

North Hinksey Parish Character Assessment



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Section A. Introduction to the North Hinksey Parish Character Assessment

Character assessments are now being undertaken by various community groups, as well as local planning authorities to establish a consensus about what is valued in the character of local areas and neighbourhoods to inform planning for change. To support local communities in undertaking their own assessment of character a number of toolkits have been prepared with the assistance of CABI and English Heritage. These are a recognised means for community groups to prepare character assessments that are sufficiently robust and reliable to be informative for planning decisions.

During January 2014 a group of local volunteers used the Oxford Character Assessment Toolkit, to undertake assessment of several discrete character areas within North Hinksey Parish. Each of these areas is noted as having a distinctive character, including features that reflect different phases of historical development and variations in planning and use that influence their character and sense of place. In combination, these character areas contribute to the character of the area as whole.

The focus of the original character assessment was central Botley, defined within the emerging Vale of White Horse District Council Local Plan 2031 as suitable for comprehensive redevelopment as a Local Service Centre, however, it also took in surrounding residential and commercial areas. In September 2015 it was updated and expanded further to incorporate both North Hinksey Village and Harcourt Hill, in order to provide comprehensive supporting evidence for the North Hinksey Parish Neighbourhood Plan. A further updated version of the Character Assessment was produced in April 2017 to take into account changes that had occurred subsequent to the 2015 update. This version of the Character Assessment was completed in January 2018 and includes additional changes such as the recently built Tilbury Fields Estate which has been added as a further Character Area.

Purpose of the Character Assessment

This statement has been prepared to provide understanding of the character of North Hinksey Parish's townscape and landscape, including the key positive features of its character as experienced by local people. It is intended to provide a reference point for assessing the impact of proposed new developments and to guide proposals to respond positively to these features. It also highlights negative features or issues that may be resolved through management or as a result of development, and vulnerabilities to change that would further detract from the area's character.

Planning Policy

Character has an important place in planning policy. ***The National Planning Policy Framework*** sets the objective for new development that it must "take account of the different roles and character of different areas" as one of 12 core principles that should drive planning. Furthermore, it states that in determining planning applications, planning authorities should take account of "the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness" (NPPF, para. 131).

Section B. Headline Findings

The Character Area Descriptions provide a high level of detail on the character of each area. However, some key findings can be identified that either represent shared characteristics across the suburb or are character features that make a highly significant contribution to the character, appearance and distinctiveness of the area as a whole.

The identification of these features follows on from the review of the area's history, spatial morphology and other characteristics and the assessment of the individual character areas. These have been set out below and are divided into the categories of features that are **(i) Key positive features of local character**, **(ii) Negative features and issues** and **(iii) Key vulnerabilities**.

(i) Key Positive Features

Positive character feature

1930s Suburban development and Architectural Character

Explanation

The extensive development of the area during the late 1920s and 1930s imposed a strong architectural character on the area, which is carried across many of the various character areas. It is seen within the commercial centre at West Way including the buildings of Elm's Parade and the Seacourt Bridge public house, in the mass of pyramid roofed and white painted rendered housing of the Elm's Rise Estate and the larger detached houses in spacious grounds of Cumnor Rise and Eynsham Road, that include examples of square modernist, vernacular revival and Arts and Crafts architecture. The robust lines, occasional Art Deco details and pyramid or hipped plain tiled roofs of the area are defining features of its character that make a strong contribution to its identity.

Modernist buildings provide a key feature of note but are the exception to the more commonplace Inter-war vernacular style houses, the contribution of which was reinforced by the construction of further housing of similar form in the 1950s. North Hinkley Parish as a whole consists of low-level buildings that

Scale of Development

rarely rise above the level of two storeys outside of the central Botley area. The majority of buildings are detached or semi-detached houses that stand in excess of >20 metres from buildings across the street, and rise to less than seven metres at eaves level, creating a spacious feeling and open environment.

Importance of Greenery in Residential Streets and quality of public green open space

The streets of North Hinksey Parish were laid out with generous provision for greenery in the public realm.

In the estates of smaller houses the greenery includes grass verges separating the footpath from the road, as well as larger communal grassed areas, such as the circus at St. Paul's Crescent. Front garden spaces were provided within the planned developments to ensure a green setting to the proposed houses and separation from the roadside to provide privacy, while many properties have low hedges or low walls backed with shrubs to provide boundaries that add further to the greenery of the streetscenes. In the streets of larger houses the generous plot sizes have allowed buildings to be set back from the road whilst the use of hedgerows and trees as boundary features contributes further to a green environment. A grass verge between the front property boundaries also adds to the green and semi-rural rural character of these areas.

Space to height ratio

The scale of development in the suburb is generally no more than three storeys and more normally two storeys, giving a normal height at eaves level of 7 metres. The roads within the residential estates are generally narrow (of only two cars width, but are broadened by grass verges and footpaths, whilst houses are generally set back at least 4

metres from the road. As such the distance between frontages is rarely less than 22 metres providing a space to height ratio of 3:1. Indeed the space between frontages is commonly as much as 30 metres providing a space to height ratio of 4:1 and in fact it is often considerably greater. This generous provision of space between buildings and their low scale provides the spacious low-rise character that is a distinctive feature of the suburb and was designed to provide the living environment that residents were moving to from the crowded city centre and Victorian suburbs in the early and mid-20th century.

On the main roads through the area the space between frontages is often considerably greater, reaching 45 metres at West Way, 40 – 48 metres at Eynsham Road and over 50 metres at Cumnor Rise.

Historically these streets were developed with the same two-storey building heights as elsewhere in the Parish providing a space to height ratio of nearly 6½:1 (taking 45 metres as a low standard frontage to frontage distance width).

Widespread survival of reminders of a rural past

Running through the landscape of residential developments, commercial centre and industrial and office uses are traces of the earlier agricultural landscape that occupied the hillsides before the construction of the suburb. These illustrate the past of the area, providing a green character and a sense of continuity with the past.

Buildings and heritage

Stone farmhouses and cottages with thatched or handmade clay tile roofs are scattered across the area and provide evidence of the small settlements of Old Botley, Botley Pound and North Hinksey Village.

Although the vast majority of buildings within the Parish were built in the 20th and 21st Centuries there are a significant number of older buildings within certain areas (primarily North Hinksey Village, Old Botley and Botley Pound) including over 20 listed houses, St Lawrence's Church and Conduit House monument.

In addition, the Commonwealth War Graves in Botley Cemetery are of national significance.

Woodland

Pockets of woodland, formerly managed as coppice lie within and between the housing estates and on the edge of the suburb. These were an essential part of the rural economy of the area until the early 20th century, providing fuel and building materials as well as cover for game. They are now pockets of high biodiversity value habitat.

Streams

Numerous small streams run off the hillside creating green corridors lined with tall broad-leafed trees where they pass through the suburban housing estates. This adds to the sense of the estates being run through with woodlands.

The larger Seacourt Stream acts as a border of the Parish along its eastern side and runs alongside North Hinksey Village.

Green spaces

A number of large green spaces (including Raleigh Park, allotments and playing fields either side of Arnold's Way provide access to green spaces that are fragments of the open space that characterised the area prior to the residential developments of the early 20th century onwards.

Views to Oxford City Centre and Green Setting

The hill slopes provide many points where views from the street can pass over the rooftops of buildings further down the slope and out to

the rural setting (part of Oxford's Green Belt) or towards the famous skyline of Oxford to the east.

Permeability and quality of pedestrian movement

The suburb has been developed as an extended network of interconnecting street grids, with footpaths providing connecting routes between many cul-de-sacs that provide a permeable layout that favours access for pedestrians and cyclists and encourages slow car speeds, on all but the arterial road routes.

(ii) Negative Features and Issues

Severance from historic settlement areas (Old Botley and North Hinksey Village) by the A34 and industrial estates.

Scale and form of 1960s and 1980s office developments: These failed to maintain the established scale and character of the suburb's 1930s and 50s buildings and now appear out of scale and discordant in their forms and materials, fragmenting an otherwise harmonious townscape.

Increasing scale of infill developments: Recent infill developments on the main routes has increased the height of buildings to three storeys, or even four storeys within the Botley Central area. This has resulted in a noticeable loss of the high space to height ratio that is part of the suburb's open and spacious character.

Lost green edge to West Way: Loss of greenery along the main routes and West Way in particular is creating a more urban than semi-rural character resulting in a loss of the area's character as a whole.

Traffic on West Way and junction to A34: The traffic on the suburb's main routes has become very busy with frequent congestion both during the week and at weekends causing pollution and detracting from the amenity of the area for residents.

Lack of public facilities in walking distance: The suburb has steadily grown to the south west whilst the focus of public facilities is at West Way in the north east, despite recent developments no provision has been made to provide additional local facilities in easy walking distance, encouraging car free living, in the south west of the suburb.

(iii) Vulnerabilities

Increase in scale

Loss or impairment of views to green space and the area's rural setting

Increasing focus of commercial and community facilities in a single large scale, high rise, car-dependent redevelopment of the Botley Central area.

Increase in traffic both on West Way and surrounding residential areas

Loss of 1930s architectural character

Loss of spacious frontage to frontage gaps (creating urban street canyons)

Loss of key 1930s character buildings, including Elms Parade, and Seacourt Bridge public house

Loss of Green Character

Loss of evidence of the rural past including stone and thatched cottages and farmhouses

Replacement of typical pyramid-roofed semi-detached and detached houses by insensitive developments consisting of larger scale blocks of flats.

Section C. Location, Context and Layout

Location and definition of the area

North Hinksey Parish lies in the north-east corner of the Vale of White Horse District and adjoins the City of Oxford. The Seacourt Stream marks the eastern boundary of the Parish. The village of Cumnor lies to the south west, with the Parish boundary situated a short distance up Cumnor Hill running along Tilbury Lane and continuing in a southerly direction up to Arnolds Way. The boundary to the south is less clearly defined by physical features as the settlement has a ragged edge running into the countryside of the Oxford Green Belt at Harcourt Hill and Cumnor Hill.

North Hinksey Parish is defined as the administrative area managed by the North Hinksey Parish Council, and in the context of Planning it has been designated as a distinct Neighbourhood Plan area. At a wider level the Parish lies within the Vale of White Horse District, within the county of Oxfordshire. Historically the latter has not always been the case as the Vale originally fell within the county of Berkshire, and it was only in 1974 when the boundaries were revised that the whole of the Vale (including this Parish) transferred to Oxfordshire.

In practical terms the area consists of North Hinksey Village and the bulk of Botley, however significant areas of Botley (Dean Court) and Cumnor Hill to the west, whose residents associate strongly with Botley Centre, actually lie within Cumnor Parish.

A map of the Parish and surrounding areas is shown at the start of section E. Character Areas.

Context

The Parish is surrounded by the Oxfordshire countryside, although only a narrow green gap separates it from the ribbon development and commercial estates that reach out from Oxford along Botley Road. The open landscape beyond the settlement lies within the Oxford Green Belt.

To the north, small fields cover the lower slopes of Wytham Hill, which rise up beyond the A420 to Wytham Woods on the hilltop. The hill and woods are a prominent feature of many views both from within the suburb and from the wider area.

To the north west small fields and copses cover the slopes of Cumnor Hill up to and beyond the A420 running down into the Thames Valley to the north west. The small village of Cumnor lies just to the south west.

Cumnor Hill rises to a crest to the south of the suburb where a mixture of open arable fields and woodland cover the hilltops and slopes of the hills that march to the south (Harcourt Hill, Boars Hill and Hinksey Hill). The lower slopes of the hill are covered by smaller pasture fields reflecting older enclosures in the vicinity of North Hinksey Village.

Just beyond the southern edge of the Parish at Harcourt Hill lies open grassland running down to the A34 and beyond that the Hinksey Heights Golf Course.

The green gap to the east is made up of low-lying meadows, subject to flooding, alongside the Seacourt Stream (part of the braided network of channels of the River Thames). In addition to forming part of the network of flood meadows that are important reservoirs, protecting the city of Oxford from flooding, this green gap has a symbolic role in sustaining the identity of Botley and North Hinksey as a separate and distinct residential area from the suburb of New Botley to the east including its large area of commercial development.

Geology and Topography

North Hinksey Parish lies on the saddle between hills that form part of the mid-Vale ridge, a line of low hills of Corallian Limestone, a hard, sedimentary limestone that forces the River Thames into its loop to Wolvercote in the north. It covers both the floor and an area of the slopes of Cumnor Hill on the south side of the saddle providing views to the north and east in particular and to the east and west in particular locations, notably in the East of the suburb at Raleigh Park and Raleigh Park Road and Arnold's Way where there are views of historic interest over the city centre.

