



# Assessment of the Oxford View Cones

2015 Report



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## View Cones foreword

Oxford is a rare City. It features an architectural history that spans nearly 1000 years, with set pieces designed by some of the best architects, past and present. These are evident at the City's core in its townscape and skyline. The location on a raised gravel bed allows Oxford's skyline of domes, spires and towers to be enjoyed in views from the surrounding villages and hills of the Thames valley, since the suburbs are mostly concealed within the lower lying topography and green landscape of the valley.

Oxford is a City of contrasts. It has an international reputation through two universities, the Oxford colleges, medical and scientific research, the motor industry and a remarkable cultural diversity. It features in the collective memory, both past and present, of the many who have studied or worked here or just come to enjoy the history and its culture.

Oxford is a vibrant and growing City. This means that there are particular challenges in achieving its economic potential in the 21st century and associated housing and infrastructure needs.

This View Cones Study is one of a suite of documents that seeks to understand the importance of this historic landscape and

how the views of Oxford's 'dreaming spires' contributes to our understanding and enjoyment of the City's cultural richness. This is as an evidence base to help all those with a role in helping to sustain the City's history and future.

The study has been made possible through the collaboration and support of Historic England and Oxford Preservation Trust and has involved local groups, individuals and businesses with an intimate knowledge and understanding of Oxford and its history.

Our thanks in particular to those who have contributed;

**Historic England** – Dr Kathryn Davies

**Oxford Preservation Trust** – Debbie Dance, Jacque Martinez, Eleanor Cooper

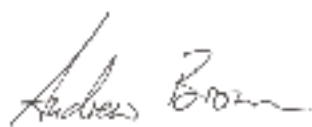
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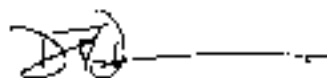
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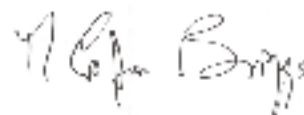
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# PART 1

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## 1.1 Introduction

The 'dreaming spires' of Oxford are an internationally recognised symbol of the city and its renowned University. The image of the ancient city in its green setting draws visitors from around the world. The opportunity to walk into and through Oxford's countryside setting and look back on the city's domes, towers and spires from the green valley or hillsides is valued by its residents as a rich inheritance that should be carefully protected for future generations.

The surroundings of Oxford have long provided a destination for excursions using the footpaths which lead out from the city into the hills and along the river valleys. The rivers are also routes into the countryside with a special literary and poetic heritage of their own. The city remains intimately connected with its green setting as a result of these linkages whilst the preservation of these open spaces contributes to the opportunities to appreciate Oxford's landscape and architecture.

Nevertheless, Oxford faces continual challenges in meeting the needs of a modern city and, in particular, in accommodating new buildings that sustain its academic, research and consumer profile. In 1962 the City Architect and Planning Officer observed that the siting of high buildings in Oxford presents particular problems because of the city's unique skyline, which can be viewed as a whole from the surrounding hills and valleys (City of Oxford, 1962). These observations led to the establishment of high buildings and view

cone policies, which have served the city for fifty years in successive development plans.

In light of the continuing challenges of building within the city this study has been prepared to provide a basis of evidence and analysis that examines the significance of each of the views as a part of Oxford's heritage. This will be used to assess the impact of new development proposals and inform decisions in order to sustain the value of the contribution of the views to the city.

The ten view cones are by no means an exhaustive list of the important views of Oxford. They were only ever expected to form a sample. The study establishes a methodology of view assessment that can be applied to other views of the city in the future. In the past, the City Council has identified the views from Wytham Wood and up Cowley Road as significant. The study of Oxford in its Landscape Setting, prepared in 2002, identifies a total of 20 views of the city from its setting as of significance. Further views from within the city, such as those from Carfax Tower, St Mary's Church Tower and St George's Tower, are also now recognised as of importance for the city.

It is also recognised that planning policies alone are not sufficient to protect the views. The study provides a starting point of evidence and understanding to guide sensitive management of the places they are seen from.



*A view of Oxford's spires, towers and domes across Christ Church Meadow, one of the most instantly recognised images of the City & University*



## 1.2 Context of the Study

The economic regeneration of the city, responding to the challenges of climate change providing a supply of affordable housing are three of the highest priorities for the city in the early 21st century. Both are likely to require considerable investment in building within the city over the next decade. The need continues for up-to-date and world class research, teaching and administration buildings in addition to residential accommodation for students. The City Council needs to deliver a minimum of 8,000 new homes within its administrative boundary in the period 2006 and 2026. These priorities have resulted in proposals for large buildings in sensitive locations both within the city's historic core and on its periphery, which create challenges for sustaining the quality of Oxford's townscape as a city of international historic and architectural significance.

These challenges have shown that we need to improve our understanding of the significance of the views in order to appropriately assess what impact developments are likely to have on them. Recent planning decisions have reinforced the need to understand better this aspect of Oxford's heritage and the requirement:

- › For a robust methodology to identify the special qualities of the views and how they are experienced.
- › To inform future development, by being able to assess the impact of specific development proposals, clearly and consistently.

Oxford City Council, Oxford Preservation Trust and English Heritage\* have worked in collaboration to produce a document that establishes a sound assessment methodology and defines the key characteristics and heritage values of the ten example views defined in the Local Plan as the Oxford View Cones. This will be used to better understand and enjoy the heritage of Oxford, as well as contributing to the evidence base that will inform future development management decisions.

The aim of the Oxford View Cones Study is to describe and evaluate the heritage significance of the 10 Oxford View Cones, as protected by the Oxford Local Plan (2001-2016) and the Oxford Core Strategy, in order to fully understand how they can be most effectively managed in the future. The study will thus contribute to the development of a unified evidence base for future planning, decision making and monitoring. Land Use Consultants (LUC) prepared an early draft of the study which the City Council has developed further with their partners.

The Oxford View Cones Study is one of a suite of studies being undertaken as part of the evidence base for the Heritage Plan. The Heritage Plan is being developed in response to the need to provide a strategic understanding and policy basis for the management of Oxford's historic environment.

\*this study was commissioned prior to the creation of Historic England

## 1.3 Oxford's Historic High Buildings and the City's Skyline

**1.3.1** A group of internationally and nationally important buildings collectively form the focus of the Oxford Views. These are the buildings that create the iconic 'dreaming spires', towers and domes of the Oxford skyline rising above the lower level roofscape of the city. They represent a thousand years of architectural history, patronage and ingenuity. They help to tell the story of the City and University. They have been recognised as buildings of exceptional or outstanding architectural and historic interest (Grade I and II\*) and are some of the most significant historic buildings in the country. The following highlights the historic high buildings that are the focus of many views of the historic skyline and provides a brief description of their origins and architecture. This will inform the understanding of their contribution to each of the views assessed below. Other historic high buildings that contribute to individual views are highlighted within the View Assessment Summaries (see below).

The character of Oxford is influenced by its physical environment. Oxford straddles two rivers - the Thames and the Cherwell which flow to the west and east of the City Centre respectively. The city's historic core developed on the terrace of higher land at the confluence of these rivers. The lower-lying floodplains form green fingers that permeate the city extending right up to the historic city core. The valley containing these rivers is surrounded by hills which form a discontinuous ring around Oxford, and provide numerous prospects down onto and over the city.

### 1.3.2 High buildings that pre-date the University

The rubble stone St George's Tower, built c1071 to guard the north-west angle of Oxford Castle by Robert d'Oilly, is now a rare piece of stone military architecture surviving from the conquest period. As well as its military function it served as part of the chapel of St George, which was an important centre for scholars in the 12th century including Geoffrey of Monmouth, and is seen as a monument of the origins of the University. After the end of the Castle's military function the tower remained as a part of the County Gaol acting as a visible symbol of authority and law

and order. It stands next to the Castle Mound or Motte, which would have supported the keep of d'Oilly's castle and is also a feature of several views of the city as a grass covered mound.



*St George's Tower*

### 1.3.3 Building representing the early University

The University Church of St Mary the Virgin was the University's main meeting place in the 13th century. The tower and spire are the oldest remaining parts of the church today built in the early 14th century (subsequently repaired and partially rebuilt). Its use as the University Church (it was used for meetings of Convocation, the supreme governing body of the University, and of its disciplinary body, the Chancellor's Court) makes it an important feature of the story of the University. It has also played an important part in the history of Christianity in England as the scene of Thomas Cranmer's trial and recantation in 1555 and through its connections with the Oxford Movement (the 19th century Anglo-Catholic revival in the Church of England). The spire is the highest in the City Centre and has a pre-eminent role in the skyline often seen in the views from the surrounding hills as the only structure breaking above the horizon of the fields and woodlands behind the city.



Further to the southeast is Christ Church Cathedral, dating from the 13th century and formerly the priory church of St Frideswide from the mid 12th century, when it is considered by some to have been the most impressive ecclesiastical building in medieval Oxford. It was subsequently made a Cathedral by Henry VIII in 1546. It has a curiously squat spire that is easily recognised within the skyline. Christ Church Hall, dating from 1529, is a survival from Wolsey's former Cardinal College (now Christ Church) and represents the lavish architectural treatment of the Oxford Colleges. Other notable Medieval towers include the ornate tower of St John the Baptist (Merton College Chapel), constructed in 1452, the listed Magdalen College Bell Tower, built in 1492 and the tallest of Oxford's medieval towers. It stands apart from other towers in many views due to the historic position of the College outside the city's walls and now marks the eastern entrance to the City Centre.

The Tower of Five Orders is a surprising classical addition to the otherwise Gothic Schools Quadrangle (1613-24) of the Old Bodleian Library, although in most views from outside the city its Gothic angled turret and spirelets make it a natural addition to the other Gothic towers and pinnacles of the city skyline.



*University Church of St Mary the Virgin's Spire*

### 1.3.4 High buildings of Early Modern Oxford

One of Oxford's most recognisable towers is Wren's Tom Tower at Christ Church (built in 1681 to house Great Tom, the bell from Oseney Abbey) with its distinctive ogee dome. Wren's choice of Gothic style for the work was motivated by the antiquity of the surrounding buildings.



*The Spire of All Saints' Church (now Lincoln College Library)*

Wren also designed the Sheldonian Theatre (1664) as a ceremonial space for the University. The cupola, replaced in 1838 by Edward Blore, is a slender feature of white painted timber with a copper dome that catches and reflects sunlight drawing attention to it in many views of the city.

Also of notable historic and architectural value are the elegant rotunda and spire of All Saints' (built 1707-8, now Lincoln College Library). This is an important design influenced by Nicholas Hawksmoor (one of the great architects of the early 18th century). Hawksmoor's additions to All Souls' College (1715) provide a striking and original example of early 18th century Gothic Revival architecture in Oxford that was carefully matched to the college's 15th century ranges. The twin towers of Hawksmoor's range are an extraordinary embellishment that are easily recognised in short and medium distance views of the city. Of contemporary date is the cupola of Queens' College (1714-19, rebuilt 1911), finished in copper and often glimpsed alongside the taller structures.

James Gibbs' Baroque Radcliffe Camera (1737-49) is the most readily recognisable 18th century embellishment of Oxford's skyline and forms the centrepiece proposed by Hawksmoor. It joins Tom Tower and the Spire of St Mary the Virgin Church as one of the most iconic buildings of Oxford and is often seen grouped with the latter and other buildings surrounding Radcliffe Square.



*The Radcliffe Camera's dome seen across the rooftops of the Old Bodleian Library*

The Radcliffe Observatory (or Tower of the Winds) was built for the Radcliffe Trustees by Henry Keene and finished by James Wyatt in 1794. It is described in the *Buildings of England* as "architecturally the finest observatory in Europe". Its octagonal tower is topped by a sculptural group of Hercules and Atlas supporting a globe. The tower was recently reclad with ochre coloured render, restoring a feature of its original design, making it a distinctive and eye catching feature of the skyline on the northern edge of the City Centre.



*Sir Christopher Wren's Tom Tower (on the left) and the Victorian spire of St Aldate's Church (on the right)*

### 1.3.5 Victorian high buildings of Oxford's skyline

The roofline and spire of Exeter College Chapel (1856-9) were designed by George Gilbert Scott. The steeply pitched roof and sharply pointed fleche create a brooding mass in the skyline.

The spire of St Aldate's Church (built 1873-4 by John Thomas Christopher) was a Victorian addition to a church of possibly 12th century origin. It is slightly lower than the nearby spire of Christ Church and is of similar height to Tom Tower but is a more slender structure, leaving the Christ Church buildings as the focus of the view, whilst contributing to the cluster of high buildings focused on St Aldate's.

The square tower of St Peter-le-Bailey, now the Chapel of St Peter's College (1874) is a lower structure among the historic high buildings, built to replace an earlier medieval church demolished the previous year as part of a road widening scheme. Its design, by Basil Champneys, is conscientiously Gothic but very simple, contributing to the overall presence of high stone buildings but not competing for attention. The elegant spire of the Wesleyan Memorial Church (1877-8) is a more eye catching feature, which is unusual among Methodist churches and required a dispensation from the Church of England for its construction. Its presence commemorates the early origins of Methodism in Charles and John Wesley's studies in Oxford.



