope with this type of development due to the amount of garden space available, it is detrimental to the character and appearance of the conservation area. The spatial dynamics are being compromised, the gaps between buildings being swallowed by supplementary building works creating a more enclosed streetscape. Front gardens are being lost to car parking, boundary walls are being removed, detached houses are becoming almost terrace like in form. Infill has generally been of a high standard, with appropriate materials and scale being taken into account so that the resultant development does not have an overly negative impact on the significance of the area.

One 1960s development that has made quite a bold impact on the sedate nature of Norham Road is the Maison Francaise building by Jacques Laurent. Whilst the building was praised for its simple modernist style, it is neither in keeping with the character or appearance of the road. The main façade is a blank screen of buff bricks, aluminium windows and blue canopy over the entrance whilst other elevations are mainly glazed providing a mixture of windows and doors, with solid concrete balconies to the first floor openings. In a suburb where steep pitched roofs dominate, the flat roof is instantly noticeable and is reminiscent of a 1960s school building. Eight Victorian properties were knocked down in order for Maison Francaise to be erected, impacting greatly on the spatial dynamics of the road and creates a large gap in what is otherwise a built-up road of tall gothic houses.

Norham Manor's buildings are sturdy and there are some magnificent examples from the various architects' works eg 19 Norham Gardens 'Gunfield' by Frederick Codd (1877) a large detached house with chapel (added by NW Harrison in 1909) built for the Denekes family. It has been constructed from the characteristic red brick incorporating blue brick banding, with a tiled roof and tall gables. 18-19 Bradmore Road by Galpin and Shirley, a striking pair of gothic styled semi-detached houses of

yellow brick with red brick string courses and stone window dressings. It is an area much favoured by the colleges, with many of the houses now in college ownership and used for teaching/academic purpose. As the colleges continue to grow, so too does their need for additional accommodation and it is therefore only natural that they would look to expand in their own grounds. The need for expansion must be balanced against the needs and character of the conservation area in order that the open and green nature of the suburb is preserved.

North of Park Town and Norham Manor, a totally different character takes over. The Bardwell Estate was the last area of St John's land to be developed, much of which was built after the end of WWI. Development began in the 1890s on the same large-scale plots that have come to characterise this part of the conservation area. The streets were straight and wide and the houses again built amongst generous gardens, but the style of the houses is distinctly different to its gothic predecessors on Norham Manor. At the start of laying out the Bardwell Estate, HW Moore was still in charge but was dismissed following the turn of the century and whilst he still contributed to the area in terms of designing some of the buildings, his influence was minimal.

The earlier houses were still red brick, vertically emphasised structures with gables but their detailing and decoration were from a different period. Up until the 1890s, the houses of North Oxford had been the responsibility of only a handful of architects but the later phase of development saw new architects bringing new ideas to the development and gradually the dark gothic gave way to the lighter Old English and Queen Anne Revival styles, which in turn moved on to neo-Georgian. The latter phase of St John's North Oxford estate was much more varied and interesting, resulting in eclectic compositions using a wider range of materials and layouts. Houses were still being built on a speculative basis but there were a few custom-build projects including 2 Northmoor Road by EW Allfrey, 1902. The house continued the red brick tradition with white timber framed windows but was Dutch in style incorporating a curved two-storey bay at first and second floor levels, dormers, ashlar porch surround and canopy and small paned sash and casement windows and is now Grade II listed. It borrows elements from the Queen Anne style and Arts & Crafts all mixed together to create a much lighter appearing house than the gothic villas.

Tall houses eventually gave way to broad houses together with tile hanging and timbering with roughcast rendering. Architects who flourished under Harrison included Frank Mountain who built houses on Northmoor and Chadlington Roads

c.1910 - 1915 with stone buttresses and half timbering as can be seen at 11 Chadlington Road; George Gardiner at 23 Linton Road c.1910 characterised by unpainted render and leaded windows; and Arthur Hamilton Moberly who introduced the neo-Georgian style to North Oxford just after the turn of the century at no.7 Linton Road.