In addition to Corallian Limestone Cumnor Hill is also made up of strata of Kimmeridge Clay that have supported a local brick making industry. In places the hill slopes are deeply incised by narrow stream valleys that run through the clay creating natural breaks between areas.

Main roads

Within the settlement, arterial roads run from a node at West Way in the north east to the west (Eynsham Road), to the south west (Cumnor Hill) and to the south east (Westminster Way and the parallel North Hinksey Lane). West Way is continued eastwards as Botley Road leading into Oxford.

The A34 trunk road (also known as the Southern By-pass Road) cuts through the eastern edge of the suburb on a roughly north – south route that separates the Seacourt Tower and Retail Centre, several industrial estates, Old Botley and North Hinksey Village from the wider area of the Parish. The large intersection immediately to the north of the Parish provides access from the A34 to the Parish but is also a main route into the city of Oxford. Access to the main roads is also available at the southern end of Westminster Way and from North Hinksey Lane (to the A34) in the south, at Eynsham Road in the north west (to the A420) and at Cumnor Hill in the south west (also to the A420).

Section D. Historical Development and administrative areas

Appendix B shows the main phases of development of the area through Ordnance Survey maps from pre-1900 to current times.

Early settlements and pre-1900 development

Saxon settlements along the Thames included the villages of North Hinksey (formerly Ferry Hinksey or Laurence Hinksey) and Old Botley. A further small hamlet at Botley Pound (the area now located at the start of Eynsham Road) developed in medieval times along with the nearby Dean Court (which lies within Cumnor Parish) further along the road.

The area now falling within North Hinksey Parish was originally mainly within Cumnor Parish, however, the land within both Cumnor and North Hinksey parishes formed manors of the Abbey of Abingdon until the Dissolution. Despite being located closer to Oxford the flood plains restricted movement in that direction, hence the close ties to Abingdon.

Early routes across the flood plains included the Hinksey Causeway, which ran as an extension of the Roan road that passed through what is now the site of Raleigh Park. Also a small stone Medieval causeway has recently been discovered close to the location of the more recent Willow Walk.

Construction of the causeway from Osney on the western edge of Oxford to Botley had begun by 1467 but only reached Ferry (or North) Hinksey in 1540. This is likely to have replaced a lower level route through the meadows that was subject to seasonal flooding. A causeway on the present alignment of Botley Road was completed in 1541 by Lord Williams of Abingdon, later becoming known as Seven Bridges Road after it was made a Turnpike in the 1760s as part of the route from Oxford to Eynsham.

The Enclosure Award Map for Cumnor, produced in 1814, reveals much of the landscape prior to the development of the Parish. This included the small settlements at Botley (now Old Botley), Botley Pound (near the modern junction of Eynsham Road and Tilbury Lane) and North Hinksey Village. Outside of those settlements the area was rural in character and dominated by a number of large farms including the current Tilbury Farm plus several which were subsequently demolished to make way for housing including Elms Farm, Seacourt Farm, Hutchcomb's Farm and Sweetman's Farm. The use of 'hurst' field names on the enclosure map may also suggest that the area had previously been more heavily wooded, although by 1814 most of the woodland had been reduced to its present area. Eynsham Road, West Way and Botley Road are shown on their present alignment. Both Tilbury Lane and Cumnor Rise Road are shown as important linking routes in the area in contrast with their modern minor route character.

However, the map also reveals that Cumnor Hill road did not exist at this point but that the turnpike road to Faringdon ran south of Old Botley, cutting across the older fields in a ruler-straight line to the southern end of modern Cumnor Rise Road. From there it ran along a sweeping alignment similar to Hurst Rise Road on the southern edge of the modern suburb. Little of the line of this road survives today. The 1876

Ordnance Survey Map reveals that the earlier turnpike road to Faringdon had been abandoned by this date and the present route of Cumnor Hill (road) had been established.

Early 20th Century growth of the Parish

A small amount of suburban housing development consisting of terraced brick cottages was constructed next to the hamlet of Old Botley around 1900, and a small Baptist Chapel was built in 1912 (now. No. 31 West Way). Also before the outbreak of the First World War the development of a field on the north side of West Way facing Elms Farm, had begun with the construction of terraced houses in Poplar Road and Elms Road plus a short frontage of semidetached houses on West Way.

These developments were made possible by the main landowner in the area, the Earl of Abingdon, selling some of his freehold property in the area. He released further significant swathes of land in the 1920s and the introduction of a bus service from Cumnor to Oxford made further development in the area an attractive proposition.

On the northern side of West Way further expansion occurred with the addition of Hazel Road and the eastern end of Seacourt Road in the 1920s and 1930s.

Stephen Howse bought Elms Farm and by 1922 had started laying out roads and housing plots for the construction of an estate of suburban houses. The long loop of Arthray Road was among the first of the new streets to be developed. Ribbon development of large villas also spread west along Eynsham Road and Cumnor Hill with a more organic character created by the variation in the style and positioning of buildings in their spacious plots.

Several other new roads were also created, including Third Acre Rise, Hurst Rise Road, Yarnell's Hill and Southern By Pass (later Westminster Way). Land at Harcourt Hill was also sold on by another major landowner in the 1920s and the Harcourt Hill Estate began to take shape,

The area had little commercial focus during its early development other than a post office at the corner of Poplar Road and West Way (formerly sited in Old Botley) and three public houses located in Old Botley at the northern end of North Hinksey Lane. Early residents recorded buying milk and some food from the local farms, particularly the Howse Family at Elms Farm.

The Seacourt Bridge public house was opened in 1936 and Elms Parade in 1937, providing the growing settlement with a focal area around which further facilities were added later. Described in John Hanson's *The Changing Faces of Botley and North Hinksey* "Elms Parade ... was a significant development for it brought to Botley a sense of suburban identity and the wider range of retail outlets which the rapidly growing local community, including Cumnor Hill, demanded" (1995, 45). A generous space was left between the shops and the road in order to reduce the impact of ribbon development on the frontage. A Church of England church (St Peter and St Paul's) was established next to the parade by 1936 using a temporary building. This was replaced with the present brick church in 1958.

Mid to late 20th century expansion

Following the Second World War housing expanded rapidly, including further development of the Elms Farm Estate southwards including the 'tree roads' leading up to Lime Road.

In the late 1950s Westminster College moved to the large site on Harcourt Hill (formerly another local farm) which now forms part of Oxford Brookes University.

The A34 was opened in 1965, creating a physical and psychological barrier between Old Botley and North Hinksey Village and the wider suburb.

Further facilities were added to the local centre around Elms Parade in the 1960s, including a Library, construction of which required demolition of the historic farmhouse at Elms Farm, which had been used as a library during the 1950s. A ballroom and community centre was built in 1968 as a communal facility whilst the shopping centre was expanded through construction of the West Way Centre behind as a low-level precinct behind Elms Parade. This also included an office building (West Way House). A baptist chapel, described by Tyack et al. as "An accomplished Modernist composition of brick cubes with fin-like aluminium projections on the roof" (2010, 178) was built at eastern end of the West Way Centre on Chapel Lane.

East of the A34 the construction of Seacourt Tower in 1965-6 created a gateway feature at the entrance to Oxford that is instantly recognisable from its distinctive rooftop spire. Its construction started the formation of a new area of office and industrial character that separated the emerging suburban centre at Elms Parade in the west from the historic Old Botley hamlet to the east.

The construction of the A420 bypass to the north west and north of the suburb in 1976 creating a defining feature to the north of the suburb.

During the 1980s the Ballroom and Community hall were demolished and replaced with a further office block. Seacourt Tower was substantially altered during 1984 and further large-scale commercial premises (Seacourt Tower Retail Park) added to the north for Habitat and Texas (latterly Homebase).

Just outside of North Hinksey Parish to the west of Tilbury Lane significant expansion occurred in the Dean Court area within Cumnor Parish in the 1950s (the Pinnocks Way Estate), and again in the 1980s (the Fogwell Road Estate). Although not within the Parish both of these developments have had a major impact on use of the facilities within North Hinksey Parish and the increasing numbers of vehicles passing through the Parish.

Recent Changes

Two major housing developments which have been built over the period 2015-17 will have a major long term impact on the Parish. An extension of the Fogwell Estate continuing eastwards across Tilbury Lane as far as Hazel Road (known as Tilbury

Fields) and falling within both Cumnor and North Hinksey Parishes, combined with a further development off Lime Road (known as Harcourt Place), raised the number of Parishioners to around 5,000 by the end of 2017. That figure compares with a population of only a few hundred individuals in 1900.

A proposed major redevelopment of Botley Centre received planning approval in 2016, and work is due to start later in 2018 and last until 2021. Further details about this mixed use commercial development are included in section E. Character Areas, part 1 West Way, below. Further changes have also been made in recent years to the Seacourt Retail Centre behind Seacourt Tower, and planning approval has been given for additional works. Although these changes will result in a number of practical impacts on local residents, the visual impact will be negligible, and Seacourt Tower itself will not be affected.

Section E. Character Areas

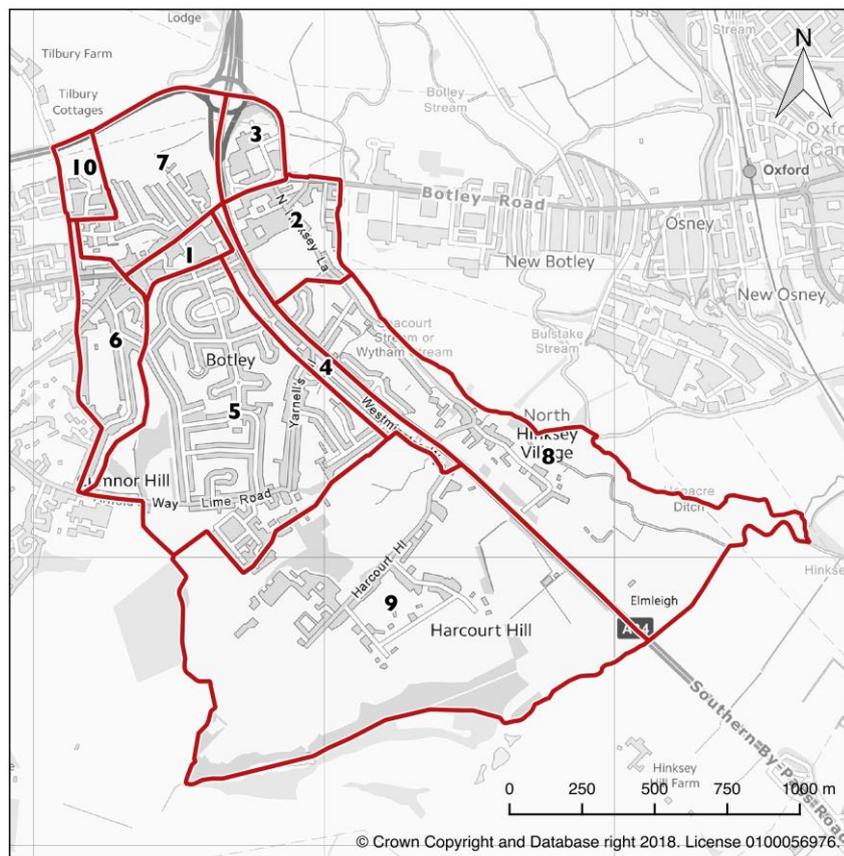
Introduction to the Character Area Statements

North Hinksey Parish exhibits several strong characteristics resulting from its initial rapid development during the 1920s and 30s. Its development at a consistent scale and use of a range of contemporary architectural mores contribute to the strong sense of place and character. Many features of character are repeated and found across the suburb.

However, it is possible to recognise areas of distinct character within the suburb, reflecting the process of its development, including discrete episodes or forms of development. By dividing the suburb into a series of character areas the Key positive features of each of the areas can be better recognised and the particular significances that these may have can be highlighted. It is also possible to consider the issues and opportunities to enhance each area individually.

The ten identified Character Areas, which are shown on the Character Area Map below and their boundaries further described in Appendix C, are as follows:

1. West Way & Botley Centre, 2. Old Botley, 3. Seacourt Tower and Retail Park, 4. Westminster Way, 5. Elms Rise Estate, 6. Cumnor Rise, 7. North of West Way, 8. North Hinksey Village, 9. Harcourt Hill, 10. Tilbury Fields.