In addition to the embellishments of the University and College in the City Centre, later 19th century high buildings provide evidence of the suburban expansion of the city. To the north are the tower and Italianate campanile of St Barnabas' Church marking the suburb of Jericho (completed in 1874 to designs by Sir Arthur Blomfield), the Gothic Revival spire of Ss Philip and James' Church (consecrated 1862) by G.E. Street, which was built to serve North Oxford and the gothic pyramid of the Museum of Natural History (built 1856-60 by Sir Thomas Deane, Son and Woodward), which represents the University's Science Area (reflecting an important development in the direction of the University's teaching and research in the late 19th century).

The spirelet and large roof structure of Oxford's Town Hall marks the historic centre of the City's administration on St Aldate's (1893-7). It is one of the few large roof structures that can be seen above the general roof level of the city.

### 1.3.6 Twentieth and twenty first century additions to Oxford's skyline

20th century buildings recognised as contributing positively to the city skyline include the tower and copper clad spire of Nuffield College (built 1949-60) which was conscientiously designed to echo the historic spires of the city. Its construction provides a memorial to the influence of William Morris (Viscount Nuffield); whose motor vehicle manufacturing businesses had such a decisive influence on the development of the city.

The most recent addition to the city skyline is the copper clad ziggurat of the Said Business School. Completed in 2001, the business school represents an expansion of the University's teaching facilities into West Oxford, and has extended the breadth of the skyline of high buildings seen from the north east in particular.



*The 20th century spire of Nuffield College with the reconstructed tower of St Peter le Bailey seen from Oxford Castle's Motte*

## 1.4 The History of the Views and Viewing Oxford

### 1.4.1 Early appreciation of the city's views

Few cities have attracted as much interest from artists and writers as Oxford. The earliest published views of Oxford date from the 16th and 17th centuries and include the skyline from the London Road in Braun & Hogenburg's *Cities of the World* and views from the 'East or London Road', and the 'South near Abbingdon Road' in David Loggan's *Oxonia illustrata* (published in 1675).

Recognition of the quality of the views of Oxford from the surrounding hills is suggested in William Campden's description of the City in his antiquarian work *Britannia* (a best seller of the late 16th century);

*"A faire and goodlie Citie, whether a man respect the seemely beauty of private houses or the statelie magnificence of publicke buildings, together with the wholesome site or pleasant prospect thereof"*

The Oxford Almanac (an annual broadsheet academic calendar) has played a particularly important role in documenting views of the Oxford skyline since 1674.

### 1.4.2 Viewing Georgian Oxford

The contribution of the city's setting to its views was well described by 'A Gentleman of Oxford' in the *New Guide to Oxford* (first published in 1759)

*"The Town is situated on a broad eminence which arises so gradually as to be hardly perceptible, in the midst of a most beautiful extent of meadows, to the south, east and west and of corn fields to the north ... From some of the surrounding hills, the traveller is surprised with an unparalleled prospect of magnificence and plenty; of numerous spires; domes, and turrets with the combined charms of verdure, water and trees".*

The drawing master J.B. Malchair further promoted appreciation of the views of the city in the late 18th century. He led groups of students into the countryside surrounding Oxford for lessons on expeditions recorded in his amusingly titled drawings, such as "Bacon and Eggs at Hingsey" and "Porck Griskin to Headington", suggesting these were highly sociable occasions. Many of today's most highly appreciated views were first recorded by Malchair. Other notable



*Oxford from North Hinksey Hill by JMW Turner ©Manchester City Galleries*



artists attracted and inspired by Oxford include Samuel and Nathaniel Buck (probably the most important topographical artists of the 18th century) and Joseph Farington, whose work included records of the newly set out grounds of Nuneham Courtenay by Capability Brown with views up the Thames Valley to the city.

J. M.W. Turner's contribution to the iconography of the city is outstanding. His paintings of the city include the view of Oxford from the South West (painted in 1787-8), from the Abingdon Road (1789 and 1811), from Headington Hill (1803-4) and two of Oxford from just above the Hinksey Conduit House (1839). He also made sketches from many other locations alongside his paintings of views from the streets and meadows of the town. The importance of these views has been recorded by Colin Harrison of the Ashmolean Museum, observing that *'no other place in England engaged his attention for so long, or to such extraordinary effect'*<sup>1</sup>.

William Turner of Oxford (1789–1862), an English painter who specialised in watercolour landscapes and was a contemporary of the more famous artist J. M. W. Turner.

### 1.4.3 The view of Oxford for poets and travellers

J. M.W. Turner's paintings span the transition in the use of the landscape in painting from the Topographical Art, intended to inform and edify, to Romantic Landscape Painting intended to stimulate a more emotional response from viewers. His paintings draw out contrasts in the landscape of Oxford between the rustic countryside setting, from which the city is seen, and the urbane and enlightened (often literally by rays of light) city at the focus of the view. Turner used this illustration to contrast the human or mundane and sublime or awe inspiring features of both city and countryside.

Whilst Turner found a Romantic muse in the setting of the city, the views of Oxford have also inspired Romantic writers. The great Romantic poet William Wordsworth captured the power of Oxford's skyline in his poem 'Oxford, May 30, 1820':

*"Much have ye suffered from time's  
gnawing tooth  
Yet, O ye spires of Oxford! Domes and  
Towers!  
Gardens and groves! Your presence  
overpowers  
The soberness of reason;"*

As a poet Matthew Arnold bridged the gap between Romanticism's use of symbolic landscapes and the more pessimistic mode of the Modernism movement. His elegiac poem 'Thyrsis' (1866) compares the constancy of the city's beauty with the changing world around it as a metaphor for the changes wrought through the loss of a friend. Lines from the poem gave rise to the often quoted description of the city based on its well known skyline;

*"And that sweet city with her dreaming  
spires,  
She needs not June for beauty's  
heightening,  
Lovely all times she lies, lovely to-night!"*

His earlier work 'The Scholar Gipsy' (1853), also speaks of how *"the eye travels down to Oxford's towers"* and of the views towards Oxford from the hill above Hinksey;

*"And thou has climb'd the hill,  
And gain'd the white brow of the Cumner  
range;  
Turn'd once to watch, while thick the  
snowflakes fall,  
The line of festal light in Christ-Church hall"*

A student at Oxford's Balliol College, Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) is recognised as one of the great Victorian poets. Hopkins was strongly influenced by the aesthetic theories of Pater and John Ruskin. His poetry often reflected his feelings towards the landscape surrounding Oxford. Changes in the surrounding rural scene are lamented in Gerald Manley Hopkins' poem describing the felling of the Binsey Poplars in 1879: *"After-comers cannot guess the beauty been"* whilst he celebrated the Oxford skyline in 'Duns Scotus' Oxford':

<sup>1</sup> Harrison, Turner's Oxford, 92-6, No. 66, Pl. 31

*"Towery city and branchy between towers;  
Cuckoo echoing, bell-swarm'd, lark-charm'd,  
rook-racked, river-rounded".*

Whilst poets and artists drew attention to the beauty of Oxford's skyline, travel writers described how to find it. John Britton describes the view as the traveller journeys down the River Thames in his *Beauties of England and Wales* (1814); *"The vale now expands into a spacious amphitheatre, bounded by some striking hills, in the centre of which the majestic towers, domes, and spires of Oxford burst upon the sight, appearing proudly ranged behind the thick shade of venerable groves"*. Wade's *Walks in Oxford* (published in 1817), for example, guides visitors to Ferry Hinksey above which a great view of the city might be seen; *"Oxford is seen to great advantage rising like the queen of the vale from the bosom of a thick grove, between which and the spectator the Isis rolls his mazy waters"*. Bradshaw's great travel guide of the mid-Victorian age of railway travel (first published 1866) also guided visitors to the view of Oxford from its setting as one of the city's most distinctive features;

*"It is situated on a gentle eminence in a rich valley between the rivers Cherwell and Isis – the prospect being bounded by an amphitheatre of hills. From the neighbouring heights the city presents a very imposing appearance, from the number and variety of its spires, domes and public edifices; while these structures, from their magnitude and splendid architecture, give it on a near approach an air of great magnificence ... Distant prospects of the city may be obtained from the Shotover and Hinksey hills"*

Later in the 19th century Thomas Hardy used the experience of viewing Oxford from afar in his novel *Jude the Obscure* (the name Christminster is used for Oxford) as the lure that drew Jude away from his rural home. Hardy also recognised the effect of changing sunlight on the view of the city;

*"The other tiler ... had also turned to look towards the quarter designated. "You can't often see it in weather like this," he said.*

*"The time I've noticed it is when the sun is going down in a blaze of flame, and it looks like—I don't know what."*

*"The heavenly Jerusalem," suggested the serious urchin.*

*"Ay—though I should never ha' thought of it myself.... But I can't see no Christminster to-day."*

*[Later, Jude's patience is rewarded with a long distance view of the city in the light of sunset]*

*"Some way within the limits of the stretch of landscape, points of light like the topaz gleamed. The air increased in transparency with the lapse of minutes, till the topaz points showed themselves to be the vanes, windows, wet roof slates, and other shining spots upon the spires, domes, freestone-work, and varied outlines that were faintly revealed. It was Christminster, unquestionably; either directly seen, or miraged in the peculiar atmosphere."*

#### **1.4.4 From admiration, to concern, to conservation**

The interest in views of Oxford has inspired efforts to preserve them by protecting the land from which they are seen. From the mid-18th century it is evident that a view over the city added to the amenity of a home. Country houses for well-to-do merchants were built on Headington Hill and at Summertown in the early 19th century from which prospects of the city would have been seen. Meanwhile the effect of Oxford's expansion in cutting off the city for its rural surroundings was recorded in the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins;

*"Thou hast a base and brickish skirt there,  
sours  
That neighbour-nature – thy grey beauty is  
grounded  
Best in; graceless growth, thou hast  
confounded  
Rural, rural keeping – folk, flocks, and flowers"*

(Duns Scotus' Oxford, 1879)



In the 1870s the Morrell family prevented developments surrounding their family home at Headington Hill Hall by buying-up the surrounding farm land. During the early 20th century there was further pressure for suburban development, partly as a result of development of the motor industry, which led to growing concern for the preservation of the view. Men of wealth and influence, inspired in part by the nostalgia for a more innocent age that followed the First World War banded together to ensure views of the venerable city in its green landscape could be enjoyed by future generations. This included the foundation of Oxford Preservation Trust in 1927. John Buchan and Raymond Ffennell in particular contributed through gifts of land at Elsfield, Wytham Hill, Harcourt Hill and Boars Hill to the City, Trust and University. Later the Trust also acquired South Park and Shotover Country Park. These were both gifted to the City Council in 1952, with covenants to ensure the preservation of their character and accessibility for the public.

#### 1.4.5 Development of Oxford's View Management Policy

By the early 1960s it was clear that the views could be harmed as much by development within the city as in its rural setting. Construction of the Hans Krebs Tower and Thom building had introduced two substantial edifices within the views that were seen to affect their quality. The University planned a Zoology department tower as a third tall building. In 1962 the City Architect and Planning Officer wrote a report on 'High Buildings in Oxford'. He recognised the potential impact of further tall buildings on the city's unique and historic skyline and quality of the townscape and roofscape, its vulnerability to the programme of development that was proposed at the time and set out measures for managing this problem. He described the main characteristics of Oxford's skyline as:

- › *"the tower of St. Mary the Virgin, which is the dominant point of the skyline from wherever it is viewed. When walking around the City, the respective positions of the spires and towers change continually, but the spire of St. Mary's remains the dominant*

*feature of the composition. Anything, that would endanger this predominance should be resisted;*

- › *its extreme fragility - the skyline seems to be composed mainly of pinnacles; the occasional dome and spire only serve to accentuate the spikiness of the silhouette. In other words, it is a matter of scale. The scale of the elements in the skyline is extremely small in height and volume. The introduction of any bulky elements would destroy this essential character;*
- › *its compactness - although from certain points of view the towers and spires seem to be spaced very widely, the area from which the silhouette sprouts is, in fact, very compact and does not extend far beyond the old city wall." (City of Oxford, 1962)*

However, he did not view the skyline of Oxford as a finite composition, but noted the importance of maintaining certain characteristics of the skyline. His report identified six points, spread evenly around the perimeter of the City to provide a sample of the views of the city based on "points which are well known and accessible to the public", from which the skyline of Oxford could be appreciated. These were:

- › Port Meadow,
- › Elsfield,
- › Crescent Road,
- › Rose Hill,
- › Boars Hill and
- › Raleigh Park.

View cones were drawn from these points to the centre part of Oxford each based on the extent of the range of historic high buildings considered to form the skyline of significance. The report recommended that the areas within the view cones were unsuitable for tall buildings (see diagram overleaf).