Post WWI saw the introduction of Christopher Wright who dominated the remaining streets of the Bardwell Estate. Wright's work favoured the neo-Georgian, that were simple in design but the different layouts and detailing added the character to his buildings. The group of houses, nos. 22 – 26 Northmoor Road are characteristic Wright houses. Based on an 'L' shaped plan constructed from red brick with symmetrical brick stacks, hipped roofs, casement windows, brick pilasters and flush brick panels below the first floor windows. One of Wright's best known houses is no.1 Belbroughton Road, 1925. This house is distinctly different with its arcaded front with cement infill to the ground and first floors, steeped pitched hipped roof with symmetrical tall brick chimneys and three dormers. It is largely unaltered with an open aspect to the front, situated behind a low boundary brick wall.

A Grade II listed house built by Fred Openshaw for Basil Blackwell of Blackwell's Books is perhaps more well known for its former occupier rather than its architectural merit. 20 Northmoor Road (1924) was home to JRR Tolkien for a number of years and is characterised by roughcast elevations with a brick plinth, wooden mullion windows with leaded glazing. Although it is ordinary in design, the house has been virtually unaltered over the decades.

Central Area Between Woodstock and Banbury Roads

Whilst east of Banbury Road is predominantly residential in character, the central area does not have a single dominant theme. There are houses, college campuses, churches, restaurants and shops which all combine to make a diverse and vibrant area.

St Anne's College and St Hugh's College are the dominant presence, with their campuses that have evolved since the early 1900s. St Hugh's sits in a highly prominent and commanding position spanning between Banbury Road and Woodstock Road with its main entrance on St Margaret's Road. The college moved to the site in 1916 having purchased GP Hester's old house, the Mount which they subsequently demolished and constructed a building to provide accommodation for

students, library, chapel and common rooms and gradually acquired surrounding buildings including the Lawn. The majestic red brick and stone 'H' plan neo-Georgian building designed by Buckland and Haywood sits in large lawned gardens where they are overlooked by the building's main, southern, elevation. Its entrance on St Margaret's Road is Baroque with rusticated quoins and pediments. The Lawn sits in the lower right hand corner of the campus, accessed from Banbury Road into a sweeping gravel and planted driveway.

St Anne's College acquired numerous properties along Banbury Road but it was not until they acquired 56 Woodstock Road and 35 Banbury Road in the early 1930s that they could begin to create a proper college campus. Sir Giles Gilbert Scott was appointed in the late 1930s to start work on their first purpose built college building, Hartland House. The building is now Grade II listed, constructed from Bladon stone in random coursed rubble, slate pitched roofs and cantilevered balconies. The campus is home to many diverse buildings including the 1960s Wolfson Building and its neighbour, the Rayne Building designed by Howell, Killick, Partridge and Amis and are now Grade II listed. The curved concrete blocks with boxed windows were meant to be part of a block of six but shortage of funds meant the plans had to be curtailed but even sitting behind a high wall on Banbury Road, the two blocks make an impression on the street scene, being unlike any other building in the vicinity.

There are a few pockets of commercial activity in North Oxford, one of which being the narrow one-way road, full of rainbow coloured shops and restaurants, known as North Parade Avenue. This road pre-dates most development in North Oxford, having been built in the 1830s as small terraced housing. It is a cheerful vibrant road; its narrowness creates a sense of intimacy and enclosure, and its proximity to Banbury Road is soon forgotten. 77 Banbury Road, a bright and sunny yellow stuccoed villa welcomes you at the entry point to North Parade and entices the passer-by into the bunting-lined road.

The western end of North Parade Avenue opens out into a crossroads with Church Walk and Winchester Road, which in typical North Oxford fashion is characterised by mature trees and tall gothic houses. Church Walk turns into a pedestrian access through to Woodstock Road, narrowing into a stone walled passageway between the former St Philip and St James Church and the Tudor styled former vicarage forming part of St Antony's College. The church and the vicarage create a contrasting image: the church is one of the best known Victorian churches, designed by GE Street, 1862 and is now Grade I listed. The coursed rubble stone is interspersed with brick

banding and the spire was added in the latter 1860s. The former vicarage is a Tudor inspired 1887 building by HGW Drinkwater characterised by coursed rubble limestone to the ground floor, roughcast and ornamental half timbering to the first floor and tile hanging to gable apex.