 Character Area

Character Areas Map

Format

Each of the Character Areas is described in terms of its general character before then assessing its key positive character features. In places this analysis has been divided between individual streets where a higher level of detail has been considered desirable. At the end of each character statement the key issues affecting the character of each area are highlighted.

How to use them

The Character Statements provide a record of the character of the suburb as it is at present as a point on a continuing process of development and change. It is expected that when planning or considering development or other possible changes to the area public organisations and private concerns should have regard to Character Statements to assess how their proposals will affect character. They should also use this evidence to consider how development can be designed to support the positive features of the area's character, avoid adding to and potentially help mitigate negative characteristics. There may even be potential to enhance the character of the area by successfully integrating with it.

1 West Way & Botley Centre

The following descriptions relating to the Botley Centre / West Way Shopping Precinct area were correct at the time this assessment was carried out in 2014, and when this report was finalised in January 2018, however, major redevelopment works approved in 2016 are planned to start later in 2018 which will have a significant impact on this area once they are implemented.

Although the frontage of Elms Parade shops will remain, it will be backed on to by a number of three to five storey structures, and to the east it will be towered over by a block rising at its highest point to eight storeys alongside the A34. This massive structure will be visible from many other areas of the Parish such as the Elms Rise Estate, and also it will become a second feature (alongside Seacourt Tower) that greets people arriving from Oxford.

The current West Way Shopping Precinct, along with the two office blocks on the east of the site (Elms Court and the Grant Thornton building), Seacourt Hall and the Botley Baptist Church will be among the structures demolished to make way for the new development so these works will significantly alter the character of this key area at the heart of the Parish.

As the redevelopment works have not even started yet, and are planned to take until 2021 to complete, it is not possible to carry out a character assessment of how this area will eventually look, so the 2014 assessment has been retained here.

General Character Description

The West Way & Botley Centre character area runs from A34 flyover to the bottom of Cumnor Hill and is defined at the macro scale by the broad stretch of road and the mixture of commercial, residential and community uses. The position of this area on the local road network and the mixture of uses makes this an important focus of activity within the Parish.

Elms Parade terrace of shops and the Seacourt Bridge Pub, which face each other across the main street, create a focal point within this area in terms of the suburb's identity. The architecture of the older, Edwardian through to 1930s semi-detached houses and the 1930s shopping parade, public house and further houses set the tone for the area. This is what most people think of as the centre of Botley. Additions from the mid-20th century onwards that support this central function include St Peter and St Paul's Church, the West Way shopping precinct and the sheltered housing complex of Field House.



Elms Parade

The wide street provides a sense of place with openness and generally low scale of development that maintains the suburban character and provides a relaxed atmosphere, dissipating the impact of the heavy road traffic to an extent and providing sweeping vistas towards Cumnor Hill to the west. There is a green character to the streetscene resulting from areas of tree planting on boundaries and in public space, although this could be enhanced. Looking back to the east the taller buildings including Elms Court seem out of scale with their surroundings and detract from the suburban quality of the area, overshadowing the road and pedestrian environment.

The West Way shopping development area has a somewhat fractured sense of place. The 1960s set piece shopping precinct has, on the one hand, a strong presence, and whilst not a particularly elegant or refined example of 60s modernism, it reads as typical of that more innocent and optimistic era.

On the other hand, the spaces and buildings outside the precinct area convey no clear sense of place, and lack any urban design, townscape or architectural integrity – they are a badly fitting assortment of various design intentions from different periods over the last 40 years, and pay little or no respect to the original West Way shopping area, or to Elms Parade.

None-the-less, taken together, and in terms of the high level of use, the range of outlets – both multiples and independents – and the natural rhythm of busy-ness and quiet over the course of any week, the area has a comfortable and lived in familiarity.



The 1960s Elms Court is out of scale with the suburban scale of West Way



Set back from the main road frontage, Elms Parade frames the focal space for the suburb

Key Positive Character Features

Spaces:

West Way provides a spacious environment at the centre of the Parish with an openness that is distinct from more urban areas such as the shopping streets of nearby towns or the city. Indeed, it is more open than many of the surrounding streets, emphasising its role as a focus of activity.

The breadth of the road is extended to either side by the set back and transparent or low boundaries of the public house and the parade of shops, church and sheltered housing, providing a greater sense of openness that helps to dissipate some of the impact of the heavy road traffic, which otherwise has a negative impact on the street. This set-back contributes to a low intensity use of space that provides a relaxed atmosphere and was an element of the layout that planners in the 1930s created as part of the suburb's character.

The generally low-scale of development contributes further to the openness and light character of the environment. The road is straight throughout the focal area, contributing to its character as a single space, with the curve as it changes to Cumnor Hill to the west and the tunnel under the A34 creates a sense of transition at either end.

The use of the curved topped railings to provide a boundary definition to the area in front of the parade of shops provides a suitably ornamented definition to the area, whilst maintaining the openness of views across the area. The well-maintained car park spaces in front of St Peter and St Paul's Church and the care home, combined with the green garden boundaries to private houses on the north side of the road provide a green environment at the west end of the main street. At the east end of the street the green space in front of the 'Grant Thornton Building', includes semi-mature trees that combine with those on the north side of the street to create a green entrance to the character area from the tunnel under the A34.

The West Way frontages have a mixture of different plot widths, reflecting the development of different uses. The parade of shops sets the maximum width at the centre of the area, with plots of apparently diminishing size to either side. Behind the main street frontage, the West Way shopping precinct is a well-defined enclosed space that provides level access to shopping for pedestrians and a secure, overlooked shopping environment with a higher intensity of usage. The space of the precinct is well designed to support the function of the surrounding shop units and also acts as a through route opening into the central square. The two-storey scale of surrounding buildings provides a human scale environment that supports the commercial use.

At either end of Elms Parade narrower streets give access to the land behind, providing a legible structure to the space. The narrow car parking space to the front of Elms Parade provides a suitable location for 'stopping off' shopping whilst the small car park just to the west is of a size suitable to the local shopping offer of the West Way precinct without encouraging overuse that would be deleterious to local traffic volumes.



The central precinct of the West Way Shopping Centre on a quiet Sunday. On weekdays, this is a busy local hub.



Like Elms Parade, Seacourt Bridge Public House provides a strong 1930s feel in the centre of the area.

Buildings

The architectural character is mixed – Positive features are Elms Parade, the Seacourt Bridge pub and the housing, in association with the 1930s residential streets to both north and south of the centre. These form a coherent whole and represent a good example of an interwar suburban type, with retail, residential, and leisure, drawing on the same architectural style and two storey scale. Most of the main buildings (including Elms Parade) are no more than 10m to 15m high (however see the negative aspects below regarding the office blocks). This combination helps to create the area’s character and sense of place. The character of the northern side of West Way is better defined through the survival of 1930s large semi-detached houses. Few buildings within this core area suggest change of use since their construction, suggesting a continuing suitability for their original use despite the consequences of changing lifestyles.

Elms Parade is a central building that gives a sense of place, with historical associations with the developers of a large part of the suburb and with aesthetic value due to its symmetrical design, Neo-classical features and uniformity of alterations. Whilst the building has received some alterations in the east, such as replacement of timber windows with plastic windows of a similar form and a single design of aluminium shopfronts and removal of the parapets of the end pavilions and central bay, these do not harm the overall uniformity of composition and were generally made some fifty years ago. During the intervening time the building in its altered form has remained the focus of the area.

Part of the shared palette of materials of the 1930s buildings that contribute to the character of Botley are the use of hipped plain tile roofs, dark brown brick and white painted render or harling.

The mix and balance of uses creates an appropriate level of vitality - the evidence of the thriving independents, and the low vacancy rates in the commercial premises associated with Elms Parade itself suggests that this is at present a viable local centre providing an appropriate range of services.

The buildings of the shopping precinct are described as a “period piece” by Tyack, et. al. (2010, 178). They have a cubic modernist character with large shop windows dominating their ground floor frontages, tile fronted canopies above and first floor

fenestration all providing a strong horizontal emphasis. Overall, they have a coherence that helps to define the precinct and have some shared character with the Baptist Church to the east as a result of the use of dark brown brick. Again, the buildings have received some minor alterations but have generally demonstrated their flexibility by accommodating a range of different commercial uses over the past fifty years.

Activity

The level of activity within the shopping precinct and to the front of the shopping parade is appropriate to its scale and function, providing a busy local centre serving the needs of the suburb. The public spaces maintain a positive level of activity until the end of trading hours at 10pm.

The busyness of pedestrians for the shops, alighting from buses or crossing for the access to the schools makes this a lively and active space, particularly during the week in the morning and late afternoon. During weekdays and especially on Saturdays the area can be very busy but is often quieter on Sundays.

The precinct provides an important social space for the community, away from the busy traffic laden road to the north, playing an important role for the interaction of the community and its sense of cohesion.

The shelter and enclosure provided by the shopping precinct's position and surrounding buildings provides a quiet, traffic free space

Views

Views along West Way include the key view westwards that takes in the shopping parade and church with greenery of spaces to the front and the line of the road and frontages to the curve of Cumnor Hill beyond. The greenery in the view and the gradual break-up of the building line to the west contributes to the positive suburban character in the streetscene.

This is one of the most familiar views of the Parish and represents a point of arrival for many entering from the east. Further along the street Elms Parade dominates views from the north side of the street, enclosing the central area of West Way. The ratio of space to the two, or three storey buildings is part of the positive character of the views, allowing a high proportion of skyscape and light.

Looking east Seacourt Tower stands out as a landmark rising above the dual carriageway and is now seen as a positive feature by many people, representing the entrance to the Parish from the city and from the A34.

Views within the precinct are well contained by the buildings focusing on the commercial frontages.

Landscape

The greenery of the spaces in front of the buildings makes an important contribution to softening the hard appearance of the roads and buildings. The green front

gardens of houses in particular help to support the atmosphere of a residential suburb despite the impact of the busy road running through it.

Within the precinct the green landscape is limited but some greenery is provided in concrete planters that helps to soften the hard features of the enclosed space.

Negative features and issues

Space

The scale and dark brick of the Elms Court Building create a dark, overshadowed area in the east of the character area, exacerbating the negative impact of the tunnel-like entrance under the A34.

The small number of safe crossing points over West Way and heavy traffic detracts from the amenity of the street, although it is well connected to surrounding areas for pedestrians and road users.

The 'back areas' of the precinct and Elms Parade are not well designed and would benefit from better enclosure to reduce their visibility from the routes through to Arthray Road in particular

The two car parks to east and west of the precinct are simple hard surfaced areas that have not received any attention in terms of landscaping and are poorly related to surrounding development with only little overlooking or passive surveillance.

Paving materials throughout the space are not of high quality and would be considered as drab within the precinct. Generally, they provide reasonable surfaces but are likely to need refurbishment in the near future.

Buildings

The later additions from the 60s, 70s and beyond detract from the architectural and townscape integrity of the early 20th century surroundings and, apart from framing certain key spaces, detract from the architectural type of the character area. This is a result of the choice of materials, scale and form, none of which have helped to integrate with the early 20th century character of the suburb. The three main office blocks are 15m to 20m in height, which is higher than other buildings in the Botley Centre area, but less high than some buildings at the Westminster Way (eastern) end of the proposed redevelopment.

New flats, built in the 2000s have also failed to adequately integrate with the area's established positive character.

The hard, urban quality of the recent buildings and their increasing scale – i.e. from the '60s onwards – are not in keeping with the suburban quality of the West Way, both in style and scale, and are another significantly negative note in Botley's otherwise strong genius loci.

Activity

West Way is at capacity in terms of vehicle traffic, and is often a difficult and potentially dangerous street to cross. The measures taken to make it safe – in particular the barriers running along much of the centre of the street – add to this negative character, including a highly cluttered public realm of highways signage. Not only is this an unsafe environment for pedestrians but it is also a polluted environment that reduces the attractiveness of the shopping areas.

Views

Views eastward along West Way are dominated by Elms Court, the scale, rectilinear form and position forward of the main building line, of which, mean they detract from the established suburban character of the area. The flyover of the A34 is a heavy, engineered structure that makes a harsh contrast with the green, low scale of the character area and suburb in general.

Landscape

West Way suffers from its hard-surfaced character, dominated by highways furniture and signage, which does not support the green character of the suburb. This dominance of hard landscaping has spread to the area in front of the parade of shops which and the car parks to either side of the precinct.