Figure 1.1

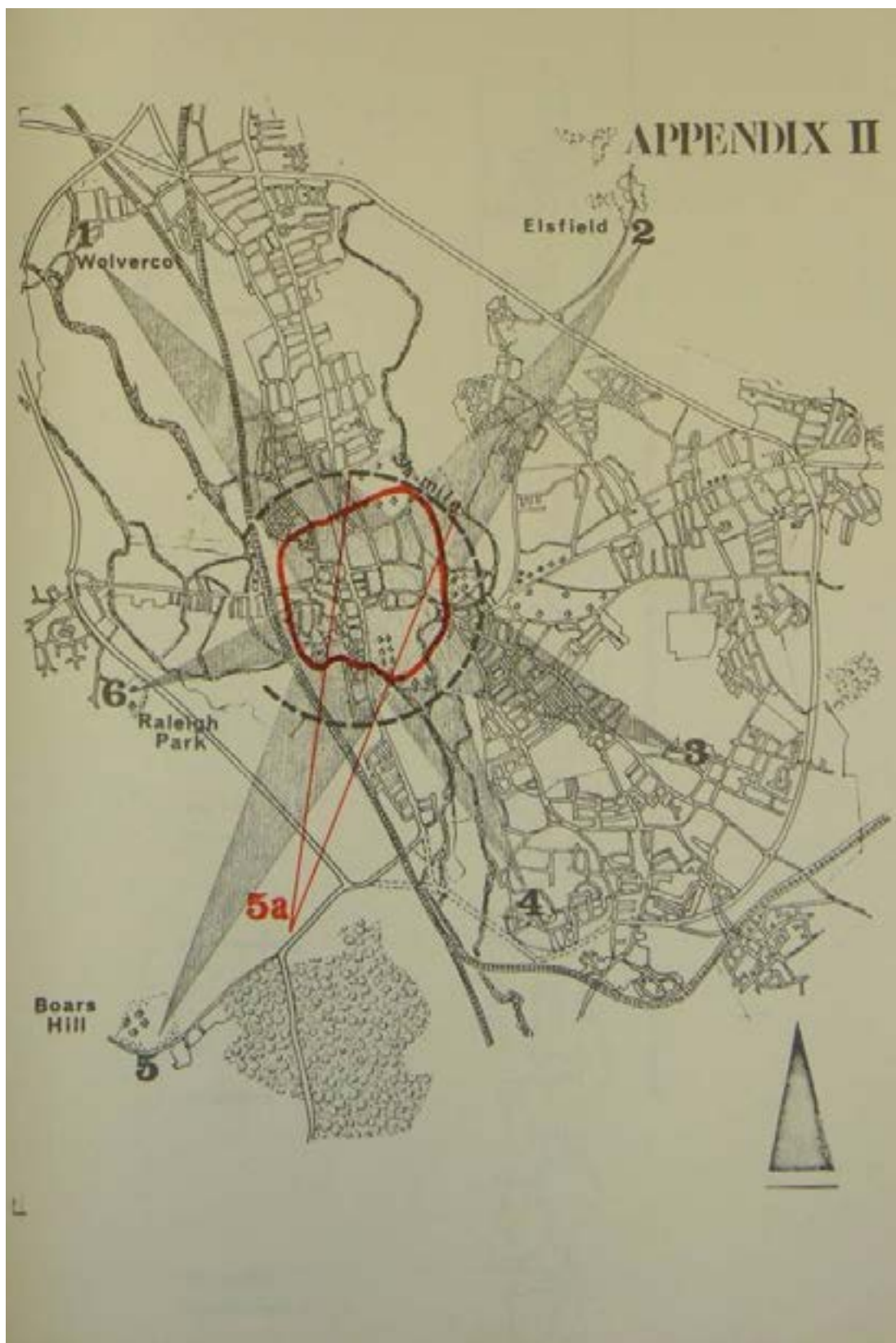


Diagram from Oxford City Council's City Architect and Planning Officer's Report, 1962



In addition, the City Architect and Planning Officer's report introduced the idea of 'townscape' (being the more intimate views obtained from street level) and 'landscape' (being the views of the City as a whole obtained from outside). He recommended that *"every building within a ¼ mile radius from Carfax which exceeds (wholly or partly) OD 260 related to a ground level 200-210 or exceeds 240, related to a ground level 180 must be carefully examined in its relation to the townscape as well as the landscape and may be rejected on either account"* (City of Oxford, 1962).

These principles have been carried through subsequent local plans, largely unchanged, with the exception of an addition of four view cones to the original six. These four extra view cones (South Park; Oxford Brookes University Morrell Hall site at Cuckoo Lane; Jack Straws Lane; and A34 Interchange at Hinksey Hill) were introduced by the Oxford Local Plan 1986, which was never formally adopted. However, the Local Plan for 1991 - 2001 (adopted in 1997) included these additional four view cones (now totalling 10 views) and they remain in the current Local Plan. The ten view cones are shown overleaf.

Over the years, regular block forms of consistent height and parapet length have emerged which represent the maximum dimensions allowed under the policies on townscape character and the skyline. This effect of uniform height and lack of variety can be seen in views from the top of St George's Tower at Oxford Castle (see photograph below).

The policies and guidance of the current development plan, including the Oxford Core Strategy 2026, 'saved' policies in the Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016 & the West End Area Action Plan 2007 – 2016, makes it clear that views of Oxford's skyline of the historic centre will be protected and acknowledges the need to create more high-level visual diversity and to avoid continuous roof lines without any vertical emphasis.

In addition to the development plan, regard must also be had for the National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012) (NPPF) and relevant advice from English Heritage.

The planning policy framework relevant to this study is set out in detail in a separate chapter.



*Modern Oxford rooftops from St George's Tower illustrating the impact of the 18.2m building height limit*

Figure 1.2



*The ten view cones shown in the Oxford Local Plan 2001 - 2016*



## 1.5 A Method for Heritage Assessment of the Oxford Views

### 1.5.1 What is a View?

In the context of this study a view is a sight or prospect (the word commonly used in the past) of a landscape, that can be taken in by the eye from a particular place. This provides three elements that are required for each of the Oxford views:

The first is the **viewer** or the person who sees and determines that a view exists and imbues it with meaning. A viewer has a personal subjective experience of a view although many responses may be experienced by others with shared cultural associations or knowledge.

The second is the **viewing place**, which determines what is seen and how it is experienced and to which meaning may also be applied. This is an acknowledged place or area from which the view can be seen and from which the features of the view are more or less consistently visible in an arrangement that is considered to be 'the view'. The view may be seen from one or more points within the area or as a kinetic viewing experience seen during movement through the area with subtle changes to the view which, nevertheless, maintains fundamental characteristics. The viewing place may have been specially designed or adapted to provide the view but this is not essential.

The third is the **landscape in the view**, i.e. the material world that provides the scenery that is seen and to which meaning is applied. A landscape is formed of many separate elements and might be divided into recognisable parts subject to their relationship with the viewing place and viewer, such as foreground, middle ground and background, vanishing points, focal points, skyline and framing among others.

Each of these three elements interacts with each other and will contribute to the quality, understanding and experience of the view.

The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) methodology, which is promoted by the Landscape Institute, provides a methodology for assessing the impact of proposed new development on landscapes as experienced

in views. This is based on an assessment of the significance of a landscape, its sensitivity to change and the impact of a development. These are based on "... changes in available views of the landscape, and the effect of those changes on people". Its methodology includes consideration of the contribution of the viewing places from which views are experienced and the people affected by change who are the viewers. In developing a methodology for assessing the heritage significance of views of Oxford we have sought to provide an assessment that can be used in a similar manner to understand the significance of the view, its vulnerability to change and the impact of development within the landscape on it. The Oxford views assessment methodology adopts a similar consideration of the significance of the viewer, the viewing place and the landscape in the view.

### 1.5.2 How do views embody and contribute to Heritage Significance?

The View Cones were conceived as a means of assessing and managing the impact of change on the views of the historic core of the city and its skyline. In the language of modern planning the city is experienced in these views as a single large heritage asset formed of numerous buildings, areas and landscape features (such as open spaces, belts of trees, rivers), each of which gains significance from its contribution to the heritage interest of the city as a whole and the historic experience of viewing it. The landscape surrounding the historic core of the city provides the setting of this asset, contributing to how the city is seen and understood, partly through its contrast with it. The surrounding landscape can itself be divided into a series of discrete landscape blocks, each an asset in its own right, with specific historical associations and archaeological, architectural, and artistic interest.

The visual experience of seeing the historic core of Oxford from its periphery is part of its significance as a heritage asset due to the long history of viewing the city from its green setting (documented above). These experiences, captured in text and illustration, have become

part of the historic and artistic interest of the city. External views have been instrumental in the design and appreciation of the city's historic buildings and therefore have contributed to the city's architectural interest, providing the context and understanding for the buildings that are seen. Occasionally, the views may even capture archaeological interest, containing information about past experiences in the landscape, such as the conduct of the siege of Oxford or the processes that drove the expansion of the city into its countryside setting.

However, understanding historic, architectural, archaeological and artistic interest is only a part of understanding heritage significance. How these interests contribute to the lives of the people of Oxford and to a visitor's experience of the city depends on how they are valued. English Heritage has developed a scheme of heritage values (based on concepts set out in ICOMOS's Burra Charter 1979) that can be used to help understand significance and make assessment of it more objective. These are briefly summarised as:

- › Historical value: The ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present. This can simply be through the associations the place has with these people, events or aspects of life or through the way its features provide a visible illustration of these associations and their influence on the heritage asset;
- › Evidential value: The potential a place has to yield evidence about past human activity through the physical remains;
- › Aesthetic: The ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place, which can be a result of their design or the fortuitous outcome of the way it has developed over time or a combination of the two;
- › Communal: The meanings of a place for the people who relate to it or for whom it figures in their collective experience or

memory. These are often closely related to the historical associations of a place, as well as its aesthetic values but have aspects that contribute to the identity, cohesion, spiritual life or memory of communities.

The original six views of the Oxford View Cones policy were chosen as a sample of publicly accessible views that are representative of the wider experience of viewing the city from locations outside its historic core. Others were added in recognition of their importance when faced by significant change. However, many of these views have a history of appreciation spanning several centuries that has contributed to the image of Oxford and to its identity over time. As such, individual views may make a particular contribution to the significance of the city and its historic buildings through their particular histories and associations of viewing in addition.

Many have been valued historically for the aesthetic quality of the view, or encompass specially created or preserved viewing places designed or chosen for their aesthetic value. Several have associations with prominent past viewers, with both the viewing place and view illustrating this association. A number of the views also have significance for the value they bring to the identity of the communities of Oxford and its environs. As such, it is important to understand the specific contribution of each view to the significance of the city, as much as the value of what is seen in the view.

### **1.5.3 Understanding the Heritage Values of the Views**

Views of heritage assets can add to their significance as a shared experience, which may contribute to communal identity, form a part of the asset's aesthetic value, provide a connection with past viewers or provide understanding of their history. The views of Oxford in its landscape setting contribute to the significance of the city as a heritage asset. The views must be assessed with regard to how they contributes to the significance of the city core as a whole, and to the individual heritage assets that are seen, as well as their contribution to the significance of the places from which they are seen.



Understanding the contribution of the viewers, both past and present, forms an important step in this process. As such we have developed a methodology that assesses the heritage value of the viewers, the viewing place and the landscape in the view respectively.

## 1.5.4 Considering the viewers

By focusing on the viewers first the method emphasises the history of the view's appreciation to build understanding of the shared experience it may provide. The appreciation of features of acknowledged merit in the view is what makes it stand out from any other visual experience of landscape. This should establish what historical associations (historical value) the view has with past viewers or events and how it contributes now to the identity of communities, including the communal identity of the city (communal value).

For each view a simple statement should summarise the history of viewing and the contribution this makes to the significance of the view as a recognised and appreciated experience of the heritage assets.

This should be followed by a simple table setting out:

|                                                                                                                     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| How the view is used by present viewers and who these are likely to include.                                        |
| The key viewers who have added to the significance of the view through their association with it.                   |
| Other evidence of recognition of the importance and quality of the view and of particular features of it over time. |
| How recognition of the importance of the view in the past has influenced its use and management over time.          |

Often the work of past viewers, particularly artists and writers or poets provides an immediate means of demonstrating how viewers have appreciated the view in the past, or occasionally in the present.

## 1.5.5 Considering the viewing place

The next step is to consider both how the viewing place contributes to the significance of the heritage assets in the view and how the viewing place, as a potential or known heritage asset, gains significance from being the place from which the view is seen.

For each view it is necessary to define the viewing place, this might be a single point or a wider area, such as a park or area of open countryside within which the view is visible from many points. The view of Oxford from Boars Hill, for example, is available from a network of footpaths running across the hillside, as well as from the purpose built viewing station at Jarn Mound (although this is presently obscured by tree growth), from the Old Berkeley Golf Links (bought by Oxford Preservation Trust to protect the view), from the houses just to the south of it (built in this location to benefit from the view), as well as from the modern Hinksey Heights Golf Course. This broad viewing place and range of viewing points incorporates the designated viewpoint at Berkeley Road and the view cone defined in the Oxford and Vale of White Horse Local Plans but also provides numerous other potential viewpoints, which may contribute to the heritage values of the view.