The residential aspect of the central section of the conservation area is varied. Large detached and semi-detached houses dominate the northern section including Staverton Road, Rawlinson Road and St Margaret's Road with the more domestic scale houses of Canterbury and Winchester Roads. Staverton Road is memorable due to its pronounced curve, a feature that is missing from the majority of North Oxford's roads. The houses are angled to take full advantage of the layout of the road and the uniformity and regularity of street frontage has been replaced by staggered building line together with plots of varying shapes and sizes. ***Anything about the houses themselves?***

Rawlinson Road had previously been designated as a separate conservation area in recognition of its survival as a complete and unspoilt area of Victorian character. Development took place towards the latter part of the 19th century and the houses were mainly accredited to Moore or Herbert Quinton. The houses were built broad and tall, supplying service accommodation in an extra wing rather than basements as had previously been the case. The houses were still red brick, many still incorporating steep pitched roofs, gables and turrets but the use of decorative materials such as tile hanging on the upper floors distanced these later properties from the earlier gothic structures. Windows were a mixture of large and small panes, the smaller panes being leaded.

Canterbury Road is considered to be Codd's finest work with all the houses being designed by him between 1871 – 1876. They continue the gothic theme of tall red and yellow brick houses with the essential steep pitched roofs and porches but there are also a few anomalies in the road. The Orthodox Church of the Holy Trinity, a yellow brick, vaguely octagonal building with a flat roof and high narrow aluminium windows is architecturally unlike anything else in the vicinity, but due to sitting in large well planted gardens, the church does not make a negative impression on the overall street scene. The connecting service duct between 11 and 12 Canterbury Road does however make a negative impression. The metal ducting, which is approximately 2 ft deep, is suspended between the upper floors of the neighbouring properties in a highly prominent position and can clearly be seen from the road level.

Canterbury Road also forms the rear boundary to St Hugh's, the tall wrought iron gates provide visual access through to the rear of the Maplethorpe Building (1999) and the high stone wall bounding the corner site along Canterbury Road and around the corner onto Woodstock Road shields the house known as the Shrubbery, one of the first houses to be built in North Oxford. The Shrubbery is now grade II listed constructed from coursed rubble with part render and part ashlar and one of only a few stone buildings in the suburb and now forms part of the Principal's House.

Other notable houses included JJ Stevenson's 27 and 29 Banbury Road. The bursar of St John's had appointed Stevenson to design a house for his use in 1881 in the new Queen Anne style. The houses were of bright orange-red brick construction with hipped tiled roofs. Pevsner describes them as 'a splendid pair' of houses with brick mouldings, balconies and white painted timber framed windows. They were the first houses to be built in the Queen Anne style in Oxford and are now both listed Grade II.

West of Woodstock Road

This character area is completely different to the other parts of the conservation area. As with the rest of North Oxford, this area still benefits from a spacious character with well designed buildings but is fundamentally a residential area, its remaining links with the colleges and University not being as obvious. Woodstock Road is the second major road running through the suburb providing access to the north west of the county. The houses fronting on to the road are generally large, but there is a variety of architectural styles and uses on this part of Woodstock Road. Opposite the acclaimed St Philip and St James's Church is the 1960s Butler Close development. Set back from the road but in an open position without any boundary wall, the dual aspect of the development is highly prominent from both Woodstock Road and Leckford Road despite the number of trees planted in front of the building. The building is characterless, and does not contribute to the special character of the area. Further along Woodstock Road, Russell Court a c.1970 residential development is also highly visible from the main thoroughfare, and does not make a particularly positive contribution to the area.

Woodstock Road is an architecturally diverse road and in between these two similar developments are Seckham's 121 and 123 Woodstock Road, the only two houses from his Walton Manor layout to be built in his role as supervising architect for St John's.

Behind the main road, the roads are narrower, not as green, houses are generally smaller, mainly terraces, but despite the greater sense of enclosure and the compact roads, the prevailing character is still one of openness. The houses on the western perimeter were much smaller than those on the eastern perimeter of the conservation area due mainly to their proximity to the canal and the fact that smaller houses had already been built on the Walton Manor estate to the south.

A number of architects were responsible for Kingston Road but it is most well known for Clapton Crabbe Rolfe's houses (114-138, 149-156 and 159-164 all Grade II listed). Rolfe was Wilkinson's nephew but unlike Moore, he did not religiously follow his uncle's predilection for true gothic. Whilst Rolfe's houses had gothic undertones, they incorporated other features which made them distinctly different from either Wilkinson's or Moore's houses. The one storey plus attic houses were heavily influenced by William Butterfield and are characterised by their polychromatic brickwork with gabled dormers, bay windows and paired arched doorways, set back behind low boundary walls and small front gardens. Kingston Road does not exhibit any of the 'garden suburb' elements of the rest of the suburb ie the large front gardens and tree-lined avenues, but due to the front gardens and hedging there is an element of greenery that softens and enhances the red and yellow brickwork. The smaller scale houses create a sense of intimacy and enclosure lacking in the wider roads.