2 Old Botley

General Character Description

The small hamlet of Old Botley survives as a cluster of historic buildings at the eastern edge of the Parish grouped around a triangle of narrow lanes that reflect the development of a road network built up from, at least, the late medieval period. The hamlet retains its enclosed, informal character in spite of the thundering traffic that passes it to enter Oxford from the regional road network.

A small group of 17th century stone cottages and 18th and 19th century brick houses make a strong contribution to the historic rural character, to which tree planting within the core of the area and the narrow lanes add further.

Nevertheless, this small area has undergone considerable change through infilling developments and commercial use associated with its position at a busy road junction. The resultant mixed character includes an industrial area between North Hinksey Lane and the A34 embankment, several medium and large sized office buildings to the south and east of the original hamlet and a MacDonalds takeaway restaurant with a significant sized car park.

Key Positive Character Features

Spaces

The central lanes still have the narrow width that was suitable to horse-drawn vehicles and are bounded by the stone cottages and 19th century houses set at the rear of the pavement creating a tight sense of enclosure, reflecting the former quiet character of the lanes.

The small number of green spaces and green verges to the lanes to the south with hedgerow boundaries provide some offsetting for the dominating hard surfaces of car parks and yards. Several other boundaries are marked by stone walls, which again, reflect the historic rural character of the area.

Botley Cemetery on the southern edge of the area opened in 1897 and is a green open space with historic and communal significance containing nationally significant Commonwealth War Graves. The smallish 16th and 17th Century Old Manor House lies adjacent to the cemetery on the south side.

On the opposite side of North Hinksey Lane a small community orchard and nature reserve are located, providing additional greenery and open space.

The green-banked Seacourt Stream marks the eastern edge of the area with other areas of informal roadside green space add to the character of the area as a former village. This includes a second small stream, flanked by willow trees, which makes a brief appearance alongside a section of one industrial estate, and a second appearance on one side of the 'triangle' of lanes, but otherwise runs underground nowadays along its entire length.

Older houses are set close together forming two small, informally organised terraces that frame a narrow section of North Hinksey Lane reflecting the organic process of development in the historic village around its network of lanes.

Buildings

A small core of houses survives in the centre. The houses feel almost squeezed out, and few have gardens of any size, but they are still interesting and worth preserving and are worthy of protection for the contribution they make to the sense of place.

The eclectic mixture of buildings reflects the age of Old Botley as a historic settlement and its organic process of development. Domestic buildings range from 17th to 20th century, with striking examples from 17th ('Frog/Snail' stone cottage), 18th (South View House – Grade 2 listed and built of redbrick with a stair tower at the rear), 19th (Cemetery Lodge built in stone with ornate gables and mullioned windows) and 20th (1930s semis). The Royal Agricultural Benevolent Society headquarters at the NW end of North Hinksey Lane was formerly the Old Bakery, and probably dates from the 17th century as well. The 'Old Thatches' is also very old, though now modernized and in multiple occupation.



South View, with stone garden wall in front and the strongly contrasting Seacourt Tower behind

The historic Baptist chapel also stands out as a building that represents an important aspect of the historic village's character and has now been reused as offices.

Away to the south of the main cluster of buildings lies The Old Manor House, with several parts of its main structure dating back to the 16th and 17th Centuries.

Several of the modern developments have tried to borrow from the palette of materials or detailing of the older houses, cottages and sheds, although this is sometimes of dubious value given the scale of these buildings.

Landscape

There are six trees in McDonald's car park with tree preservation orders on them. They are primarily broad leaved, including a thriving young oak tree, which helps to sustain a small element of the historic rural character.

The green lawns and trees in South View's garden provided an island of greenery in the centre of the settlement that softens the surrounding hard environment of car parks and roads.

The community orchard and nature reserve to the south are valued green spaces and a community resource.

Activity

In spite of the busy vehicle traffic the area is also busy with pedestrians and cyclists as part of a main route from the Parish into Oxford city.

The area is quieter at weekends.

Views

There are glimpsed views of the countryside and woods of Wytham Hill.

Negatives Features and Key Issues

Spaces

Old Botley's historic village character has been severely eroded by the dominance of the heavily engineered highway of West Way/Botley Road and the coverage of open spaces by large tarmaced car parks serving the restaurant, offices and industrial yards.

Street furniture consists mainly of the dominating highways signage and tall street lights that dominate the area at night.

The competing uses of spaces define the area, with industrial and office, including Minns and Hinksey Business Parks and Walbrook Court overwhelming the historic village character of the area. Curtis Yard Industrial Estate and Hinksey Business Park are both active with light industry. Minns, Curtis Yard and Hinksey Business Park are all recognised as strategic employment sites within the Vale of White Horse District Council's Local Plan 2031.

The little lane at the heart of Old Botley is generally blocked by parked cars. Road markings may not be well designed and create points of conflict between cars and pedestrians accessing or leaving the village to West Way.

At night there is considerable light pollution from the street lighting and offices. The roads are a constant source of noise and air pollution although this is at its worst during rush hours.

Buildings

Commercial buildings built over the past 30 years include huge new brick-built gabled offices, with a 'cottage style' but on a much larger scale.

Activity

The area is extremely busy with road traffic including cars, lorries and buses, which compete with pedestrians and cyclists on the crowded roads several of which weren't designed for the weight of use they currently receive. Much of the local traffic consists of commercial vehicles, some very large, entering and exiting the industrial estates.

Views

Seacourt Tower is a dominating feature in views and makes a strong contrast with the character of the historic village buildings within this area. Some residents consider this building to be a positive and characterful feature, however to others it is an intrusive and ill-fitting structure.

3 Seacourt Tower and Retail Park

General Character Description

Seacourt Tower and Retail Park is a tidy mixed office and retail estate set between West Way, the A34 and the A34 slip Road. Seacourt Tower is recognised as a strategic employment site in the Vale of White Horse District Council's Local Plan 2031. The A34 flyover forms a visual and physical barrier between the estate and the wider area of Botley to the west. The A34 slip road effectively isolates it from the countryside of the Thames Floodplain to the north and east.

When first developed in the 1960s it replaced the historic Seacourt Farm, cutting off Old Botley hamlet from the countryside to the north. The development is self-contained with its own internal distribution roads and car parks separated from the surrounding roads by green landscaping and, currently, accessed from a single point on West Way. The tower, with its distinctive fleche or spire, is the main surviving feature of that first development and has become a distinctive local landmark providing a gateway feature for the Parish.

The concave surfaces of the inner angles of its cruciform plan and its gull-wing roof add further to its visual interest, although these are less evident in distant views from Wytham Hill where it appears to be a blocky, over-tall structure in the foreground of view to the historic city centre with its famous skyline of dreaming spires. The surrounding office block has added a bulkier frontage to West Way although this is given a sculptural quality by stepping up and in towards the tower with stairwells expressed externally as bowed projections.

The building has been successfully utilised in the last thirty years and provides an accessible and well used office space just outside the city. The large retail sheds to the north have been less successful and are currently in the process of major modification to provide a group of smaller units, reflecting changing patterns in modern retailing. The petrol station is also shortly to be dismantled and replaced. To the north and west steep wooded banks form a backdrop to the development and lead up to the A34 and its slip road.

Key Positive Character Features

Spaces

Seacourt Tower dominates the space as a focal building. The car parks are enclosed on three sides by the commercial buildings providing a strong sense of overlooking and activity that makes this a secure feeling environment.

Green edges to the estate emphasise its separation but also make a positive contribution to the appearance of surrounding roads (by **contrast** with the south side of West Way).

Buildings

The tower is known locally as the Botley Cathedral and was originally a multi-storey garage with offices, but has since been converted to remove the car parking and

include banking and legal company offices. The tower's curved windows are an attractive feature demonstrating investment in its architectural quality.

Views

Seacourt Tower acts as a focal feature in many views and is regarded positively by many residents, although it intrudes in views of the more ancient Oxford skyline from Wytham Hill to the west partly as a result of its materials but also due to the striking form of its gull-wing roof and considerable bulk compared to the more finely proportioned historic high buildings of the city.

Looking out, the countryside of the Thames Valley to the west and Wytham Hill to the north provide a visual connection to the area's rural setting and past. The wooded hills shelter and 'look down' on the estate, providing a sense of enclosure by the wider landscape.

Landscape

Although this is generally a hard, semi-urban area the estate has been enhanced by dense planting of trees on the banks leading up to the surrounding roads. These will provide an important service both as wildlife habitat and by screening the passing traffic from view, but also help to reduce the noise and air pollution of the busy trunk road passing the estate.

Activity

The office use has proved successful and expanded over the long term of the estate's development.

Negative Features and Key Issues

Activity

The streaming traffic on West Way and the A34 junction cuts this area off from the wider suburb, which is exacerbated by the long, inactive frontages of the Seacourt Tower office building. As such, it has a strong sense of separation from the rest of the Parish.

The only access to the site at present is from West Way, forcing lorry deliveries to be made using the local road network. The retail development has proved of limited success in the medium term despite the easy access to local transport networks and edge of city location.

The office use of the large Seacourt Tower building means that the site has large areas of inactive frontage that make this a rather sterile area that is not comfortable for pedestrians. Permeability for pedestrians to the commercial area to the north is poor and, generally the self-contained character of the estate makes it feel cut off from the wider Parish.

4 Westminster Way

General Character Description

Westminster Way lies between the Elms Rise Estate and the A34. The road was originally built as Oxford's eastern by-pass, but was quiet enough that it developed as a road of large detached and semi-detached houses with prestigious views over the city to the west.

The construction of the much larger A34 and the need to build a high barrier to reduce the noise of four lanes of traffic has severely impacted on the area's attractive historic character. As a rat run linking Botley Centre to the A34 it is also busy with traffic. Nevertheless, several groups of attractive early and mid-20th century semi-detached houses with and generous green front gardens, as well as a sizeable green gap at the southern end where Raleigh Park runs down the road, contribute positively to the attractiveness of the area.

Key Positive Character Features

Spaces

Despite the negative impact of the long sound barrier wall on the A34 side of the road, much of Westminster Way is a light, open space with a green character. The consistent two storey scale of houses, green front gardens and hedgerows that enclose the road at its southern end contribute to this positive aspect of the area's character.

Gaps between the buildings contribute to the sense of spaciousness, with greenery seen between the houses.

The area was developed with regular width frontage plots creating a strong horizontal rhythm in views and reflecting the formal planning of the area's development. The frontages become narrower, creating a tighter grain of development, in the north west. This creates a transition between the areas that bound the Elms Rise Estate and the larger plots of Yarnell's Hill area further south.

The plots are fronted by low brick walls that allow views through to the front gardens adding to the spaciousness and green character of the southern parts of the street.

The road is long but sinuous road with a number of 'chicanes' and curves that create foreshorten views providing more enclosed areas.

In the south-east the road is separated from the A34 by a tall hedgerow and tree line, creating a more attractive green area.

Buildings

The houses make a very strong positive contribution to the area's character including well designed early and mid-20th century semi-detached, two-storey suburban houses of around 10m height. They form groups of consistent design reflecting a chronology of development starting with the bow window fronted redbrick houses

built in the 1920s and 30s in the north west and, to half-timbered Tudorbethan semi's with distinctive scat slide roofs to either side built in the late 1940s or early '50s in the south west near Raleigh Park Road, and late 1950s 'self-build' houses that were completed around 1960.

The buildings generally have high quality materials. The long group of 1920's/30s houses at the north-east end of the road stand out for the high quality of their red brick frontages, laid in Flemish bond with four centred arched headers to the front doors and robust transoms and mullions to windows. The chimneys of their rooftops contributed to the rhythm of the roofscape in views down the road to the north east.

The 1950s houses in the south also have red brick ground floors with the half-timbered upper floor frontage filled by white painted render panels and a herringbone brick noggin central panel.



1930s semi's at Westminster Way with a view towards West Way and Wytham Hill to the north west. Chicanes create some sinuous sections in the views along the roads.

Few of these houses have been extended other than low level garage extensions to the side and most retain their characteristic architectural features giving the area a sense of integrity as good quality housing built as an attractive suburban development with views over the city to the east.

Activity

The area retains its residential character although this is heavily affected by through traffic (see below).

Landscape

The area benefits from numerous well maintained gardens, especially at the southern end, contributing to its green suburban character.

The topography is level in the south with a slope towards the southern end that provides more open vistas towards West Way and Wytham Hill beyond.

The steep sloped of the hill to the south west means that houses tend to stand above the road, giving them a high level of prominence and ensuring the road is well overlooked as a public place.