In defining the extent of the viewing place consideration should be given to how well defined it is as a distinct 'place' in its physical features and historical development. Further matters to consider are whether the viewing place is appreciated as a destination, the extent of the area from which the view is actually visible, and its history of use or management to provide the view. This can be set out in a brief statement that broadly describes the characteristics of the viewing place.

This should be followed by an assessment that considers how the viewing place contributes to the significance of the view. The following questions are used as a series of prompts to consider various ways that the viewing place may do this, they are not all relevant in every case:

1.5.5 Table 1

| <b>What contribution does the viewing place make to the aesthetic or picturesque quality of the view?</b>                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                             | Does it help the focus of the view to be prominent by framing it or through the absence of distracting features?                                                                                                                                      |
|                                                                                                                                                                             | Does it contain features that contribute an attractive focus in their own right?                                                                                                                                                                      |
|                                                                                                                                                                             | Does it have a particular character that allows you to share a historic experience of the view?                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Has the viewing place been designed or managed to preserve the view?</b>                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Does the viewing place illustrate a particular period of historical development or use that contributes to its historical associations with viewing?</b>                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                                                                                                                                                                             | For example, South Park preserves features of the tree planting by the Morrell family when Cheney Farm was transformed into a park as part of their country estate with views over Oxford.                                                            |
| <b>Is there any potential that archaeological investigation of the viewing place might reveal more evidence of the history of viewing?</b>                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>How does the extent of the viewing place and your ability to move around it contribute to the experience of the view as a fixed point or kinetic viewing experience?</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Do other features of the management of the viewing place contribute positively or negatively to the experience of the view?</b>                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                                                                                                                                                                             | For example, a viewing place managed as a nature park may have a more interesting array of wildlife contributing to the view, whilst a view from beside a busy road may be a noisy and noxious environment that discourages appreciation of the view. |

If the viewing place is considered to include several viewing points it might be necessary to answer one or more of these questions separately for each viewpoint. Photographs that pick out key features of the viewing place can help to illustrate this analysis. The extent of the viewing place and any particular viewpoints of note within it should be recorded on a map to help understanding of the analysis presented. Key features of the viewing place might also be emphasised through a graphical representation of the view as in the 'simplified renders' we have prepared for the Oxford View Cones.

#### 1.5.6 Considering the landscape in the view

This is the most complex element of the analysis. For each view a brief statement should seek to describe the key features of the view that contribute to its heritage values. Each view should be considered as a whole landscape to which constituent elements contribute in different ways. The statement should characterise the contribution of these different

elements including the features that make them, and draw out how these contribute to the heritage values of the features in the view. This may include the way different elements of the landscape in the view interact. For example a part of the landscape might lead the eye to a focal group of buildings, or provide a particular contrast with an adjacent area.

Landscape features to be considered should include the following:

- › topography and layout (including the extent and framing of what is seen, definable fore, middle and backgrounds or areas within these and the impact of elevation of the viewing place or other features in the view);
- › changes in the view that result from movement around the viewing place, such as changing elevation, distance from the focal features or changes in the framing of the view;



- › green character features, such as the locations of belts of woodland, formal tree planting or areas of farmland or parkland;
  - › areas of different architectural character, such as areas of buildings of different age, scale or materials that make different contributions to the character of the landscape;
  - › focal features, such as individual buildings or landscape features or groups of buildings that draw the eye and/or make a particular aesthetic contribution to the view, in Oxford these are likely to be the historic high buildings of the City Centre (an example outside Oxford would be the stone outcrops or 'tors' of Dartmoor);
  - › infrastructure (including roads, railway lines and power lines);
  - › changeable but predictable factors including sunlight conditions, weather and seasonal changes of vegetation or agriculture, to understand how experience of the views will vary; and
  - › the conditions that provide particular aesthetic impacts that are well recognised.
- The analysis of significance is dependent on knowledge of the landscape, which may vary between viewers. However, the analysis should be well informed and assume a high degree of knowledge, including understanding of the historic character of different areas of the landscape in the view (for example understanding the rooftops of North Oxford as representing a suburb of the historic City Centre, or of the use and history of notable buildings that stand out), as well as familiarity with the historic associations of the view, such as its descriptions by poets or portrayal by artists.
- The analysis should identify how the following elements of the view contribute to its significance:

1.5.6 Table 2

| Context of the view – how does the location of the viewing place affect the experience of the heritage asset as a whole?                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | From what direction is the heritage asset seen and how does this affect what is most prominent?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Is it seen from close up or far away and how will this affect what is appreciated about it?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Layout, expanse and framing of the view – Does the absence of framing provide a majestic sweeping vista or does framing by trees, buildings, etc. create a channelled view that emphasises a focal feature or other features of interest? How are the features in the view distributed and how does this affect the way the eye moves around the view? |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› How broad is the arc of the view (e.g. narrow and focused or broad and expansive)?</li> <li>› Does this apply to all of it or just a part (e.g. broad foreground with trees framing a narrower, middle ground)?</li> <li>› How far can you see? Is this a short view in which all features are clearly discernible or is it a long view in which features in the distance recede into an obscure horizon?</li> <li>› What are the characteristics of the foreground, mid-ground and background and how do these vary?</li> <li>› Where are the focal features in this landscape?</li> <li>› How open is the skyline? Does it balance or contrast with the openness of the landscape?</li> <li>› What provides framing if there is any?</li> <li>› How have these characteristics changed over time based on historic appreciation of the view?</li> </ul> |

**Topography** – how does the elevation of the viewing place or other elements in the landscape affect character of the view?

- › Does the eye naturally travel down a hillside to focus on whatever is in the valley below?
- › How does the elevation influence the relative dominance of the foreground, middle ground, background and skyline?
- › Does the elevation provide an expansive foreground or is this foreshortened by a steep slope that makes the middle and background more dominant in the view?
- › Does a low level viewing point make the skyline more dominant and leave areas of the middle ground and background hidden from view?
- › Does a feature on a hilltop or raised area in the landscape appear more prominent than other features?
- › How does the influence of elevation vary across the viewing place?

**Green characteristics** – How do trees, hedgerows and other greenery contribute to the character of the view?

- › What are the different characteristics of the contribution of greenery in the fore, middle and background?
- › How does greenery contribute to the transitions between these areas?
- › What contribution does this make to the aesthetic value of these areas in the view or parts of them?
- › Does the greenery represent formal planting that is intended to have an aesthetic impact in the view or is it representative of an historic activity or use of the landscape?
- › How does this contribute to the historic experience of the view and connection with past viewers?
- › How does the greenery influence appreciation of focal features in the view?
- › Does any area of greenery make a particular contribution to the identity of a community – such as the trees in a historic park or a parish graveyard?

**Architectural characteristics** – How do buildings contribute to the character of the view?

- › Which individual buildings, areas or groupings of buildings can be identified in the view?
- › How do the materials, heights, shapes, densities and alignments of buildings influence their aesthetic contribution to the view?
- › What features do different groups of buildings have that provide evidence of different periods of development, different uses or other influences that mean they contribute to the aesthetic or historical value of the view differently?  
For example, buildings constructed before natural slate was widely distributed as a roofing material in the late 18th century are more likely to have steeply pitched roofs, that will appear different from the shallower pitch of later development. Buildings in historic villages may be distinguished in a view by their varied alignment, size and roof plans from the more uniform form, alignment and spacing of buildings in areas of 20th century suburban development.
- › Are any buildings or groups particularly prominent and does this contribute to the aesthetic or historical value in the view?
- › Are there any gaps between areas of buildings that contribute to their historical or aesthetic value? – For example by allowing them to stand apart or by illustrating their separate development?
- › Do any areas of architectural character contribute to the identity of a particular community?



**Focal features** – What provides the focus of the view, how does it do this and how does it contribute to the historical and aesthetic value of the view?

- › Is there one focal feature or several?
- › Is its/their focal role in views an intentional feature of their historical design or accidental?
- › Is it spread out across the view or confined to a narrow part of it?
- › If several features are clustered together, how does their juxtaposition affect their aesthetic and historical value – Are they designed to compete with each other or to contribute to a unified design?
- › What in the surrounding landscape contributes to its/their prominence? E.g. does the absence of other competing features make them more prominent or does the presence of a feature in the background or foreground draw attention to them.
- › Are these features that contribute to the identity of one or a number of communities by memorialising their origins or history or representing their activities?

**Infrastructure** – How do features that run across the landscape, contribute to its structure or lead the eye around the view contribute to its historic and aesthetic value?

Examples to consider might include roads, rivers, canal or railway lines. These represent specific features that have influenced the development of the landscape and have had specific uses in the past. They may have particular historical and aesthetic associations relating to their development and function.

**Skyscape, light and the seasons** – How do diurnal and seasonal changes in light influence the character of the view? What features of the landscape are likely to change in a predictable fashion? Which conditions are recognised as the best to view it?

- › How does the extent of skyscape contribute to the quality of the view? Is it constrained by surrounding features such as trees that frame views and contribute to a formal parkland setting or is the openness and lack of framing part of a wider rural character that is part of the picturesque quality of the view?
- › How does this affect your appreciation of features in the view – e.g. by casting shadow, highlighting or illuminating particular features or creating silhouettes?
- › Are there any materials in the view that will react particularly strongly to changes in sunlight or cloud cover?
- › What seasonal changes can you predict that will affect the colour and texture of farmland or tree canopies and what impact will this have on the historical and aesthetic value of the view?
- › How will seasonal changes in foliage affect what is visible, including architectural characteristics and focal features?
- › Are there other changes, such as seasonal flooding that are expected to influence the character of the view?

**Unique features** – Is there anything unique in the view not covered by the questions above that contributes to its ability to provide a connection with past people and events, that could reveal more about past human activity and experience, that contributes to its aesthetic impact or contributes to the identity or cohesiveness of communities?

**Detractors** – How do features perceived as incongruous or unattractive detract from its heritage value?

- › Do they hide features that are considered to make a positive contribution to the heritage assets' significance? This includes its aesthetic value but might also include historical, evidential and communal values.
- › Do they draw the eye away from features that make a positive contribution to the heritage asset's value by being more prominent?
- › Do they significantly alter the characteristics of an area within the view that was appreciated in the past for making a particularly positive contribution to the view's historical or aesthetic value?

- 1.5.7** This long list of criteria may seem intimidating, however, by working through the list of headlines the process of assessment is undertaken systematically and an understanding of the view built up that can then be summarised as a shorter statement.

Whilst it is necessary to assess the landscape in the view from a recognised viewpoint to provide an experience that can be replicated, it is also important to move around the viewing place to consider how the experience of the view changes from other angles, or changes in the elevation, framing or foreground. This can be presented within the assessment of each view by using a selection of photographs that represent the variety of experiences of the view that the viewing place provides.

The analysis should not rely on photographs alone to illustrate the positive features of the view. Key features of the landscape in the view might also be emphasised through a graphical representation of the view as in the 'simplified renders' we have prepared for the Oxford View Cones. This study can include annotations that characterise the contributions made by different elements of the landscape. These should emphasise how their historical or aesthetic value contributes to the quality of significance of the landscape in the view as a whole.

It is expected that each assessment is illustrated using a photograph taken from the identified assessment point. The Landscape Institute have stated that relying on photographs taken using a 35mm lens with a focal length of 50mm alone is a somewhat outdated method of reproducing a visual experience of a view (Landscape Institute, 2011). They suggest using photographs taken with a telephoto lens or enlargement of areas of photographs to show details that are too small to be seen in a standard image. This is necessary to replicate the eye's propensity to focus on particular details within a view rather than taking in the whole vista at once.



## 1.6 The Oxford Views

**1.6.1** The ten viewpoints in the current Oxford Local Plan are examples of places from which Oxford can be appreciated in its landscape. Each has its own history of viewing and provides a different viewing experience, whilst the view seen from each point has its own special qualities. These may be representative of the viewing experience; as such the ten views are grouped by the areas they represent.

They can be broadly grouped into:

- › Views from the western hills - examples: Raleigh Park, Boars Hill and A34 Interchange at Hinksey Hill
- › Views from the north eastern hills - example: Elsfield
- › Views across the Thames floodplain - example: Port Meadow
- › Views from the eastern hills - examples: Doris Field Memorial Park, Headington Hill Allotments and South Park
- › Views from south-east Oxford - examples: Crescent Road and Rose Hill

There are many other views of Oxford, examples of which are set out in the 'Character Assessment of Oxford in its Landscape Setting' (prepared for The Countryside Agency and Oxford City Council by Land Use Consultants in March 2002). Although the ten views from the Local Plan will be analysed in this report, it is anticipated that other views may also be identified and analysed in the future. Others are currently being identified through other projects in the city's Heritage Plan including the Oxford Heritage Assets Register and Conservation Area Appraisals.

## 1.7 The Planning Policy Framework

### 1.7.1 National Planning Policy Framework 2012

Conservation principles, policy and practice seek to preserve and enhance the value of heritage assets. The publication of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in March 2012 re-affirmed the government's overarching aim that the historic environment and its heritage assets should be conserved and enjoyed for the quality of life they bring to this and future generations.