Kingston Road leads into Hayfield Road, past the anchor public house. The road dips and curves slightly with the streetscape changing from a soft greenish image to a much harder urban form. The small cottages of Hayfield Road (Moore, 1887) front directly onto the pavement creating an unbroken rhythm of original façades. Natural or stone washed lintels add relief to the red brick, each lintel spanning across the ground floor openings of two houses effectively pairing the terraces and creating a focal point for the entire length of the road, Moore's trademark scroll motif adorns each lintel. The brick chimneys with their moulded stone coping stones also stand proudly from each roof and create quite a feature of the street.

In between Kingston Road and Woodstock Road a variety of roads exist, some being slightly curved, some characterised by dense tree cover all demonstrating different styles of housing but all is of high quality. Warnborough Road showcases tall three-storey houses with attics, steep gables with decorative barge boarding and porches with pointed arches. The front gardens are much larger than those along Kingston Road, many of which have been converted for parking purposes. The road is green,

with mature trees overhanging the garden boundaries, framing the street and providing the important contrast with the red brick. Gaps between the houses provide glimpses through into well planted rear gardens.

St Margaret's Road is a long straight road spanning from Banbury Road to Kingston Road and is the most institutional road in this part of North Oxford with both St Margaret's Church (Drinkwater, 1883-1893) and St Aloysius' First School taking up commanding corner positions. The pavements are lined with trees, the roots of which have raised and cracked the paving surface but the uneven nature of the pavement, together with the pronounced camber of the road, adds interest to the streetscene. The trees arch over towards the gardens creating a green alleyway and long views down the whole road are possible through the trees. The houses are typical North Oxford – tall and red, with sash windows and stone mullions mainly attributed to Wilkinson and Moore. The low boundary walls are often topped with railings and the image is quintessential North Oxford.

Focal points and views

Views throughout the conservation area are limited due to the nature of the street layout and lack of open space. Therefore the long views down the streets are important. In the eastern section of the suburb, trees dominate street views together with other mature greenery, creating a soft and vibrant scene enhanced by the vast red and yellow brick structures. Towards the west, the streetscape views are much more urban in character, fewer trees, smaller gardens, continuous ranges of houses, only the occasional gap between buildings. Whilst the views are contrasting, they are equally important and need to be retained.

Views into and out of the conservation area are also limited and where they do exist, these should be retained and if possible, enhanced. The church on St Philip and St James's forms part of the view cone from Wolvercote and the north west. The churches generally form focal points for each of their localities. Another important view can be obtained from the canal bridge at the end of Frenchay Road looking down the canal and to the rear of Hayfield Road. This is a particularly important view, showcasing an assemblage of housing (and their varying extensions), gardens, planting and canal scene all of which is very green in character which is in direct contrast to the hard, urban, brick image when looking down Hayfield Road at the front of these buildings.

There are long views down Woodstock and Banbury Roads, where optical illusions take over with the roads narrowing to a point and the trees appear to meet, creating a dead-end to the roads. The mature trees shield the houses from sight. The skyline plays an important role in these vistas, as it is a major contributor to the overwhelming sense of space.

Leafy Image

Much of the layout of North Oxford is attributed to William Wilkinson, designing many of the buildings and much of the landscape. Wilkinson's plans recognised the importance of planting to the appearance of the area and included a profusion of trees and shrubs in his planting schemes. The attractive quality of North Oxford is due in large part to the trees, shrubs, ground cover and climbing plants that soften the architecture and add contrasting colours and textures.

Planting in North Oxford is almost all within the private areas of the original Victorian houses. The houses are large in scale with generous front gardens and that scale is

reflected in the choice of planting eg large forest sized trees. The trees are the key element in the landscaping structure. The smaller trees and flowering shrubs are of secondary importance but provide an element of screening and contribute to the overall character of the area. Front garden planting enlivens the buildings and makes a valuable contribution to the street scene, the flowering trees in North Oxford creating one of the most beautiful and unforgettable gateways into the city.