Views

The 'famous' view to Oxford is seen from high windows in the houses at the south end.

All of the buildings look out eastwards onto the A34.

From the street level the A34 is screened by a thick line of trees in the south east or the long noise attenuation barrier, which is less appealing, in the north west.



The attractive 1950s houses at the south west end of the road with a high hedgerow separating the space from the A34

Looking along the road along the road to the north-west views are channelled by the well-defined building line towards Wytham Woods, and this view is quite dramatic as you pass the turn to Yarnell's Hill on the way to the Elms Parade shops.

The Roman Catholic church at the bottom of Yarnell's Hill is quite distinctive.

At the north-west end of the road the roofscape is very neat and uniform as a feature of the views encouraging the eye forward towards Wytham Hill.

Negative Features and Issues

Spaces

Although screened from view, the A34's presence has had a major impact on Westminster Way 'squashing' the road by removing the space to the north east through the presence of the long uniformly coloured horizontal screen of the noise attenuation barrier. The barrier has a poor appearance, pulling down the otherwise attractive character of the street. Above this the tops of lorries are seen continually rushing by.

The road surface is poor with uneven areas and potholes, whilst the carriageway is too narrow for the present volume of traffic using it as a route to the A34 with buses having difficulty in negotiating the route due to the chicanes and the need to pass

cars coming from the opposing direction. Parked cars along several sections of the road also frequently cause awkward hazards for traffic.

The pavement disappears at the south end when the houses finish and Raleigh Park starts making this an inaccessible area for pedestrians.

The bell-mouth junction of Yarnell's Hill is very wide making it dangerous for pedestrians to cross.

The pavement is damaged in parts from heavy vehicles mounting the pavement.

Buildings

In recent years several blocks have been built at the northern end of Westminster Way (north of Arthray Road) adjoining the Botley Central area. Although completely out of character and of much larger scale than other properties in Westminster Way (including the buildings they replaced), they gained planning approval because of the larger, rectilinear buildings in the current and proposed Botley Centre.

Activity

The impact of traffic on Westminster Way is severe, as this road forms a much used rat run between West Way and the A34 used by lorries, cars and buses and conflicting with its residential character.

Large numbers of lorries can be seen even though the A34 is below the level of Westminster Way. The noise of traffic is severe even though sound-absorbing barriers have been installed.

Traffic on A34 continues throughout the night and results in air pollution at all times.

Some parking by commuters to Oxford at the north-west end of the road churns up the grass verge, which should be an attractive feature of the area and further narrows the road.

Landscape

Several gardens at the north end have either been tarmaced or entirely gravelled or paved over for car parking, reducing the greenery of the streetscene.

Views

Views are generally very limited views across the A34 from the houses except maybe from upper storey, as a result of the noise barrier.

5 Elms Rise Estate

General Character

Located just to the south of Botley Centre this area is separated from the main through roads of the Parish by surrounding development and has a quiet residential character, although the central axis of Crabtree Road/Finmore Road can be a busy route for road traffic. Accounting for a little under one third of the physical area of the Parish the Elms Rise Estate probably houses around half of its permanent residents.

The roads running down the hill provide ready access for pedestrians to local services at Botley Centre. It is almost entirely a residential area with just a corner shop and take-away restaurant located at Laburnum Road. The public house that provided a social focus was lost to redevelopment for flats some ten years ago. The area was primarily developed in two phases separated by the Second World War but is highly consistent in the style and scale of building, character of spaces and landscape creating a classic mid-20th century suburban character of two storey, pyramid roofed semi-detached houses set back with green front gardens and roads with narrow footpaths separated from carriageway by narrow grassed verges.

As a successful residential area there are many long-term residents with a stable population that has developed a strong sense of community has the feeling of a village. Easy access to formal and informal open space supports the health and vitality of the community, whilst the area has a well-cared for character, the result of the care taken of the area by both local residents and Vale of White Horse Council.

A distinctive feature of the area is the impact of the topography of Harcourt Hill, which provides channelled views down the street towards Botley Centre and over the rooftops to the green countryside of Wytham Hill beyond, crowned by Wytham Woods. At the southern extremity of the area at Lime Road the rural edge of the Parish is reached with attractive views southward to Boars Hill and the large Louie Memorial Playing Fields which offer major outdoor leisure facilities.

A recent housing estate (Harcourt Place, built 2015-17) is located immediately off Lime Road to the south but is mainly hidden behind trees that run along the south-eastern edge of the Louie Memorial Upper Playing Field.

Key Positive Character Features

Spaces

The breadth of roads, green environment and low scale of development, with gaps between semi-detached buildings provide a low-density character to the area. Houses are consistently set back from the road with a formal building line providing the spacious environment but also ensuring privacy for occupants.

The curving lines of roads, particularly at Arthray Road and St Paul's Crescent provide an organic character to the streets that benefits from the greenery of hedgerows and trees to break up the formality of the planned streets.

The broad spaces of roads and front gardens are enclosed by the building lines either side with buildings rising to a uniform two-storeys scale with frontages set at least 22 metres apart resulting in a spacious character.

Front boundaries are defined in a mixture of materials including shrubs and hedges that provide colour and softness in the streetscene. On the upper slopes these are mainly low redbrick walls providing a more consistent character.

A small number of shared green spaces include the large open space at St Paul's Crescent, which is used by local residents.

Narrow paths run between streets creating a highly permeable environment for pedestrians.

At street junctions the buildings are angled to face the corners creating more open spaces and maintaining the active frontage. Numerous short cul-de-sacs run off the main streets of the estate. These have stepped building lines that gradually increase the distance between frontages creating broad spaces where the buildings encircle the road's end, normally with a small green island at the centre of the turning circle.

Hutchcomb Road has a less uniform character and represents a transition to the lower density and more organically developed streets of Cumnor Rise to the west. In places the street has a less rigidly defined building line but houses are set well back from the road, providing green garden space to the front ensuring an open environment and privacy for occupants.

Buildings

The estate has a high degree of architectural uniformity although the pre and post Second World War elements can be recognised by a change in materials and the design of bay windows. In the earlier phases of development the use of white painted render for cladding and bow fronted bay windows were chosen as modernist style features in the 1930s. The later houses tend to have a split between brick ground floors and unpainted render cladding to upper floors and are flat fronted creating a less detailed streetscene. Essentially there is a high degree of consistency within streets.



Typical Elms Rise Estate housing.



The View to West Way and Wytham Woods from Crabtree Road.

Most properties have had their windows updated but there are a number of surviving examples of the historic window and door patterns. The windows of the 1930s houses had glazing bars providing a horizontal emphasis that highlighted the curving fronts of the bays and contributed to the modernist style. An occasional rare example of art-deco coloured glass glazing stands out as a special survival.

The houses surrounding St Paul's Crescent stand out for a greater mixture of architectural detail including use of tile hanging and some half-timbered gables over bay windows emphasising the overlooking of the public space.

Occasionally garages stand out for the retention of art-deco style garage doors, providing a distinct historic period feature. The provision of garages, particularly in the later 1950s period of development helps to reduce the impact of on street car parking.

Again, Hutchcomb Road's architectural style is more mixed, including a variety of one and two-storey houses and greater variety of materials.

Generally additions to the building have been hidden at the rear of properties reducing the impact on the appearance and character of the area. Almost exclusively the 1930s to 1960s houses are two storey, with a typical height of no more than 10m to 12m.

Activity

This is a quiet residential area, generally with little road traffic but served by a useful bus route. Its busy times are at the beginning and end of the school day. Good passive surveillance, a strong sense of community and street lighting makes this area feel very safe at night.

Views

The upper roads tend to be long and straight, creating a number of channelled views down the hill, over the rooftops of buildings below and across the narrow valley to Wytham Hill beyond. These provide a visual connection to the nearby countryside that is an attractive element of the Parish. Lower down the slope the buildings of Botley Centre lie in the middle ground of these views.

The uniform pyramid roofs with central chimneys seen marching down the hillside in views from higher up provide a distinctive element in views over the estate.

Street furniture may be seen as a positive feature in views, particularly where flocks of birds perching on wires add movement to the scene.

Popular views include the vista from Louie Memorial Playing Fields at Arnolds Way, which takes in Port Meadow as well as Wytham Hill. Seacourt Tower also acts as an eye-catcher in some of these views and is popular as a local landmark and symbol of Botley. Views westward also include the tall trees of Hutchcomb's Copse, providing a connection with another element of the area's rural setting.

Landscape

The apparently universal front gardens play an important role in the green character and spacious character of the area, creating the soft suburban environment.

Grass verges to footpaths are another distinctive element of the streetscene, although these have had to be reinforced in areas where car parking crosses onto the pavement.

The lower streets have a gentle curve that helps them to ascend the hillside.

Hutchcomb's Copse is notable for streams running down the hillside and for areas of Fen, which has been identified as important wildlife habitat.

Key Negative Features and Issues

Spaces

Access for pedestrians is impeded by cars parked over the pavements' edges, reflecting existing high pressure for on-street car parking

Within Harcourt Place Estate itself there is currently a total lack of greenery despite all of the houses and flats having been completed. This gives it a feeling of still being a building site, although this lack of atmosphere should improve slightly over time once landscaping works have also been completed.

Buildings

On the southern edge of Elms Rise around Lime Road a number of the original properties have recently been replaced by larger buildings, or several houses on one site. Along with the development at Harcourt Place these properties are uncharacteristically larger in scale (often 3 storeys, and even 4 storeys in places), but the general use of red brick or white render, together with pyramidal roofing, combined with high levels of surrounding greenery, minimalises their intrusiveness.



Larger scale red brick / white render houses and flats in Harcourt Place Estate.

Views

The webs of overhead wires are particularly intrusive in views looking down the slopes towards Botley Centre and north towards Wytham Hill.

The 1960s Elms Court and Westway House are both intrusive features in the views across the suburb to Wytham Hill due to the scale and uncharacteristic rectilinear form. The larger buildings to be built on the Botley Centre site as part of the redevelopment will be even more intrusive because of their increased height.

Also the recently built Tilbury Fields Estate, although more distant, is highly intrusive because of the scale of the buildings.

In the landscape beyond the Parish the line of pylons marching through the gap between the two hills has a significant negative impact on the beauty of the rural landscape of the Oxford Green Belt.

Activity

The road traffic is noticeably busier in the lower areas of estate as a result of the area being used as a cut through to the shops at Botley Centre.

The addition of Harcourt Place Estate has increased road traffic passing through Elms Rise from the southern end of this area.

Landscape

The steep slope of the hill and gradual loss of water permeable surfaces has resulted in problems with excessive run-off during periods of heavy rain.

Unlike the remainder of this Character Area the recently built Harcourt Place Estate is almost entirely devoid of greenery within the estate itself in its current state. It does, however, benefit from significant numbers of trees surrounding the estate and adjoining green spaces with public access.

6 Cumnor Rise

General character description

Beyond the more formally planned development of Elms Farm housing developed along both Eynsham Road and Cumnor Hill in the 1920s and '30s as a more organic ribbon of large detached houses of unique design in generous plots. As a result the area has a suburban residential character but it also has a varied architectural character, based around 1930s styles. Given the size of these houses and the money invested in them, they are generally of a high architectural quality.

For the purposes of this document Cumnor Rise is being used to describe an approximately rectangular area running along the western boundary of the Parish from Eynsham Road down to the south-western corner of the Parish. As well as a short section of Eynsham Road and the bottom of Cumnor Hill it includes Hurst Rise Road and several short roads immediately off it, plus Cumnor Rise Road.

Houses are mostly set well back from the road with green garden boundaries and landscaped grounds to the front providing a green environment, with an informal character and high level of tree cover, supplemented in places where the copse and side lanes create breaks in the frontage. Scattered throughout the area are remnants of much older development, including several cottages in Botley Pound on Eynsham Road). The area has a general low scale of development restricted to two storeys with attractive views out to the countryside seen over rooftops or from the peripheries of the area, including the narrow rural lanes.

Key positive character features

Spaces

The main roads running through this character area are generally wide with long sweeping curves creating long, open and light spaces bounded by green hedgerow boundaries with tall trees providing occasional vertical emphasis and, in places, areas of more enclosed space.

Even where there is denser woodland beside the roads the area feels light due to the generous space of the road.

Narrow country lanes and footpaths (principally Cumnor Rise Road) provide a strong contrast and help to illustrate the earlier history of the area before the new turnpike road cut across the older field system. These lanes are generally darker, with trees arching over and creating shade.