The Government sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development and explains that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of this. For development to be sustainable it must, amongst other things, perform an environmental role contributing to the protection and enhancement of our natural, built and historic environment.

The elements of the historic environment that we value and that merit consideration in planning are called heritage assets and of these some will be defined as 'designated' heritage assets – for example scheduled monuments, listed buildings, conservation areas, registered historic parks and gardens. The features of the history, architecture, archaeology and artistic expression that give these assets interest determine their heritage significance. The NPPF explains that in developing a positive strategy for the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment local planning authorities should take account of:

- › the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- › the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits that conservation of the historic environment can bring;
- › the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness; and
- › opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place.

The NPPF advises that local planning authorities should have up to date evidence about the historic environment in their area and use it to assess the significance of heritage assets and the contribution they make to their environment. It is therefore important in Oxford that evidence about Oxford's views and their heritage significance is clearly documented.

In addition, the NPPF requires local planning authorities to identify opportunities for changes in the setting of heritage assets that would enhance or better reveal their significance and to treat favourably applications that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to, or better reveal, significance.

### 1.7.2 Oxford's Designated Heritage Assets and the Views

The historic high buildings that are the focus of the Oxford View Cones are statutory listed buildings protected under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The historic core of Oxford and large parts of its northern and eastern suburbs have been designated Conservation Areas under the same act. Under Section 66 of the Act the City Council have a duty to have **special regard** for the desirability of preserving listed buildings and their settings and any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses, when determining whether to grant planning permission for development. Similarly under Section 72 they must pay **special attention** to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas when exercising their powers as a planning authority.

The National Planning Policy Framework defines the setting of a heritage asset as; "The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral."



The Oxford View Cones provide a means of providing this special consideration of the impact of development on the setting of the historic high buildings of the city centre and several of the city's conservation areas where these are experienced from the wider landscape setting. They should be regarded as a sample of the views that allow appreciation of the setting of the city and its listed buildings and conservation areas.

English Heritage's Guidance on the Setting of Heritage Assets (2010) is intended to assist the implementation of the policies and guidance on decisions affecting the settings of heritage assets. The guidance points out that *'the heritage significance of places derives not only from their physical presence, but also from other attributes including their relationship with their surroundings, particularly their setting'* (Preface, English Heritage 2010).

The draft guidance acknowledges that the contribution of setting to the significance of a heritage asset is often expressed by reference to visual considerations, including views. It acknowledges that some views may contribute more to understanding of the heritage values of an asset than others, either due to the relationships between the asset and other historic places or natural features; or due to the historical associations of a particular view or viewing point; or because the composition within the view was a fundamental aspect of the design of the asset. It also suggests that where complex issues involving views come into play in the assessment of setting, a formal views analysis may be merited.

The study presented here provides such an analysis of the complex assemblage of heritage assets that form Oxford's historic views.

### 1.7.3 Current 'saved' Local Plan 2001 – 2016

The policy in the current Oxford Local Plan, 2001-2016 that aims to protect the character of the skyline is as follows:

*"POLICY HE.9 - HIGH BUILDING AREA:  
Planning permission will not be granted for any*

*development within a 1,200 metre radius of Carfax which exceeds 18.2 m (60 ft) in height or ordnance datum (height above sea level) 79.3 m (260 ft) (whichever is the lower) except for minor elements of no great bulk. A lesser height may be considered more appropriate for buildings that have to fit into the existing townscape. If existing buildings (at, or in excess of, these limits) are redeveloped, the City Council will consider carefully whether rebuilding to their previous height is acceptable in terms of how it would affect the appearance of the existing townscape and skyline".*

The policy in the current Local Plan that aims to manage Oxford's view cones is as follows:

*"POLICY HE.10 - VIEW CONES OF OXFORD:  
The City Council will seek to retain significant views both within Oxford and from outside, and protect the green backcloth from any adverse impact. Planning permission will not be granted for buildings or structures proposed within or close to the areas that are of special importance for the preservation of views of Oxford (the view cones) or buildings that are of a height which would detract from these views."*

### 1.7.4 Core Strategy 2026

The skyline's importance is also recognised in adopted Core Strategy Policy CS18, which states that;

*"Views of the skyline of the historic centre will be protected"*

### 1.7.5 West End Area Action Plan

And in West End AAP Policy WE10, which reads as follows:

*"...Applicants should demonstrate in their Design and Access Statement...that new development has been designed with an understanding of the area's heritage, street patterns, views, skyline and important buildings"* (Our emphasis)

This study seeks to provide the decision-maker with additional tools by which to assess whether development proposals meet these policy requirements.

## 1.8 References

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Oxford, OX1 0EW



## Appendix 1: Glossary

|                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Accurate Visual Representation (AVR)</b> | A still image, or animated sequence of images, intended to convey reliable visual information about a proposed development to assist the process of visual assessment [From The London Plan (Spatial Development Strategy for Greater London) Revised Supplementary Planning Guidance London View Management Framework, July 2010].                                         |
| <b>Arc of the View</b>                      | The total extent of view that is seen from a point as a result of the presence or absence of framing features.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Background</b>                           | <i>'Part of a scene or description that forms a setting for the main figures or events'</i> <sup>2</sup> . For the purposes of this assessment the background is described as the part of the view that forms a backdrop, where outline, colour and texture are more important than individual elements. This will include the area beyond the principal focus of the view. |
| <b>Diurnal Changes</b>                      | The changes to light and activity that take place on a daily cycle                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Dominant</b>                             | Having a commanding or imposing effect. Most important or influential.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Focal Feature</b>                        | The main feature or one of several features of the view that draw the eye to a particular point of interest.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Foreground</b>                           | <i>'The part of a view or picture nearest to the observer'</i> <sup>3</sup> . For the purpose of this assessment the foreground is defined as the viewing place itself and its immediate context, where the texture, materials and colour of elements can be clearly seen and contribute to the viewing experience.                                                         |
| <b>Framing</b>                              | The contribution to the character of the view of the foreground features that determine the extent of the view.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Grain (Urban Grain)</b>                  | The pattern and arrangement of street blocks and plots.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Heritage</b>                             | All inherited resources which people value for reasons beyond mere utility [from English Heritage's Conservation Principles]                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Heritage Assets</b>                      | A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. Heritage asset includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing).                                                      |
| <b>Heritage Values</b>                      | An aspect of worth or importance, attached by people to inherited resources. The 'family' of heritage values set out in English Heritage's Conservation Principles comprise the following component parts: evidential value, historic value, aesthetic value, and community value                                                                                           |
| <b>Kinetic</b>                              | Relating to or resulting from motion. In this report the kinetic nature of a view refers to the way in which the view is perceived as the viewer moves around or through a space (usually the viewing place).                                                                                                                                                               |

<sup>2</sup> Definition from the Oxford Dictionary

<sup>3</sup> Definition from the Oxford Dictionary

|                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Middleground</b>                  | For the purposes of this assessment the middle ground is defined as the link between foreground and background, where identification of individual buildings is possible, and the scale, grain, massing and pattern of buildings is particularly apparent.                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Optimal Viewpoint</b>             | Best or most favourable place for the view providing the greatest appreciation of its heritage values due to the composition of the view and the associations of the point from which it is seen.                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Prominent</b>                     | Particularly noticeable.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Setting (of a Heritage Asset)</b> | 'The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral' (from Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment, PPS5). |
| <b>Skyscape</b>                      | The extent and character of the visible sky the character of which is determined by framing and the features of the horizon in addition to any intrusive features such as power lines.                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Vanishing Point (also nadir)</b>  | The point at which a feature disappears from view, normally where it meets the horizon.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>View</b>                          | A sight or prospect, typically of attractive natural scenery, that can be taken in by the eye from a particular place (from Oxford Dictionaries online)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>View Cone</b>                     | The corridor between the viewer and the subject which encompasses the view up to the focal feature.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>View Significance</b>             | A combination of the sum of the heritage values of the view and how clearly they are expressed, including whether the view forms an 'iconic image', perhaps an image used in paintings, postcards and guidebooks. It also relates to the scale at which the view is valued (international, national, regional or local scale).                                                                              |
| <b>Viewing Place</b>                 | A public space from which the view can be experienced. The viewing place may have defined physical boundaries or may be a looser zone.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Qualitative Views Analysis</b>    | Analysis of a view by qualitative, rather than quantitative, means.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |



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## PART 2

# The Oxford View Cones: Views from the Western Hills

2015 Report



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## 2.1 Raleigh Park View Analysis Summary

### 2.1.1 Introduction

Raleigh Park now provides the most publicly accessible example of the view of Oxford from Harcourt Hill above North Hinksey, which has been admired since the early 18th century and recommended in some of Oxford's earliest guidebooks as one of the best prospects from which to view the city's architectural splendour. The view has inspired numerous artists in the past three centuries, although development along the hilltop and an increasingly wooded landscape has reduced access to it. Establishment of Raleigh Park in the early 20th century preserved public access to the view. Sadly this is one of the most compromised of the city's historic views due to the impact of later 20th century developments.

The view of the City Centre is framed by trees in the parkland. The historic high buildings in the middle distance are spread across the framed area and rise above the otherwise low scale roofscape of the City Centre. The foreground preserves elements of the rural hillside and meadows that were an essential element of

the beauty of the view portrayed by artists and writers in the past - the contrast between the 'rustic' and 'civilised' forming part of the 'sublime' quality of the landscape. Headington Hill also preserves a green backcloth against which the towers, spires and domes are seen. Commercial and industrial development in the later 20th century has included the construction of the Osney Mead Industrial Estate and other large buildings with low-pitched hipped roofs that appear as a continuous area of development leading up and into the historic City Centre, blurring its edges and cutting it off from the once admired green setting. In the background, the large rectilinear structures of the John Radcliffe hospital sits on Headington Hill drawing the eye from the historic high buildings and detracting from the fine architectural character of the City Centre. The impacts of these past developments make sustaining the positive characteristics of the view even more important in order to sustain its contribution to the significance of the City's heritage. Sustaining access to the view by managing the trees in the park should be a priority for protecting the view in the future.



*The Raleigh Park view in the 1960s*



## 2.1.2 The Viewers

This view was chosen by topographical artists to represent the view of Oxford in the 18th century and has been a widely recognised image of the city since that date. The popularity of their work guided the use of these locations by tourists during the wars of the 18th and early 19th century that prevented Britons from visiting the architectural and historical sites of the continent. The activity of walking out to view the city from Harcourt Hill is recorded in early 19th century tourist guides to Oxford, further cementing the practice of viewing the city from the hill as an important part of the experience of visiting Oxford. Later in the 19th century J. M. W. Turner painted the view of the city from above North Hinksey, continuing the tradition

of the earlier topographic artists. Experiencing the view today provides a connection to the experience of these past artists both famous and obscure. In 1924 philanthropist Raymond Ffennell gave land to form a park from which the view would be freely accessible for residents of Oxford and those in the nearby suburbs. As a founder of Oxford Preservation Trust, Ffennell's gift reflects a wider concern at the time to preserve the ability to appreciate Oxford in its green setting. The view is also experienced from the surrounding housing contributing to the quality of life for the residents of this area and adding to its attractiveness. Part of the park's management is now undertaken by local volunteers, who help to conserve the park's wildlife interest.