The large trees, which have been regarded as a nuisance due to blocking light and the production of an abundance of litter are now ageing and dying with the temptation of replacing them with smaller, more ornamental and inappropriate species. Many of the mature trees and shrubs in the conservation area are the original Victorian and Edwardian plantings that are becoming over mature. In order to ensure a continuity of planting, new trees and shrubs are required to replace old and diseased plants, and it is important for the appearance and character of the area that appropriate species are used. Appendixlists the appropriate species of trees and shrubs for North Oxford.

Use

The area is still mainly a residential suburb despite the colleges and University viewing North Oxford as a favoured location. Following the disposal by St John's of a large proportion of their estate in the 1950s/1960s, a number of buildings were bought by colleges and have been used for educational and administrative purposes as well as providing some student accommodation. Although change of use has been quite prevalent in the area, the character of North Oxford is still that of a residential suburb. Internally the buildings may have been altered significantly but externally, it is often difficult to determine the use without closer inspection.

Other minor, but essential uses, include the commercial pockets of North Parade Avenue and Kingston Road, the various churches, restaurants and public houses which all contribute to the character and help create a complete suburb.

Contribution of open space

Public open space within the suburb is very limited. The feeling of spaciousness is created by the width of the roads, college grounds and low boundary walls rather than the provision of formal open space. The conservation area is abutted by space in the form of University Parks to the south, the banks of the Cherwell and the canal. Inside the boundary, open space is generally within the private realm. However, due

to the low nature of boundary treatments, private gardens and college grounds do contribute to the open and green character of the area. The various church grounds provide the majority of any public space. The formal garden of Park Town is a rare feature in Oxford and although it is a private, the surrounding railings allow visual access into the garden and the greenery softens the continuous built form of the surrounding crescents.

Neutral/Negative Elements

Loss of front gardens

As a garden suburb, gardens have played an important role in both the character and appearance of the suburb. As the use and ownership of the buildings has changed and car ownership has substantially increased, a large number of gardens have gradually given way to hard standing to create on-site parking facilities. Whilst this has reduced the need for on-street parking or has solved the problem of not being able to park on some roads eg Woodstock Road and Banbury Road, it has impacted on the 'green' character of the suburb. Not only have trees and shrubs become casualties of this type of development, the low boundary walls have been destroyed in places, some being totally removed, thus eroding part of the original design of St John's middle class suburb and impacting on the continuity of street frontage.

The material used for the hard standing has also impacted on the appearance of the area. Tarmac has been used in some instances, creating a hard, characterless surface, totally out of keeping with the character of the buildings. Additional planting would help soften the appearance to a certain extent but ideally an alternative surfacing material would be better. Where creamy-yellow gravel has been used, the colour and texture of the material has added character to the garden and setting of the building. Its uneven and rough surface being much more in keeping with the character and age of the buildings, enhanced by the often mature and verdant planting of the verges and remaining garden.

There are a number of instances where parking spaces have been marked out on the tarmac surface effectively turning the front garden into a formal car park, reinforcing the institutional use of the building. Whilst it is accepted that on-site parking is a necessity, a much softer and sympathetic approach to achieving the desired spaces should be adopted, avoiding the need to lay out a 'car park'.

Backland development

North Oxford has a distinctive plot layout, especially in the eastern section of the suburb where large houses sit in large garden plots with wide gaps between the properties providing glimpses through to the rear. Whilst many of the houses built in the far eastern extremities of the conservation area have remained in single family use and retained their gardens, other buildings closer to Banbury Road and Woodstock Road have not remained so and have developed their gardens. Although it may be seen as unnecessary to have such large gardens in this day and age, the layout of North Oxford was planned and the spaces between each building and the size of the gardens was an important element of this layout. Infill projects both on backland garden sites and between the buildings are now altering this dynamic and changing the spacious character of the area. Extensions to a building can often be incorporated without harming the character of the space or the building but by adding a separate building on to the same plot, can be detrimental in certain circumstances.

The houses in the west of the suburb were mainly terraces and as such little has happened that has impacted on the layout and density of this part of the suburb. Further towards the east, especially where the houses have been converted to institutional use, there has been a tendency to link neighbouring properties together, build in the gaps between properties, build in the back gardens .