A view of Cumnor Hill, garden trees frame the road, open countryside in the distance.



One of the area's rural character lanes. Hedgerows provide definition to the narrow road, houses well set back.

Road surfaces are generally plain black top, often without formal kerbs creating an informal feel that is a natural successor to the beaten earth roads of the historic landscape and helping to maintain the semi-rural character.

Houses stand well back from the road (providing privacy for residents) with large front gardens that provide an attractive setting to the houses but also add considerably to the openness of the road with very wide frontage-to-frontage distances.

Spaces between buildings are also generous, contributing further to the low-density character of the area.

The low front garden boundaries, generally hedges or low walls, allow views to front gardens, making an important contribution to the openness of the area (and making a contribution to security by allowing passive surveillance of property from the surroundings).

The housing steps up the hill, with the scale of development varying between one and two storeys contributing to the informality of the area and allowing views out to the countryside over the rooftops and woodland from high areas.

Buildings

The area is entirely residential, with Matthew Arnold School standing just to the south across Arnold's Way in Cumnor Parish. As such, the architecture is domestic, formed almost exclusively of detached houses of between one and one storeys.

The buildings include examples built throughout the 20th century but with a strong presence of 1920s and '30s architecture, which makes an important contribution to the area's historic character.



Large early 20th century houses and bungalows provide the basis of the area's architecture.

No. 11 Eynsham Road.

The range of designs includes references to the Arts and Crafts' and Vernacular Revival Styles, using a mixture of vernacular materials that provide a rich texture which complements the scatter of older buildings

The brick houses on Eynsham Road and a single stone house with thatched roof opposite (No. 11 Eynsham Road) provide evidence of the former settlement of Botley Pound and include houses made with the locally produced Chawley brick and tile providing evidence of the area's industrial past.

Many houses retain their original windows (including a range of different 20th century styles).

Generally the materials used are red brick and white painted render with plain tiled roofs often including hand-made tile that has a more varied colour, creating an attractive brindled effect of mellow orange tile.

Roof forms are highly varied but are generally pitched with a mixture of hipped and gable ended profiles. The retention of chimneys provides an interesting roofscape.

Landscape

The green character of the area is very distinctive influencing the character of the Parish as a whole through the contribution of numerous mature trees that are seen in views across the area.

The hedges and grass verges that bound the road are an important feature of the semi-rural character of the area with points where Hutchcomb's Copse breaks through the building line, providing gaps with a more sylvan feel.

The generous gardens of the area have afforded ample opportunity for tree planting including trees at the road frontage that frame views along the roads and at the rear of properties creating a green backdrop to view up to buildings.

The steep slope of the hill gives elevation to viewpoints allowing some sweeping vistas over the rooftops and trees below to the wider countryside including Wytham Hill and the Thames Valley.

The response of development to the slope of the hill, stepping down as individual buildings, which are placed to derive an aesthetic impact from positioning at the top of a rise, is a distinctive feature of the area's character.

Views

The long, gentle curves and tree lined character of the main routes gently leads the eye towards the vanishing point, taking in the green surroundings along the way and creates an unfolding a series of views along their length.

By contrast, the narrow country lane and footpath at Cumnor Rise Road have more restricted views.

There are many views out to the open countryside beyond the suburb from the area, including many glimpses between the widely-spaced buildings. Some of these are expansive, whilst others are framed by trees.

Activity

The area is quiet due to its exclusively residential use, with some busier times at the beginning and end of the day and particularly whilst children are arriving at and leaving Matthew Arnold School to the south.

Negative features and key issues

Spaces

There are a number of instances of single dwellings having been demolished and several houses being built on the plot. This is having a harmful impact on the character of generous spaces and plot sizes with gardens contributing to the semi-rural feel to the area.

The concrete road surface of one close is harsh and unattractive.

Buildings

Many houses have had windows replaced with models that do not contribute well to the design of the buildings.

Conifer Close stands out as a single development that has not matched the more general character of the area due to the greater density of development, formal design of space and lack of separation between plots and at the road frontage.

Landscapes

A number of Leylandii hedges stand out as negative features, creating visual barriers between the street and gardens.

Activity

Cumnor Hill is now a busy traffic route, which detracts to an extent, particularly when diesel powered lorries accelerate to climb the hill.

There is a low background noise of traffic on the dual carriageway.

Views

The pylons that march across the across open countryside detract from the aesthetic quality of the views out from the character area.

7 North of West Way

This area includes some of the earliest areas of suburban development in Botley, including the Edwardian terraced houses on Poplar Road and Elms Road. The area is not subject to through traffic and so is a tranquil residential area at present enjoying views northwards to the lower slopes of Wytham Hill and the woods above, providing an immediate connection with the area's rural setting. Later infilling to the earliest streets and the later additions of Hazel Road and Seacourt Road create a greater variety of housing including 1930s pyramid roofed semi's and 1960s bungalows that support a range of residents' needs.

Despite being some of the oldest streets of housing in the suburb these have maintained some of their early character with one (Poplar Road) remaining unadopted and unpaved with rustic gravelled surfaces. Occasional green front boundaries and small front gardens provide some greenery and softening to the streetscene. The streets vary in width with some very narrow streets creating intimate residential areas. Seacourt Road and Hazel Road both provide more hidden areas, set away from the main street of West Way. The strong street lines create channelled views either to the countryside to the north or to Botley Centre (including Elms Parade) to the south.



A view along the unpaved Poplar Road.



Terraced housing on Elms Road.

Key Positive Character Features

Spaces

The spaces are generally defined by low-scale buildings providing a light environment. The low trafficked character of the streets and pavements, separated from the road in some cases by narrow grassed verges, makes this a comfortable and accessible area.

Older streets are notable for areas of tight enclosure by terraced building lines which then open out into wider, more spacious areas with later buildings set back and with more gaps between buildings. This provides both the earlier character and a sense of history with a pleasant open and varied streetscene.

Front gardens on the older streets have low front boundary walls, hedges and fences that provide definition between the public realm and private defensible space.

Seacourt Road and Hazel Road are notable for the wider space between frontages with deep front gardens and provide something of a contrast to the two narrow streets at the entrance to this character area.

Seacourt Road follows a winding course creating a series of framed spaces that provide a more intimate enclosed character. In the west, the later 1960s period development includes shared lawned spaces around which the short terraces of bungalows are set, forming small garden squares with a spacious feel provided by the set back of buildings from the roadside.

Elms Road stands out for having a greater mixture of activity, including the Primary School and Medical Centre as well as a small area of flats (Nursery Close), in addition to private housing. However, the flats and school are set well back from the main road frontage with definition to the street provided by tall trees and green garden spaces.

Buildings

The streets are varied in the style of building, presenting a series of spaces each with its own strongly defined character. Poplar Road and Elms Road are both defined by red brick terraced houses built before 1914, probably using the locally produced Cumnor bricks. Those on Elms Road are half-rendered providing a mixture of materials. The mixture of buildings of different dates in these two streets provides a pleasing architectural timeline and sense of organic development over time that creates a village character.



Attractive green front boundaries on Elms Road.



The view over rooftops southward from Hazel Road.

Hazel Road and the eastern part of Seacourt Road were built up with uniform pyramid roofed semi's that share the 1930s character found in the Elms Rise Estate to the south. The terraced bungalows on the western part of Seacourt Road have a simple form and lack of ornament creating a low-scale area with a strongly uniform character.

The scale of development is predominantly two storeys, with a significant number of bungalows in Seacourt Road creating a uniformity that ties the area together along

with the general uniformity of materials within areas or groups of buildings. Overall these dwellings combine to give this Character Area one of the lowest average heights (virtually all residences are less than 10m to the roof ridge) in the Parish. The only significant larger scale housing consists of recently built flats in Nursery Close, but given their location on the edge of this area (next to the A34 and West Way) their impact on the rest of the Character Area is not major.

Whilst doors and windows have mainly been updated, the materials of buildings including cladding and roofs are generally unaltered, whilst chimneys contribute to a detailed and interesting roofscape.

Activity

The area has a 'villagey' residential character supported by the mixture of buildings, low scale of development, slow traffic speeds and presence of the school and views to green countryside.

Views

The strong building lines form a series of channelled views. The more architecturally varied Elms Road and Poplar Road provide a visually stimulating collection of frontages

Generally, the streets provide channelled views up to Wytham Woods north over green fields, which form one of the most attractive features of the area.

Hazel Road also has a stunning channelled view south over rooftops to Elms Parade and to the tree covered slope of the suburb climbing Harcourt Hill to the south.

Poplar Road also has an attractive channelled view to Elms Parade to the south.

Landscape

Grass verges and hedgerow boundaries make an important contribution to the green character of the streets along with the shrubbery of the many small front gardens.

Negative Features and Issues

Buildings

The blocks of flats built in Nursery Close are atypical of this Character Area being basic rectangular blocks, larger in scale than other housing nearby, and lacking in any character. Density of dwellings is also much higher than in most other parts of the Parish, falling into the 80 to 100 dwellings per hectare range, which matches the density of some of the most recent house to flat conversions further west on West Way. Given their position between West Way, the A34, and Botley School, however, these flats are less out of place and damaging to the street scene than if they were located elsewhere within this Character Area.

Activity

Dominance of on-street car parking in the older streets detracts from their historic character.

Views

The attractiveness of the view south along Elms Road is marred to some extent by the uncomfortable contrast of the scale and materials of Elms Court on the south side of West Way, however this building will be replaced during the redevelopment of Botley Centre.

Landscape

Due to their greater depth and suitability for conversion for car parking many of the front gardens of houses on Hazel Road have been hard-surfaced for car parking cutting down the green character of the street.

8 North Hinksey Village

General Character Description

North Hinksey Village itself lies on the eastern boundary of the Parish alongside Seacourt Stream, and flood plains that separate it from Oxford City. It is located at the southern end of North Hinksey Lane on a no-through road, and it has a distinctly remote and separate feel to it.

This is a unique environment within the Parish – tranquil, ancient, rural with many original, listed buildings. The importance of this uniqueness is reinforced by the fact that the main section of the Village is a Conservation area and is surrounded by Oxford's Green Belt. This combination has helped to provide protection from excessive development in the Village to date.



The green, leafy village of North Hinksey showing typical cottages.

Despite its rural feel the proximity of the A34 means that there is a constant but relatively quiet background hum of traffic, and at the northern end of the Village where North Hinksey Lane links to the A34 in one direction and a Primary School is located there is a significant amount of local traffic on those sections of road at certain times of the day.

As a Character Area the northern boundary has been defined as the northern end of the North Hinksey Lane allotments with the subsequent buildings to the north of that (including The Old Manor House) being more obviously tied to Old Botley. This area does therefore include a significant number of 20th Century houses outside of the old village on the west side of North Hinksey Lane.

Overall the village itself has a well-kept and well-off feel to it, and despite having no shops there is a comfortable and appropriate level of activity resulting from the presence of a popular public house and major sports facilities.

Key Positive Character Features

Spaces

Significant open spaces within the Village include a large pub garden, a small village green, the churchyard of St Lawrence's Church which is managed for wild flowers following a plan by BBOWT, and at its southern end the playing fields of Oxford Rugby Club. These combine to offer a pleasant mixture of contrasting spaces.

Additionally there is easy access to the open fields to the east, which lie outside of the Parish but offer opportunities for lengthy walks in the extensive areas of open land between North Hinksey Village and the railway line.

Overall with well-spaced housing the Village has an airy, light feel but the road through the Village being a narrow, winding country lane lends it a certain 'cosiness'.



Stone cottages within the central area of the Village.



The start of Willow Walk bridleway leading from North Hinksey Village to Oxford.

Several footpaths lead eastwards towards Oxford including the substantial, tree-lined Willow Walk bridleway, and a further narrow footpath runs northward from the church giving a pleasant contrast to the more open spaces in the Village.

At the northern end of the area outside of the old village two sets of Parish Council owned allotments are located. One of these lies between North Hinksey Lane and the A34 near to the School, and is hidden from view to the average passer-by. The other lies at the northern end of the area alongside the eastern side of North Hinksey Lane and is more in view to pedestrians, but hidden from drivers by a substantial hedge. The housing opposite these allotments is well set back behind a grassy bank providing a sense of spaciousness.

Buildings

Within the Conservation Area there are a number of 17th and 18th Century stone cottages, many thatched, and eight of them listed. These include a blue plaque house associated with John Ruskin and his attempts to organise Oxford University students building an extended road through to South Hinksey Village. These buildings help to provide a consistent, country village ambience.