## 2.1.3 Present Viewers

|                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>People of Oxford and Vale of White Horse and visitors</b> | <p>This is now a freely accessible view that many residents from the surrounding area enjoy every day.</p> <p>People walk out to the park from the city for gentle recreation and access to semi-natural open space that is enhanced by their access to the view over the historic City Centre, providing a link between the suburb and city.</p> <p>The Raleigh Park view is popular with photographers providing an opportunity to get close up to the skyline of the City Centre.</p> <p>More formal tours have brought visitors and local people out to the park to admire the view painted by Turner and others.</p> <p>Lower down the hill, residents of North Hinksey Village and walkers on local footpaths benefit from views across the meadows towards the City Centre.</p> <p>The Park provides part of a network of paths along the sides of Harcourt Hill and linking to Boars Hill and Hinksey Hill, which are used for recreational walks to which the view makes a special contribution.</p> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

## 2.1.4 Viewers in the Past

|                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Early topographic writers and artists for tourists</b> | <p>This view was chosen by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck as the view of Oxford in their series of historical and topographical engravings published as Buck's Antiquities in the late 1720s and 30s and subsequently widely reprinted.</p> <p>It was also used by Joseph Farington in 1793 for his view of Oxford from the South West, published in Combe's History of the River Thames.</p> <p>John Britton, a noted early 19th century antiquarian and conservationist, in his 'Beauties of England and Wales' (1814) used an engraving of the view from Ferry Hinksey (North Hinksey) by E. W. Brayley to illustrate his description of the city in its setting "...The vale now expands into a spacious amphitheatre, bounded by some striking hills, in the centre of which the majestic towers, domes, and spires of Oxford burst upon the sight, appearing proudly ranged behind the thick shade of venerable groves."</p> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

|                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                    | Wade's walks in Oxford (published in 1817 as a guide to the city's historic sights) describes an eminence near Ferry Hinksey where "Oxford is seen to great advantage, rising like the queen of the vale from the bosom of a thick grove, between which and the spectator the Isis rolls his mazy waters."                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>J.M.W. Turner's later paintings of Oxford</b>   | <p>Turner's paintings and sketches of this view date from the later part of his career when financial independence had allowed him to become more experimental in his art. One is an example of his pure light paintings whilst another is a detailed landscape now held in the Manchester City Gallery.</p> <p>Both paintings emphasise the uneven rural foreground, the open space of meadows and river in the valley floor and the City Centre and its skyline buildings standing on a low eminence forming a focus to the landscape. The more detailed painting uses people to emphasise the rural toil of the foreground, which provide counter point to the sublime quality of the landscape and city architecture. Two dons shown walking in discussion provide an unusual feature suggesting a different relationship between the city and its rural surroundings.</p> |
| <b>Matthew Arnold – Victorian Poet</b>             | Matthew Arnold's poem the Scholar Gypsy refers to the journey across the causeway through flooded fields to Hinksey and up the hill to a viewpoint where, looking back the lights of Christ Church Hall could be seen on a winter evening. This seems to be an evocative description of the journey to view Oxford from Harcourt Hill above North Hinksey.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>20th century settlers</b>                       | Houses on the lower slopes of the hill were built with frontages facing the city to get the best value from the views.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Early 20th century conservation campaigners</b> | <p>The land at Raleigh Park (27 acres) was bought by Raymond Ffennell in 1924 from the Harcourt family who were promoting the hillside for housing development. He later gave the land to the city for a park that would provide views of the famous city skyline.</p> <p>Land in the Thames Valley was protected through the designation of the Oxford Green Belt in 1975 to preserve the historic setting of the city and prevent urban sprawl.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |



*Oxford from North Hinksey Hill, JMW Turner (c. 1835-1840) ©Manchester City Galleries*



### 2.1.5 The Viewing Place

The viewing place will contribute to what is seen in the view but may also have historical, evidential or communal value as a place for viewing the city that adds to the significance of the view. The park provides 'kinetic' views - that is a series of changing views seen as a person moves around the park, with views changing as a result of different angles, changing elevation in the park and the framing effects of trees. The park is now

partly wooded, restricting the area from which views of the city are seen. Where it does provide views to the city, the park preserves a rough grassland character as a foreground with framing by hedgerow trees that reflect the historic character of the views from the city's agricultural hinterland recorded in historic paintings. The Park lies within the Vale of White Horse District and forms part of the Oxford Green Belt, designated to protect the setting and historic character of the city.

|                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Aesthetic value of the foreground</b>                       | <p>The park provides a green foreground with soft framing of views to the City Centre by trees. This provides an attractive setting to the city that provides a strong contrast with the built up area but does not contain structures that would distract from the view of the colleges and other historic buildings of the City Centre.</p> <p>The park has been managed to provide rich wildlife habitat with birds and insects contributing to its attractive quality.</p>                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Historical value of the rural landscape of the hillside</b> | <p>Whilst land to the north west of the park has been developed for housing and land to the south west is expected to be developed shortly, the park preserves an area of open rural character that reflects the history of the hillside as open farmland as portrayed by artists and writers in the past.</p> <p>By preserving this character it maintains its associative value with the past viewers who have used it as an escape from the urban and academic life of Oxford, including the poets and artists who have taken inspiration from the juxtaposition of city and countryside.</p> |
| <b>Historical association with philanthropists and viewing</b> | <p>The park has a special association with Raymond Ffennell as the philanthropist who gave it to the people of the city for their enjoyment and to preserve the view of Oxford in its green setting.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |



*A photomontage showing the contribution of the rural foreground environment and the fragile narrow area of skyline forming the focus of the view*

### 2.1.6 The Landscape in the View

Raleigh Park provides both framed and open views of the City Centre as you move around it at a relatively close point to the historic high buildings (the viewpoint is approximately 2.3 kilometres from Carfax). Within the view the landscape is seen as a series of narrow layers each representing a different area of the city.

In the foreground the parkland greenery is maintained as a mixture of rough pasture and woodland, reflecting the historic rural setting of the hillside, with rooftops and the pyramid topped church tower of North Hinksey village adding to the historic rural context. Unfortunately development of woodland in the park has also screened views to the city from a large area of it.

In the village and across the meadows to the east, tall trees continue the green character of the foreground and, in the summer months, help to reduce the intrusive impact of the roofscape of the modern industrial estate at Osney Mead on the remaining foreground (see below). The green meadows and the sinuous course of the River Thames running up to the feet of the city have been a feature of the view admired by artists over the centuries. However, the tall trees on the park's edge and beyond North Hinksey currently screen these features from view. Beyond Osney Mead, a small number of red brick industrial buildings, stand out within the landscape of development of West Oxford including Osney Mill, a 19th century mill that marks the site of Osney Abbey, as well as the brick chimneys of the Morrell's Lion Brewery. From lower slopes in the park a more open aspect allows views northward to the area surrounding Oxford Station including the stepped spire of the Said Business School

and the Victorian power station next to the River Thames. Historic high buildings in Jericho and North Oxford can also be seen rising above the tree canopy that generally obscures views of the rooftops of these suburbs.

The high buildings stand in a narrow row across the framed area of the City Centre allowing appreciation of the architecture and historic interest of each individually.

Behind, Headington Hill provides a green backcloth of woodland and the well-wooded gardens of houses on Headington Hill and surrounding developments. Peeping from among the trees is Headington Hill Hall, the home of one of Oxford's most successful mercantile families. The green open space of South Park is seen on the hillside just to the right of the City Centre and has further historic interest, as well as contributing to the green backcloth.

Beside the positive features there are also a number of features that detract from the quality of this view. The buildings of the Osney Mead Industrial Estate have introduced a roofscape of large shallow-pitch hipped roofs of white or light grey sheet materials that cross the framed area in front of the City Centre, drawing the eye away from the City Centre's architectural interest. The print hall of the Newsquest building is particularly prominent as a large boxlike structure rising up above the surrounding green landscape in the foreground of the view. Other buildings with similar roofs, including the Royal Mail Building and Oxford and Cherwell Valley College Jericho Building either side of Oxpens Road, continue the intrusive roofscape up to the edge of the City Centre. The bulky, flat-roofed structures of



*The view zoomed into the thin line of the City's historic skyline in October 2010*



the council offices at Castle Street and the Westgate Centre sit within the City Centre as intrusive elements that rise above the general roofscape without incorporating the pitched surfaces, and variations in height and material that characterise the more historic roofscape

of the city. In the background, the large rectilinear structures of the John Radcliffe Hospital break up the green backdrop to the city and also draw the eye away from historic high buildings, sitting directly behind some of them in the view.

### 2.1.7 Topography and layout of the view:

|                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The expanse of the view varies within the park.      | <p>At the viewpoint most commonly chosen the trees and hedgerows in and around the park frame the view of the city's historic core, providing an understanding of the extent of the medieval city set on its gravel ridge at the river crossings.</p> <p>Elsewhere in the park more open views can be experienced that provide a greater sense of the City Centre's connection with its historic industrial suburb to the west. Glimpsed views between dense groups of trees focus attention on individual high buildings.</p> |
| Looking down on the city with Headington Hill beyond | <p>The elevated position of the park allows the viewer to look down to the city and the high buildings, which are seen as rising from the more general roofscape of the City Centre and against the backdrop of Headington Hill.</p> <p>Development on the lower slopes of Headington Hill and in the Cherwell Valley do not rise up between the City Centre and the hill, preserving the sense of the city in its green setting.</p>                                                                                          |

### 2.1.8 Green Characteristics:

|                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Rural landscape of the park                  | Contributes to both the aesthetic value of the view and the ability to connect with the historic experience of past writers and artists. This includes the rough pasture, grazed by cattle and the hedgerows and trees that frame views.                                                                                                                                            |
| Rural landscape in the Thames Valley meadows | The trees in North Hinksey and in the valley beyond add to the green quality of the view, helping to set the City Centre within a green landscape. They also help to screen some of the industrial buildings built within the floodplain in the later 20th century, which intrude into this view.                                                                                   |
| Wooded hills in the background               | The wooded gardens and landscape of Headington Hill adds to the aesthetic value of the City Centre by setting it against an attractive and contrasting green background. The greenery recalls the open countryside recorded beyond the City Centre by historic painters and writers and illustrates the development of Headington Hill as a picturesque suburb in the 19th century. |
| South Park as part of the background         | South Park also forms an attractive part of the green Headington Hill background. Its open landscape preserves a section of the open countryside that provided the backdrop to the city in the 18th and 19th centuries when this view became popular. The preservation of the green space has further historic interest (see the South Park View Summary)                           |
| Trees along the Thames and Railway line      | An area of large trees running along the River Thames and the Railway Line help to divide the roofscape of Osney Mead from that of the historic city core. They provide mounds of soft foliage above which the City Centre roofscape and skyline rise.                                                                                                                              |
| Trees in the City Centre                     | Notable trees in the City Centre rise within the roofscape, softening the outline of buildings and adding contrast to the predominant limestone and grey colours. Particularly notable are the trees on Oxford Castle Motte (drawing attention to this historic feature) and in Grove Quad at Lincoln College, which stand juxtaposed to the Radcliffe Camera.                      |

### 2.1.9 Architectural characteristics:

|                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Historic rural foreground buildings</b> | The village buildings of North Hinksey including the unusual pyramid roof of the tower of St Lawrence's Church provide vernacular forms and materials as well as unevenly spaced and oriented building that contribute to the rural character of the foreground indicating the relationship between the city in the distance and the village standing in its rural setting.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>City Centre roofscape</b>               | <p>North of the Westgate Centre, the City Centre is seen as a narrow band of fine-grained roofscape of small pitched roofs of natural slate and red clay tile rising to a consistent level or ridgelines and above which the numerous historic buildings rise.</p> <p>This view is notable for the high number of smaller towers that are visible in the north and west part of the City Centre, representing the many medieval parish churches in the city, as well as Oxford's Castle.</p> <p>South of the Westgate Centre areas of fine-grained roofscape are seen, representing the ribbon of historic development along St Aldgate's and the area between the west end of High Street to Blue Boar Street. Occasionally the longer pitched roofs of buildings of colleges and churches are seen amongst these reflecting the concentration of colleges in the south east quarter of the historic City Centre.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Oxford Castle</b>                       | The long elevations of Oxford Castle's historic prison buildings stand out on the western edge of the City Centre marking the edge of the historic city and drawing the eye to this important historic feature.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>West Oxford buildings</b>               | The larger rooftops of historic industrial buildings help to illustrate the development of this area as Oxford's riverside industrial suburb, part of its character that stretches back to the Middle Ages and continued into the late 19th and early 20th century. These tend to be red brick buildings of up to three and half storeys. Osney Mill, recently renovated, stands out as a red brick building with traditional pitched slate roof with cornered gables.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>The high buildings</b>                  | <p>The historic high buildings stand above the general roofscape and form the focus of the view. The two groupings of high buildings seen from the east are also discernable in this view (The University Group focused on the Radcliffe Camera and the Christ Church Group focused on Tom Tower). These reflect the two foci of investment in prestigious architecture by patrons including Kings of England, bishops and magnates, among others. Both provide attractive groupings of historic buildings with a juxtaposition of attractive architectural detailing.</p> <p>Other high buildings are spread across the historic centre of the city illustrating the extent of Medieval and Early Modern Oxford, the presence of numerous medieval parish churches in the City Centre and the extensive spread of the historic colleges, each with their own prestigious buildings competing for prominence on the skyline.</p> <p>Oxford Castle's St George's tower acts as a marker for the early locus of civil administration and Norman overlordship as well as marking the historic entrance to the city from the west.</p> |

### 2.1.10 The Influence of light and the Seasons:

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| <b>Breadth of sky varies but balances the enclosed character of the foreground</b> | The openness of the skyscape varies at different points within the park. From the apex of the view cone the surrounding foliage provides a frame that constrains the skyscape and focuses the view toward the City Centre roofscape in the valley below. As such it generally balances the contained open space within the park. From lower down the slope the foliage is less constraining on either side, with a wider skyscape that provides more of the open rural character that it has been valued for in the past. |
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| <b>Optimum view conditions</b>         | The optimum conditions for viewing are in mixed cloud and sun in the late afternoon in high summer, when the light illuminates the limestone high buildings with the dark green foliage of Headington Hill behind providing a strong contrast.    |
| <b>Less favourable view conditions</b> | From October until May the loss of tree cover makes the intrusive impact of more recent developments more dominant in the view, whilst in overcast or misty weather the focus shifts to the foreground and the City Centre can become indistinct. |