Multi-occupancy

At the time of development, most of the houses in North Oxford were occupied as single-family dwelling houses. The family dynamic has since altered and such large houses are not as sought after as they once were. Colleges have acquired many of the houses changing them into institutional use and for student accommodation and others have been sub-divided into houses of multi-occupancy. Changing a property in to multi-occupancy residences has environmental knock-on effects including increasing traffic volume, greater need for parking provision and greater loss of gardens, all of which impact upon the character of an area. In a suburb such as North Oxford where a large element of its special character is as a result of its gardens, the loss of such a feature is all the more pronounced. Although it may be possible to convert a single-family dwelling into multi-occupancy use without having to undertake any external alterations so the façade is preserved, the additional use and needs of the increased number of occupiers will take its toll on the appearance of the area.

see local plan policy re HMOs.

Loss of architectural detailing

Many of the houses within North Oxford were decorated with stone or brick detailing around windows, doors together with general decorations including crested ridge tiles, decorative chimney stacks, iron railings etc. There have been instances where replacement of decaying decorative detailing has been lost, either through the actual removal and non-replacement eg removal of chimney stacks, or replaced by a plain style. Decoration often characterises a house and creates individuality. Although many of the houses in North Oxford were designed by a small number of architects, many of them were designed specifically for their original owners and all incorporated individual design details. Where detailing has been retained, it should be maintained and preserved. Crested ridge tiles for example add character to a roof. Chimney stacks were often ornate, reflecting the period in which they were constructed.

Boundary treatments

One element that St John's insisted on at the time of the original development of North Oxford was low boundary walls topped with railings. Unfortunately the majority of the railings were removed during the war and have not been replaced. There has been a move over recent years to reinstate them but often the incorrect style has been used. It is important in replacing historic and architectural details that research is undertaken to ensure that the correct detailing is used. More encouragement should be given to replacing the railings as they make a real contribution to the area and are infinitely more attractive than wooden fencing.

Boundary walls have also suffered the same fate as gardens have gradually been given over to on-site parking. Due to the difficulties of parking within the area, there is obviously a need for off-street parking but a balance should be sought between providing suitable hard standing for the vehicle whilst preserving as much of the boundary wall as possible as well as the garden planting, softening the appearance of hard elements. Traditionally the boundary walls of North Oxford were constructed from brick – any reconstruction/repair of boundary walls should be in brick to maintain continuity of street frontage and historic continuity.

There are instances where brick boundary walls have given way to fencing which is an inappropriate boundary treatment in some areas of North Oxford, especially for properties fronting onto Banbury Road and Woodstock Road. A neat and new fence

can look attractive but it has to be well maintained – aging, patched and broken fencing is unattractive.

Hedging – usually in conjunction with a low brick boundary wall and railings to provide privacy to the garden whilst providing important elements of greenery to the streetscape. Again the hedging needs to be well maintained in order for it to be attractive – overgrown and dying hedging is unsightly.

Floorscape and street furniture

The appearance of the streets makes a significant contribution to the character of an area, especially in North Oxford where they are such a dominant feature. The majority of the roads have poorly maintained road surfaces, being patched, unattractive and crumbling around drains and manholes in the road. Traditional materials are gradually being replaced by inappropriate modern materials which are not in keeping with the character or appearance of the area eg stone kerbs being replaced by concrete. Granite setts running down the edges of the road add to the appearance and should be retained.

A number of pavements are also in a bad state of repair. Tree roots are pushing through, raising and cracking the surface around the base of the trunk, resulting in uneven and potentially hazardous surfaces.

There is a general cluttering of the pavements and roads with unnecessary and inappropriate signposts, bollards, lamps, road markings, bins, benches, bus stops and shelters etc. A street audit should be undertaken to assess whether all existing signs and posts are all necessary. It may be appropriate to reduce the number of posts, and re-site them at the rear of the pavement so as not to be a hazard. Road markings also impact upon the appearance of the area.

There is a limited provision of benches throughout North Oxford which in an area where public open space is limited, provide an opportunity for the public to enjoy the surroundings. Where pavements are wide enough benches should be provided but these should be maintained as some of these are currently in a bad state of repair. There is no continuity of lamp-post style throughout the area. Whilst this does not cause any aesthetic problem, there are a number of municipal posts which would benefit from being replaced by more historically appropriate styles.

Opportunities for Enhancements

- Rationalisation of street furniture
- Reinstatement of architecturally correct railings
- Repair of boundary walls
- Additional planting to reinforce the 'garden suburb' character.
- Improved road and pavement surfaces

Conclusions