In addition there are a number of other pre-20th Century houses in a variety of styles including brick buildings with slate or tile roofs, that provide variety. These include a 19th Century red brick pub and the ancient stone Church of St Lawrence, which has its origins in Saxon times and includes ancient, listed crosses and chest tombs in the churchyard.

The row of houses alongside the western side of North Hinksey Lane as you approach to old village from the north is set well back from, and significantly above the road. They are primarily two-storey, red brick, semi-detached dwellings dating from the mid to late 20th Century, and are generally in a well-maintained condition giving a pleasant aspect to this part of the area.



The Church of St Lawrence surrounded by wild flowers.

A combination of low-level hedges, fences and stone walls provide structure without being overbearing.

Overall this Character Area, along with Character Area 7, has one of the lowest average building heights with virtually all housing being two storeys or less, and under 10m height to the roof ridge.

Activity

The mixture of facilities within the Village and its immediate surroundings include a Primary School, church, public house and sports facilities in the form of a rugby club and a tennis club.

The school and church are located outside of the main village at its northern end, and bring a wide range of people into the area without ruining the ambience of the main village itself.

The public house is busy at lunchtimes as well as in the evenings and provides a lively hub for the Village as well as attracting many 'outsiders'. The sports facilities are in use primarily during the daytime, especially at weekends, and on match days (maybe a dozen times each year) a significant number of cars drive through the Village to the event, but this level of activity isn't overwhelming given its infrequency.

Additionally horses are kept in some of the fields within the Village and in the nearby stables, and horse riders are frequently seen passing through emphasising the rural feel.

The two sets of allotments are generally well tended by local residents who also provide a degree of activity, albeit relatively low key and unobtrusive.

Landscape

The Village lies along a gently winding country lane where a number of traditional stone cottages surrounded by greenery are nestled within the Green Belt. To the east a thick swathe of trees and bushes around Seacourt Stream gives a pleasant, gently enclosing feeling.

At the southern end of the Village the road turns into a track which comes to an abrupt halt at a locked gate with only open fields beyond.

Views

There are few clear long views from within the Village itself except in winter time when the greenery running along Seacourt Stream loses its leaves and allows glimpses of the view towards Oxford.

Historically there was a recognised view of Oxford from the northern end of the Village near to the Church of St Lawrence which has been captured in paintings by a number of well-known artists including J.M.W. Turner, the similarly named William Turner of Oxford, and the delightfully named Sir Muirhead Bone, who actually lived in Harcourt Hill.

There are significant short views within the Village of the rural setting with lots of greenery and occasional glimpses of Seacourt Stream meandering past.

In addition there are open views eastwards towards Oxford across the North Hinksey Lane allotments and the Seacourt Stream which runs alongside them.

Negative Features and Issues

Buildings

Immediately to the south of the Conservation Area a handful of rather unattractive ex-Council houses are located, which are completely out of character with the other nearby housing.

In addition the basic, functional design of the Rugby Club buildings are similarly out of character, but have less impact on the general streetscene because of their location, hidden away at the very end of the road.

Activity

At the northern end of the Village drivers using North Hinksey Lane as a rat run to link the A34 with West Way or industrial estates and business parks within Botley can cause heavy traffic levels, particularly during rush hours.

Parents dropping off and picking up children at the Primary School park along North Hinksey Lane itself, causing hazards and a further increase in traffic levels on top of other rush hour traffic.

A constant, but low level hum of traffic noise from the A34 is a minor annoyance, and despite its proximity this is less obvious than in some other areas of the Parish.

9 Harcourt Hill

General Character Description

Harcourt Hill lies along the south-western edge of the Parish running uphill from the A34, and consists of housing to the south side of Harcourt Hill Road and within a 'D' shape trio of Private Roads leading off it, with Raleigh Park situated near the A34 to the north side of Harcourt Hill Road, and above it the large campus of Brookes Oxford University with its many playing fields. To the south-east of the housing lies open Green Belt land and extensive views in the distance of the Hinksey Heights Golf Course, with views of the City of Oxford to the east.

The overall impression of Harcourt Hill is of an extremely green and leafy private estate surrounded by open spaces and the Green Belt, containing predominantly very large family homes well set back from the roads, often hiding behind high hedges, fences or walls. The ambience leans towards exclusivity and a wish for privacy rather than an inclusive, neighbourly village.

Although Harcourt Hill makes up around one third of the total land area of North Hinksey Parish it probably only houses around 10% of its permanent residents. The houses generally sit on large plots and are generously spaced with the lowest level of densification in the Parish. Despite this the feeling of spaciousness is probably more apparent within the grounds of each house as the roads themselves are not overly wide, and overhanging greenery, particularly along Harcourt Hill Road itself, gives a sense of a sheltered and shady enclave threaded through by narrow country lanes for much of the housing area.

Key Positive Character Features

Spaces

Harcourt Hill as a whole consists mainly of large areas of open space including Raleigh Park and the playing fields of Oxford Brookes University to the north of Harcourt Hill Road, and open Green Belt grassland to the south.

Raleigh Park consists of a large area of sloped grassland dotted throughout by a considerable number of smaller trees and bushes and containing a small pond area.



A panoramic view across the mix of grassland and trees within Raleigh Park.

In addition to a variety of buildings and a car park the Oxford Brookes University Harcourt Hill Campus includes a number of playing fields on the western side of the site, which are accessible by walkers when not in use.

A footpath leads from the end of Harcourt Hill Road via a tree-lined track into the open countryside to the south-west in the direction of Cumnor Hurst.

Buildings

The housing is predominantly large (four bedrooms and upwards), but low level, with few buildings rising above two storeys. There is a huge variety of building materials and designs on display resulting from nearly a century of ongoing development and redevelopment within the area, primarily by individuals with money building single properties, rather than by developers building larger scale estates.

Not surprisingly, brick and stone buildings dominate, with roofs mainly being slate or tiles, and a handful using thatch. Overall because of the wide spacing between houses and the high level of greenery it is difficult to see more than a few houses at any one time, so the differing styles tend to provide interest as you pass through the area rather than clashing with each other.



Four examples of typically large detached houses showing the variety of housing designs and materials to be found across Harcourt Hill.

Activity

Much of the area (excluding the Oxford Brookes University Campus and Harcourt Hill Road) exhibits extremely low levels of activity, with occasional walkers passing

through Raleigh Park, residents gardening in the large grounds of their houses and very little else. Quiet generally pervades throughout the day. As there is no through traffic there are generally few vehicles on the roads other than buses and cars heading to and from the Oxford Brookes University site.

Landscape

Along with North Hinksey Village this area allows the easiest access to surrounding open spaces and is in itself one of the greenest within North Hinksey Parish.

Not only does Raleigh Park provide a green oasis for residents in the surrounding areas, but views into the large gardens surrounding most houses, and attractive hedging and trees along many frontages give an overall feel of walking through nature rather than a more urban style of streetscape.

The overall dominant feature is the steep slope of the land itself which runs downhill towards the A34 and provides many of the impressive long distance views available from this area.

Views

There are significant short, medium and long distance views throughout Harcourt Hill.

Along two of the Private Roads (Vernon Road and Stanton Road) the emphasis is on the short distance views along what are in effect attractively leafy country lanes running past spacious private gardens.

The pleasing mix of grassland, ponds, small trees and bushes, and a wide variety of other vegetation in Raleigh Park offer numerous worthwhile medium distance views within its confines.

Longer distance views of central Oxford and its 'dreaming spires' can be obtained from several locations including the upper parts of Raleigh Park and on the south-east edge of the area beyond the housing.



A panoramic view looking east along Grosvenor Road towards the A34 and Oxford, with open Green Belt land and Hinksey Heights Golf Course to the right (the south).



A view of Oxford City from the upper area of Raleigh Park.

Negative Features and Issues

Buildings

Although relatively well hidden behind high hedges the current buildings on the Oxford Brookes University Campus include many uninspiring buildings of large proportions built from around 1960 to the 1980s. An intended redevelopment of the site in the near future offers an opportunity to replace many of these tired, drab and poorly designed buildings with others of higher architectural merit. The western end of the site contains newer accommodation buildings and the Sports Centre, which are bulkier, but of better design and benefiting from the open spaces surrounding them to the south-west.



Brookes Campus, semi-hidden but uninspiring older buildings.



Brookes newer accommodation and Sports Centre plus playing fields.

A number of large plots within Harcourt Hill have been redeveloped in recent years with pleasant older houses being replaced by rather bland and bulky designs of house which do not sit comfortably with their neighbours. If this were to continue it could become highly detrimental to the overall character of the whole area. When this type of redevelopment also involves the removal of trees and other greenery the negative impact can be significantly magnified.

A handful of smaller, less attractive houses located at the bottom of the hill very close to the A34 would have a small negative impact on the area if located in a more central part of the area, but they are only visible from very close by and not to anyone passing through on nearby Harcourt Hill Road.

On Harcourt Hill Road there is a single detached house which has been in a semi-derelict state for a number of years with a heavily overgrown front garden. This run-down property lends an air of negligence to the immediate surroundings, which is at odds with the otherwise well-maintained state of other properties in the area.

Activity

The sole factor causing significant activity (including vehicular traffic) within the Harcourt Hill area is the Oxford Brookes University Campus sited at the top of the hill on the northern side of Harcourt Hill Road. Visitors to the site include not only students but also non-student users of its popular Sports Centre and playing fields.

Plans currently under consideration for significant expansion of student numbers attending Oxford Brookes University Campus could have a major impact on activity levels within this area, and in particular the potential negative knock-on effect of increased traffic levels (including buses) will need to be considered in depth.

10 Tilbury Fields

General Character Description

Located in the north west corner of the Parish, this recently built housing estate (2015-17) is relatively small in size, but distinctive from surrounding character areas in a number of ways.

The estate as a whole lies on both sides of Tilbury Lane, which marks the border of the Parish. The western half of the estate lies in Cumnor Parish, and the eastern half in North Hinksey Parish. Vehicular access is via an extension of Fogwell Road to the west which leads onto Eynsham Road. There is access for pedestrians and cyclists on the eastern side of the estate via Hazel Road.

As can be seen from the aerial photograph below looking north west from Botley Centre the buildings are significantly larger in scale than houses in adjacent roads to the east (Character Area 7).



Aerial view looking north west from Botley Centre. Tilbury Fields are the larger, and most distant buildings in the centre of the photograph.

Although all of the houses and flats have now been built, and most are inhabited, the estate as a whole has not been totally completed (e.g. the children's playground has yet to be built). This incomplete state, combined with a general lack of greenery currently within the eastern half of the estate and building equipment and materials left lying around does make it still feel like a building site. Overall it has zero atmosphere.

The proximity of a row of electricity pylons, and behind them the A420, are further distractions, with a permanent background hum of traffic heard throughout the whole estate.



Tilbury Fields Estate showing houses and the current 'unfinished' state of the eastern half within North Hinksey Parish.

Key Positive Character Features

In its current state the eastern half of Tilbury Fields Estate has no positive character features, although matters may improve slightly once the whole site has been completed.

Negative Features and Issues

Spaces

There are currently no significant public outdoor spaces within the eastern half of the estate.

Buildings

Although all of the houses and flats are built in styles that do not radically jar with other housing in the Parish (e.g. use of red brick, white render and pyramidal roofs) the buildings here are of a larger scale than is typical for the Parish (mostly 3 storey, with some 4 storey buildings), and overall the architecture is uninspiring.

Activity

During peak hours traffic heading west out of the estate via Fogwell Road is heavy at times, and adds to congestion along Eynsham Road and West Way towards the A34 Ring Road and Oxford City.

At other times of day activity within the eastern half of the estate is minimal, and currently there is no reason for residents to linger in the public areas of the estate. This should improve when the required children's playground has been erected.

The permanent background hum of traffic on the nearby A420 is a minor annoyance.

Landscape

The internal landscape of the housing estate is almost entirely lacking in greenery in its current state, which is atypical of the Parish as a whole.

Views

There are short and medium term views within the eastern half of the estate, but none of these are currently pleasant or inspiring. Once the estate has been completed there will be medium distance views of farmland immediately to the north east of the estate from some properties located close to the pedestrian access point, however currently these views are obscured. Potential views of Wytham Woods to the north are blocked by the A420.