#### 2.1.11 Detractors:

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| <b>Osney Mead Industrial buildings</b>               | <p>The industrial buildings of Osney Mead have replaced the former open rural character of the meadows that formed the middle ground of the view up to the edge of the City Centre. They tend to have large low pitched areas of sheet roofing that are either white or of a light colour that are very reflective, drawing the eye to the foreground and away from the historic high buildings of the City Centre. They have reduced the extent of the rural setting to the city that was historically part of both its aesthetic and evidential value and historic and artistic interest. The buildings are seen cumulatively as a quilt of roof surfaces extending right across the middle ground of the view, although the tree cover provided in high summer helps reduce their visual impact.</p> <p>The print hall of the Newsquest building is particularly intrusive, rising well above the general roofscape of Osney Mead with conspicuous blue cladding. From the main viewing point in the park it is in line with the buildings of Christ Church and competes with them for attention, marring the low level character of the middle ground of the view.</p>                                                                              |
| <b>West Oxford Buildings and the Westgate Centre</b> | <p>Several buildings on the edge of the city and running into its centre continue the extent of the intrusive 'quilt' of low-pitched large roof surfaces established by Osney Mead. The Royal Mail building (King Charles House) and Jericho Building of Oxford and Cherwell Valley College both contribute to this roofscape. These blur the visible edges of the City Centre, reducing the distinctive sharp edge between the historic city and its rural setting that was historically part of its historical and aesthetic value and artistic interest.</p> <p>The Westgate Centre forms two large blocks that rise up within the City Centre landscape. These have a distinctive rectilinear form that detracts from the pattern of steeply pitched rooftops that are characteristic of the City Centre beyond. The white painted cladding elements on the upper floors of the building draw the eye, highlighting this element of the building, which competes for attention with the high buildings in the historic core of the city beyond. This impact is partially mitigated by the steeply pitched pyramids that form part of the building's roofscape, helping to break up the horizontal mass it creates in the City Centre roofscape.</p> |
| <b>John Radcliffe Hospital</b>                       | The earliest structures of the John Radcliffe Hospital were built on a hilltop location outside the City Centre to provide access to fresh air. Nevertheless the buildings constructed in the 1960s and more recently have not generally been considered as having any aesthetic value. Early staff members referred to it in derogatory terms as 'The John' due to its appearance. The buildings break up the wooded slopes of Headington Hill that form the backdrop to the City Centre with a large mass of white rectilinear surfaces that draw the eye away from the historic high buildings marring the architectural character of the view.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Pylons</b>                                        | The line of Pylons and high level electric power lines that runs from Hinksey/Botley across the view and then down into the city introduces a jarring feature that contributes to the modern intrusions of industrial development to the formerly rural foreground of the view.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

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| <b>Tree management</b> | Trees within the park have grown to a point where they screen the view of the city from the majority of it. Maintaining views from within the park towards the City Centre need to form a consideration for future management that reflects the origins of the park as a place for viewing Oxford from its countryside setting. |
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#### 2.1.12 Sensitivity to change:

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| <b>Change in the viewing place</b>                         | <p>The growth of trees in the park has resulted in a gradual loss of the view of the City Centre and the small cluster of historic rural buildings of North Hinksey village at the foot of the hill. Further unmanaged tree growth threatens to further reduce the visibility of the view and would represent harm to the view that is likely to result in under appreciation of its importance when considered in decision-making. Conversely, there is potential to enhance the view through gradually revealing views from other parts of the park by careful tree thinning.</p> <p>Loss of the rural character of the viewing place either through change within it, or by increasing the visibility of surrounding developments would result in harm to the significance of the view.</p> |
| <b>Change in the middle ground – Osney Mead and Oxpens</b> | <p>Further development that extends the coverage of the area of large shallow-pitched roofs between the viewing place and the historic City Centre or makes it more visibly prominent would have a negative impact on this view. The impact of the Newsquest Print-hall rising up from the industrial estate demonstrates how increasing the prominence of these buildings detracts further from the view.</p> <p>However, there are also opportunities to enhance the view by reducing the prominence of the industrial estate's roof-surfaces. This might include using darker or less reflective materials for roofs when they are replaced or using tree planting to break up the area of roof-surfaces.</p>                                                                               |
| <b>Change in the City Centre</b>                           | <p>New development that detracts from the prominence of the historic high buildings, or that reduces their visibility would be regarded as having a negative impact on the view. Development that detracts from the positive character of the city centre roofscape as a mass of steeply pitched small roofs would also be considered to detract from the view.</p> <p>The long side elevations of the Westgate Centre are noted as detracting from the view at present. Breaking these up through use of shorter lengths of different materials to reflect the finer grain of other roof-surfaces in the City Centre could enhance the view.</p>                                                                                                                                              |



Figure 2.1.1



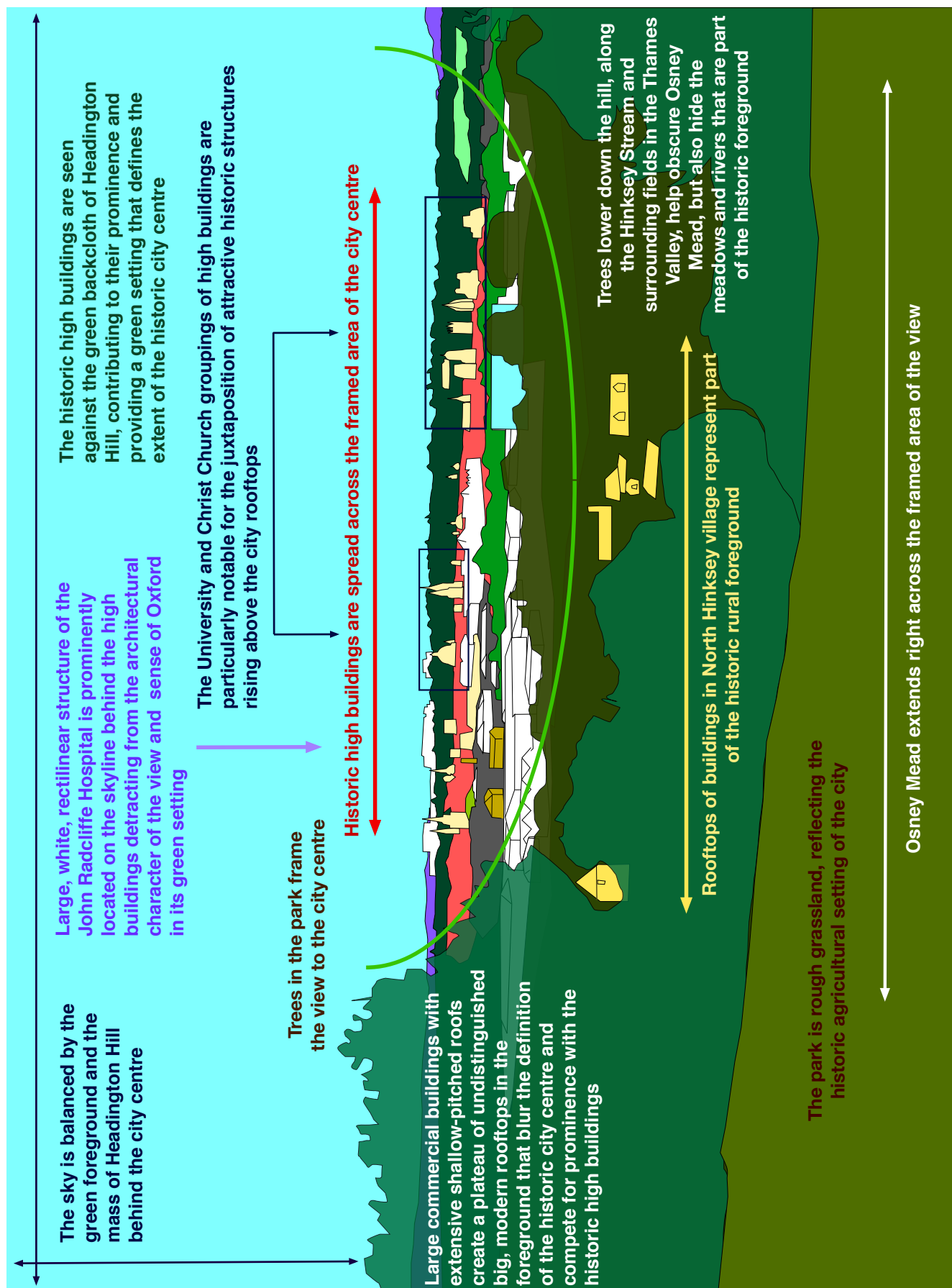
*Photograph of the view from Raleigh Park*

Figure 2.1.2



*Illustration 1: Simplified render of the view from Raleigh Park*

Figure 2.1.3  
Illustration 2: Annotated  
render of the view from  
Raleigh Park





OXFORD  
PRESERVATION  
TRUST

## 2.2 Boars Hill View Analysis Summary

### 2.2.1 Introduction

The Boars Hill view is one of the most famous and unspoiled views of Oxford. It has inspired painters and poets since the 18th century, providing the origin of Oxford's identity as "... that sweet city with her dreaming spires". Despite threats that the viewing place would be lost to prestigious suburban development in the early 20th century, the former Berkeley Golf Course and Sir Arthur Evans' Jarn Mound are now publicly accessible, thanks to their ownership by Oxford Preservation Trust. The former golf course now contributes to the pastoral character of the foreground. The City Centre is seen at a distance of several miles looking from a point within the Vale of White Horse District over land in Oxford's Green Belt. The rolling green fields and woodlands appear to continue unbroken to the feet of the medieval city. The limestone churches and University and college buildings are seen forming a mass in the south east of the City Centre. These include long elevations of college

buildings with intricate rooflines of pinnacles or spirelets, above which the towers, spires and domes rise. To the west (left) the rest of the City Centre is mainly comprised of a more humble mix of small, pitched rooftops. St George's Tower and the prison buildings of Oxford Castle with the spire of Nuffield College indicate the western limit of the City Centre. The rooftops, spires and domes of 18th and 19th University and college buildings and churches (including the Tower of the Winds and the Churches of St Barnabas and Ss Philip and James) continue to the left of the view where North Oxford and Jericho are seen as an extension of the City Centre. Nevertheless the mass of the suburbs' buildings are disguised by the dense tree canopy. The modern suburbs of New Marston and Northway are hidden behind the City Centre in the Cherwell Valley, whilst East Oxford is screened by woodland in the foreground. The hills of Elsfield and Woodeaton form a wooded backcloth with 'blue' hills beyond.



*An example of the Boars Hill view taken by a professional photographer*



## 2.2.2 The Viewers

The view provides historical value by connecting us to past viewers through a shared experience of seeing Oxford's landscape and architecture. The view from Boars Hill is one of Oxford's most romanticised views, described in poetry by Matthew Arnold (sometimes considered the third great Victorian poet) in his wistful eulogy *Thyrsis* (1866) as well as the *Scholar Gypsy* (1853) and painted by J. M. W. Turner in one of his earliest works (in 1787/8 at the age of 14). These poems also point out that the hilltop was a regular destination for scholars from the University either for sociable exercise or as a quiet location to study in the rural surroundings. The Berkeley family made the hill their home in the late 19th century, building The Heath (later Foxcombe Hall) as a replica of their ancestral castle. Subsequently, house builders exploited the views from the hill to attract wealthy buyers. A golf course was

also established attracting more people to the hilltop. In the early 20th century, concern for the preservation of the views attracted the attention of conservationists. Oxford Preservation Trust bought the Old Berkeley Golf Course in 1927 to protect it from the spread of housing development that was threatening to destroy opportunities to see the famous view. The purchase brought the Trust into being as one of the country's earliest amenity societies, with the express purpose of protecting the world famous views of the city. During the years of the Great Depression (1931-33) Sir Arthur Evans, the famous archaeologist, provided work for unemployed men by building Jarn Mound, which offered a prospect of Oxford over the canopy of trees that was developing. How past viewers have recorded or portrayed the view can reveal features that have historically been considered significant about it and that continue to have significance today.