Section F. Sources and Acknowledgements

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Appendix A. Methodology

The Oxford Character Assessment Toolkit

Volunteers from the local area have undertaken the assessment using the Oxford Character Assessment Toolkit. This is one of several self-guided toolkits that are promoted by English Heritage and CABE. Although initially developed in Oxford, the toolkit is now used by numerous local authorities across England to support communities in preparing their own character assessments and conservation area appraisals. Examples include Durham County Council, Wolverhampton City Council, Luton Borough Council and Dover District Council. It is also used by developers and architects to provide a recorded assessment of character that can support the development design process.

The toolkit helps users undertake a systematic character assessment. It includes a series of questions and prompts that help to structure assessment of the many possible features that may contribute to the character of an area. This includes a prompt to provide a score or rating of the relative positive or negative contribution of each feature observed to the overall quality of the area's character. It also includes guides to the process, explanations of some of the complex terminology that is used, guidance on presenting information gathered and links to further information resources.

Training Volunteer Assessors

Volunteers attended a training day held at St Peter and St Paul's Church, Botley that included information on the purpose of character assessment, a review of the development history of the suburb, instruction in using the character assessment toolkit and a practical exercise of using it and reviewing the results as a group. The division of the suburb into a number of distinct character areas was considered and agreed upon. Volunteers were then assigned a specific character area to assess.

Undertaking Assessment

Volunteers undertook assessment of character areas 1 to 7 between 18th and 28th January 2014 in pairs.

A subsequent exercise carried out in September 2015 covered character areas 8 and 9, with character area 10 finally being added in November 2017.

Reviewing and Reporting the Assessment Findings

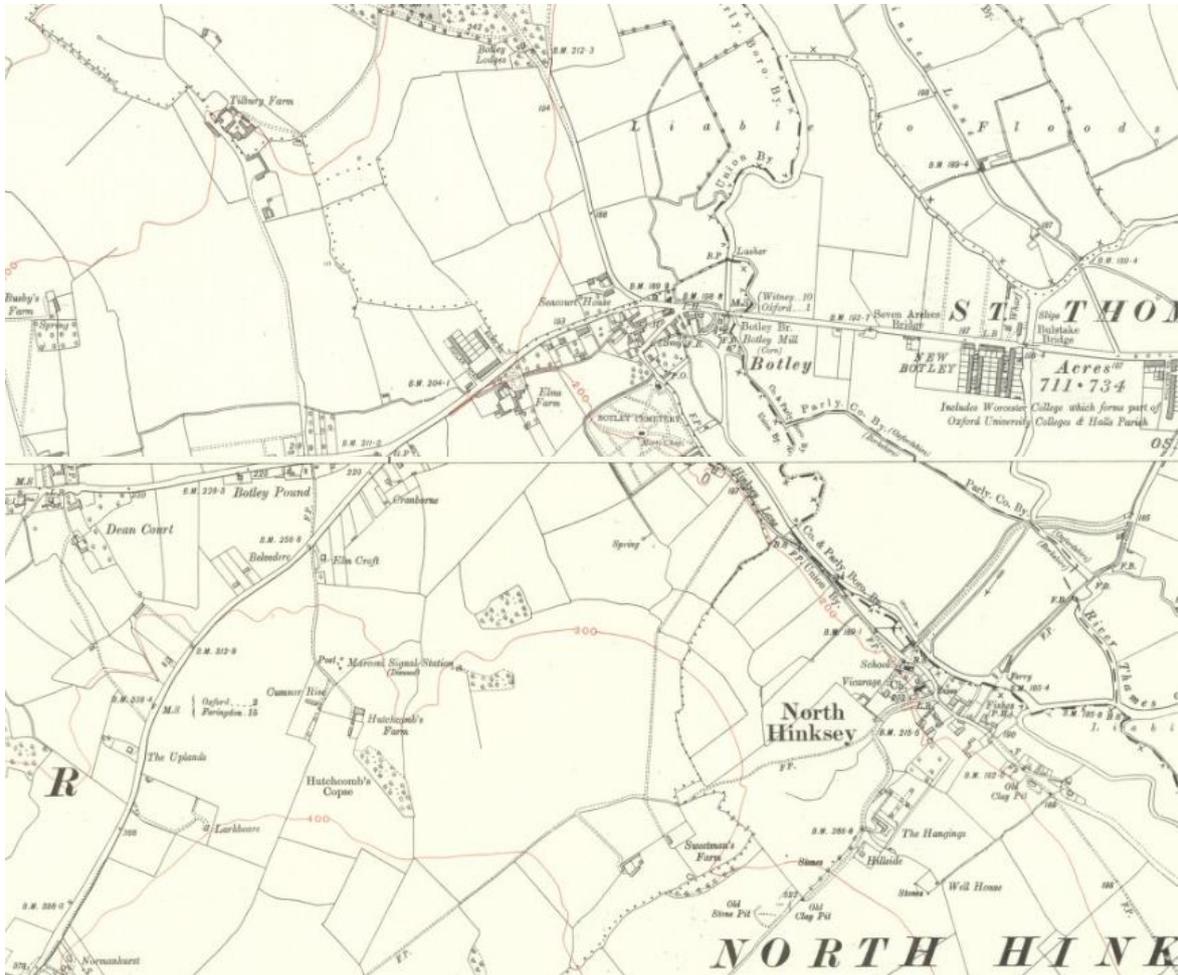
The results of the character assessments were reviewed by an experienced historic environment consultant. They were then compiled to form this character statement providing descriptions and analysis of each of the character areas considered.

Appendix B. Historical maps of North Hinksey Parish

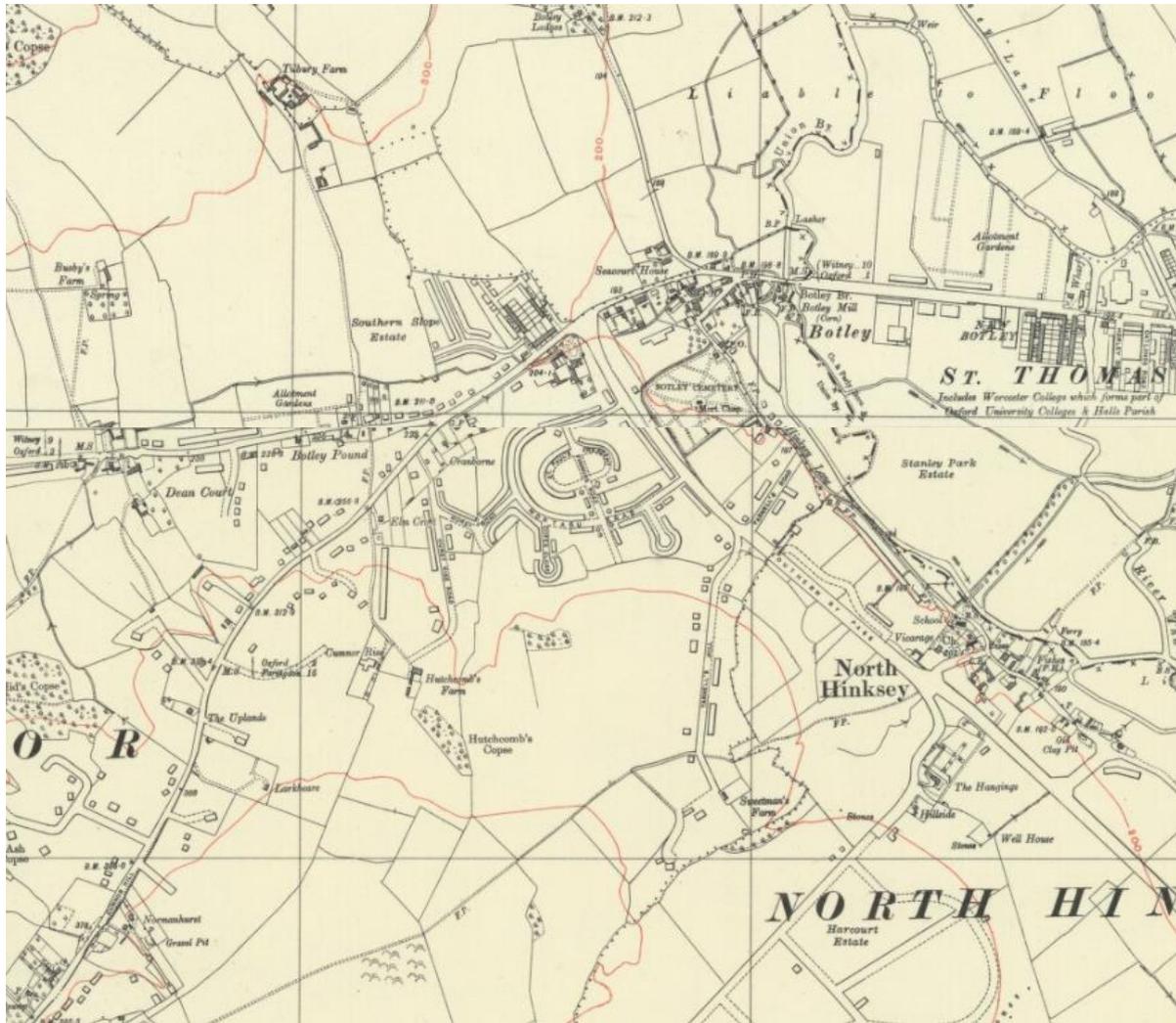
The following range of Ordnance Survey maps are reproduced here with the permission of the National Library of Scotland.



1896: Pre-development. Housing concentrated in North Hinksey Village, Old Botley and Botley Pound with a number of farms dominating land use.



1910-11: Early 20th Century developments around Elms Road, Poplar Road and West Way, plus immediately to the west of Old Botley Village.



1938: Pre- WWII development. Further expansion of the 'Southern Slope Estate' at Hazel Road and Seacourt Road to the north of West Way, plus the start of development around Cumnor Rise and on the Elms Rise Estate south of West Way. Elms Farm is still shown on this map even though Elms Parade had been built shortly before this map was published.



1960: Mid-20th Century development. Further expansion, mainly on the Elms Rise Estate and along North Hinksey Lane. Around this time Sweetman's Farm on Harcourt Hill (still shown on this map) was demolished and the campus of Westminster College was established.

Appendix C: Character Areas boundaries:

1. West Way & Botley Centre.

Runs from Westminster Way in the east to the junction of West Way / Eynsham Road / Cumnor Hill in the west, including properties on both sides of West Way. To the south it runs through to the back of properties in Arthray Road and encompasses all of the land described as Botley Centre within the Vale of White Horse SPD of that name.

2. Old Botley.

The area to the south of West Way running from the A34 to the eastern boundary of the Parish at Seacourt Stream. To the south it extends down North Hinksey Lane to the Old Manor House and includes the houses opposite located between the North Hinksey Nature Reserve and the allotments on North Hinksey Lane.

3. Seacourt Tower & Retail Park.

The retail and office area bounded by the A34, West Way, and the A420 slip road (the Parish boundary) to the east.

4. Westminster Way.

Solely the road of that name running alongside the A34, but excluding the very northern end which is incorporated in the Botley Centre area, and therefore within Character Area 1.

5. Elms Rise Estate.

This area is bounded by character areas 1, 4, 6 and 9 plus the south western Parish boundary at Matthew Arnold School. It runs from Arthray Road in the north, to Arnolds Way / Louie Memorial Upper Playing Field / Lime Road / Harcourt Place / Yarnells Hill / Raleigh Park Road in the south, and from Hutchcomb Road / Hutchcombe Copse / Louie Memorial Lower Playing Field in the west across to (but not including) Westminster Way in the east.

6. Cumnor Rise.

The sections of Eynsham Road and Cumnor Hill that lie within the Parish plus to the north, properties on the eastern side of Tilbury Lane, and to the south, houses on the eastern side of Cumnor Rise Road plus Hurst Rise Road and the two small roads running off it (Springfield Road and Conifer Close).

7. North of West Way.

Those roads accessed from the north side of West Way, namely Elms Road, Nursery Close, Poplar Road, Hazel Road and Seacourt Road.

8. North Hinksey Village.

The area to the east of A34 across to the eastern Parish boundary (Seacourt Stream), and running from the allotments on North Hinksey Lane in the north down to the original North Hinksey Village at the south eastern end of the Parish.

9. Harcourt Hill.

Lying to the west side of the A34 at the southern end of the Parish, running from Brookes University Harcourt Hill Campus and Raleigh Park in the north.

10. Tilbury Fields.

The part of this recently built estate that lies within North Hinksey Parish between Tilbury Lane and Hazel Road, but with vehicular access via Fogwell Road.