## 2.2.3 Present Viewers

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| People of Oxford and Vale of White Horse residents and visitors. | <p>It is now a freely accessible view that hundreds of people enjoy every day. People walk out to the hill to enjoy the view whilst having a picnic or relaxing and it is still normal to see students reading on the grass at the Old Berkeley Golf Course on sunny days.</p> <p>The Boars Hill view is very popular with photographers who often zoom in to catch the detail of the group of University buildings, unimpeded by development in the foreground.</p> <p>The regional headquarters of the Open University is now based at Foxcombe Hall and many visitors are able to admire the view over the Old Berkeley Golf Course.</p> <p>Lower down the hill the Hinksey Heights Golf Course and a network of footpaths are used by local residents for recreation, which include routes that are either the same or similar to those recorded by the poets. Viewers use these paths to move from one viewing place in the western hills group to another with the links from Boars Hill to the Harcourt Hill views (including Raleigh Park) to the north and the Hinksey Hill Views (including those from Bagley Wood and the Hinksey Hill Interchange) to the south east.</p> |
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## 2.2.4 Past Viewers

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| One of J.M.W. Turner's earliest painted landscapes | 1787 "View of Oxford from the South West", Tate Collection.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Other 18th and 19th century artists                | Examples of other artists who have shown appreciation for the view include J. B. Malchair, (A distant view of Oxford from Hinksey), Skelton (South West view of Oxford after Malchair, c. 1820), and William Turner of Oxford (Oxford from Hinksey Hill, c. 1840, Oxford City Council Collection). |

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| <b>19th and early 20th century poets – including Matthew Arnold</b> | <p>Matthew Arnold was introduced to the view in 1841 by his friend and fellow poet Arthur Hugh Clough. His poems the Scholar Gypsy (1853) and Thyrsis (1866) both refer to the view from the hill, referencing pastoral landscape of Hinksey, Bagley Wood and Cumnor (Boars Hill was part of Cumnor Parish until the mid-19th century) and the distant view of the city and particularly of Christ Church.</p> <p>Later in the 19th century, poets including Margaret Louisa Woods, Robert Bridges and John Masefield (the latter both poet laureates).</p> <p>Following the First World War the poets Robert Graves, Edmund Blunden and Robert Nichols all lived on the hill. Elizabeth Daryush, the daughter of Robert Bridges was also a prominent 20th century poet and lived on the hill. Her husband later bequeathed their house, Stockwell, with its ground to Oxford Preservation Trust.</p> |
| <b>19th and early 20th century settlers</b>                         | <p>Houses on Boars Hill were built in the early 20th century to exploit the high quality of the view, each borrowing the city and its green setting to add to the attractiveness of the property.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Early 20th century conservation campaigners</b>                  | <p>Oxford Preservation Trust bought the golf course to protect the land from housing development and to preserve public access to the famous views of the city.</p> <p>The land in the middle ground was protected through the designation of Oxford's Green Belt to safeguard the setting and historic character of the city.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |



View of Oxford from the South West by J.M.W Turner, c. 1787 © Tate, London 2014



## 2.2.5 The Viewing Place

Boars Hill forms part of the western hills, which provide a series of views down to the city from a network of paths and open spaces. To the north the paths lead to Harcourt Hill (see the Raleigh Park View) and to the south to Hinksey Hill (see the Hinksey Hill/ A34 Interchange View). The Boars Hill view can be appreciated from several viewing places, each of which might make a contribution to the historical, aesthetic, or communal values of the view. The view across the Old Berkeley Golf course provides one

assessment point, although the golf course itself provides a kinetic viewing experience; that is a series of views as the viewer moves through or around the viewing place. Other viewing places include Jarn Mound, built by Sir Arthur Evans, which is a more fixed viewing point, as well as Hinksey Heights Golf Club and footpaths across Boars Hill between South Hinksey, Boars Hill, Chilswell Priory and Harcourt Hill. All of this area, west of Oxford's Southern by-pass lies within the Vale of White Horse District and forms part of Oxford's Green Belt.

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| <b>Aesthetic value of the foreground</b>                                  | <p>The rural foreground provides an attractive setting to the city with no structures that distract from the view of the historic buildings of the City Centre.</p> <p>Small farm cottages and farm buildings have scale, materials and detail that contribute to the aesthetic of this rural landscape – that is, they contribute to its rural picturesque beauty even though they may not have been designed with this in mind.</p> <p>The former golf course has been maintained as an open green space with undulating topography portrayed in early paintings of the view adding interest to the foreground.</p> <p>Hedgerows further down the hill add further attractive greenery in the view and provide reference features for understanding of perspective.</p> |
| <b>Historical and evidential value of rural landscape of the hillside</b> | <p>The rural character of the hillside provides evidence of its development as a farming landscape.</p> <p>By preserving this character it maintains its associative value with the past viewers who have used it as an escape from the busy urban and academic life of Oxford, including the poets and artists who have taken inspiration from the juxtaposition of city and countryside.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Historical value of the Old Golf Course</b>                            | <p>The grassland and flora of Old Berkeley Golf Course illustrates the area's use as open grazing land, enclosed in the early 19th century, but maintained more or less as a heath whilst in use as a golf course.</p> <p>The association with the early champions of Oxford's views provides further historical value to this viewing place that is heightened by the conservation of its character.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Historical value of Jarn Mound</b>                                     | <p>Jarn Mound provides associations with Sir Arthur Evans a great archaeologist but also a philanthropist, and benefactor of the Scouting movement. The mound is surrounded by a 'wildlife' garden created in the 1930s that also illustrates an early example of British nature conservation.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Ever-changing views</b>                                                | <p>The extensive green open space and public routes on the hillside provide an enormous number of views in which the continuously changing perspective creates different groupings and juxtapositions of historic buildings seen within the green setting of Oxford's rural surroundings. From lower down the slope, at the Hinksey Heights Golf Club the floodplain of the River Thames also comes into view, as open space interspersed with woodland.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |



*The Boars Hill View in 1962*

### 2.2.6 The Landscape in the View

From Boars Hill the historic City Centre, particularly the buildings of Christ Church, the dome of the Radcliffe Camera and spire of St Mary the Virgin Church, are seen as a tightly focused group within an extensive green setting of rolling hills. This creates a juxtaposition of the fine architecture of historic buildings with the soft green pastoral landscape (a contrast between the built, civilised, urbane or intellectual with the rural, rustic or 'natural' landscape). This is an important part of the experience of the city appreciated by artists and writers since the late 18th century. Seen as a group in the east of the city a number of the historic high buildings can be admired as a collection of competing pleasing forms, which vie for attention. This reflects their designers' intent to create buildings that would stand out in the landscape and compete for prominence with their neighbours as symbols of wealth, patronage and taste. The buildings are too distant for appreciation of their detailing, but the breadth and extent of the view allows an appreciation of the city in its setting of the surrounding hills.

The City Centre is raised just above the floodplain of the Thames, which is seen as meadows running from the lower slopes of the hill up to the wooded line of the railway. The City Centre's mass screens buildings in the Cherwell Valley. The mass of Oxford's northern suburb is seen to the west (left) of the City Centre, but is generally of low enough scale that it is largely hidden by the dense tree canopy of its gardens and streets. Historic high buildings in this area include the Radcliffe Observatory, the spire of Ss Philip and James' Church and the pyramid of the Museum of Natural History, which illustrate the 18th and 19th century expansion of the city and University. Elsfeld Hill and Woodeaton Hill provide a green backdrop to the City Centre and historic high buildings, against which the limestone and lead of the towers, spires and domes provide a strong contrast. Buildings in the foreground illustrate the dispersed settlement of the countryside and provide both historic and architectural interest. From the higher points on the hill the view is framed by woodland to either side, with areas of woodland crossing the foreground adding to its aesthetic interest.



### 2.2.7 Topography and layout of the view:

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| Wide view seen from a high point and far away in a broad green setting. | <p>The City Centre is a point of interest set within a broad green landscape of rolling hills (a jewel in a sea of green). The fall of ground into the valley draws the eye down to the City Centre without significant structures that distract in the foreground. Woodland and the shoulder of Harcourt Hill provide framing to an otherwise expansive view, screening East and West Oxford from view.</p> <p>This view exemplifies the historic experience of seeing Oxford in an amphitheatre of green hills recorded by poets, writers and artists.</p>                                                                                                                                   |
| The City Centre from the south west                                     | <p>The view illustrates the compact nature of the medieval and early modern city between the two rivers and north of the main river crossing.</p> <p>The main group of high buildings forms a cluster in the right half of the City Centre's visible mass. They are seen as a pyramid of high buildings competing for attention rising to the spire of St Mary the Virgin Church as the highest point. Their position reflects the historic concentration of university and college that are clustered on the main routes into the city from the south and east.</p> <p>St George's Tower is seen at the left limit of the City Centre, marking the western entrance to the medieval city.</p> |
| North Oxford to the left is an indistinct spread of development         | <p>The North Oxford suburb is seen as an indistinct mass of development softened by the extensive canopy of mature trees illustrating its picturesque planning and preventing an undue distraction for the historic experience of viewing the City Centre.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Woodeaton and Elsfield Hills as a green backdrop                        | <p>The two hills rise up seemingly from directly behind the historic high buildings as the Cherwell Valley and buildings of New Marston are hidden behind the City Centre.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

### 2.2.8 Green Characteristics:

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| Green rolling foreground crossed by agricultural hedgerows and woodland | <p>Contributes to both the aesthetic value of the view and the ability to connect with the historic experience of past writers and artists. Escaping to the green environs of the city to enjoy the open rural landscape is an important activity itself, to which the views of the city provide a unique element that is highly valued.</p> |
| Green up to the City Centre                                             | <p>The apparent continuity of green spaces up to the feet of the historic City Centre preserves its integrity as a compact medieval city and contributes to the attractive juxtaposition of the 'natural' countryside and 'civilised' University City.</p>                                                                                   |
| Wooded hills in the background                                          | <p>The woodland of the two hills in the background provides a strong contrast of colour with the City Centre high buildings that emphasises the nature of both.</p>                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Tree canopy of North Oxford                                             | <p>The roofscape of North Oxford is softened by the extensive canopy of mature trees illustrating its picturesque planning and preventing an undue distraction for the historic experience of viewing the City Centre.</p>                                                                                                                   |

### 2.2.9 Architectural Characteristics:

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| <b>City Centre<br/>roofscape</b>                                                            | The City Centre is mainly seen as a fine-grained roofscape of small pitched roofs of natural slate and red clay tile rising to a consistent level or ridgelines and above which only the high buildings and the roof of the town hall rise.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>The Colleges</b>                                                                         | In the east of the City Centre the long limestone ashlar elevations of College buildings are seen with spirelets rising from their parapets, creating a masonry forest of detail and low lead covered roofs.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Speedwell House<br/>and Oxford Castle</b>                                                | The long elevations of both buildings are seen as the edge of the City Centre. In the most distant views Speedwell House can be mistaken for a college building, whilst the Castle's prison blocks create a 'wall' defining the edge of the City Centre. The combined effect replicates part of the experience portrayed by Turner.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Buildings of the<br/>historic rural<br/>landscape</b>                                    | These have a vernacular character, rising to only two storeys in limestone or brick with prominent gables and steeply pitched roofs of limestone slates or clay tile.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Georgian<br/>and Victorian<br/>spires and high<br/>buildings of<br/>Oxford's suburbs</b> | Outside the focal group of historic high buildings (see below) a series of high buildings document the spread of Oxford northwards during the late 18th and 19th centuries. These include buildings that reflect the special academic history of the city including the Radcliffe Observatory's Tower of the Winds and the distinctive pyramid roof of the Museum of Natural History and colleges built in the late 19th and early 20th century (Keble and Nuffield College, as well as religious buildings that are representative of the suburbs within which they stand including the Church of Ss Philip and James and St Barnabas. These buildings share the palette of materials and forms that are used by those in the focal group, providing a shared character that is part of the attractive character of the view. |
| <b>The high<br/>buildings</b>                                                               | <p>The 'pyramid' of high buildings draws the eye to this part of the City Centre, reflecting the focus of the University and colleges' development.</p> <p>There is no other competing focus of high buildings in the City Centre that competes with this grouping allowing it to dominate.</p> <p>Oxford Castle's tower acts as a marker for the early locus of civil administration and Norman overlordship as well as marking the historic entrance to the city from the west.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

### 2.2.10 Infrastructure:

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| <b>The Railway Line</b> | The railway line into the City Centre crosses the interface between the green foreground and the City Centre. It is generally hidden by a belt of scrubby woodland, although trains can be seen running between gaps in the canopy or through the screen of trees in winter. It is most prominent in views from lower down the slope, including from Hinksey Heights Golf Club, where it forms the edge of Meadows and playing fields in the foreground. |
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### 2.2.11 The Influence of light and the Seasons:

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| <b>Skyscape</b> | <p>Looking down to the city the unconstrained skyscape is balanced by the extensive green foreground. This is part of the essential rural character of the view.</p> <p>The optimum conditions for viewing are in sunny weather with some high cloud in the late afternoon, when the sun is at a low angle behind or to the left of the viewer reflecting from the limestone of the high buildings, churches and colleges.</p> <p>The extensive setting can often mean that different parts of the view are in sunlight and shade. When the sunlight reaches the City Centre the limestone of the historic high buildings is illuminated picking these buildings out as bright but delicate structures in contrast with the greenery of the hills in front and behind and making an important contribution to the attractiveness of the combination of disparate landscape features.</p> |
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### 2.2.12 Detractors:

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| <b>Pylons</b>                                                                         | The line of pylons and high level electric power lines run from Botley to the left of view across the view and then down into the city and introduces a jarring feature that distracts from the rural character of the foreground and the aesthetic quality of the experience recorded by historical viewers.                                                                                                         |
| <b>University Science and Engineering Towers (Hans Krebs Tower and Thom Building)</b> | These two high buildings constructed in the 1960s have tall and bulky rectilinear forms that provide a negative contrast with the graceful spires and domes of the older high buildings. Whilst they represent the continued development of the University as a centre for the development of science they failed to support the aesthetic standard of high buildings in the view and inspired the view cones policy. |

### 2.2.13 Sensitivity to change:

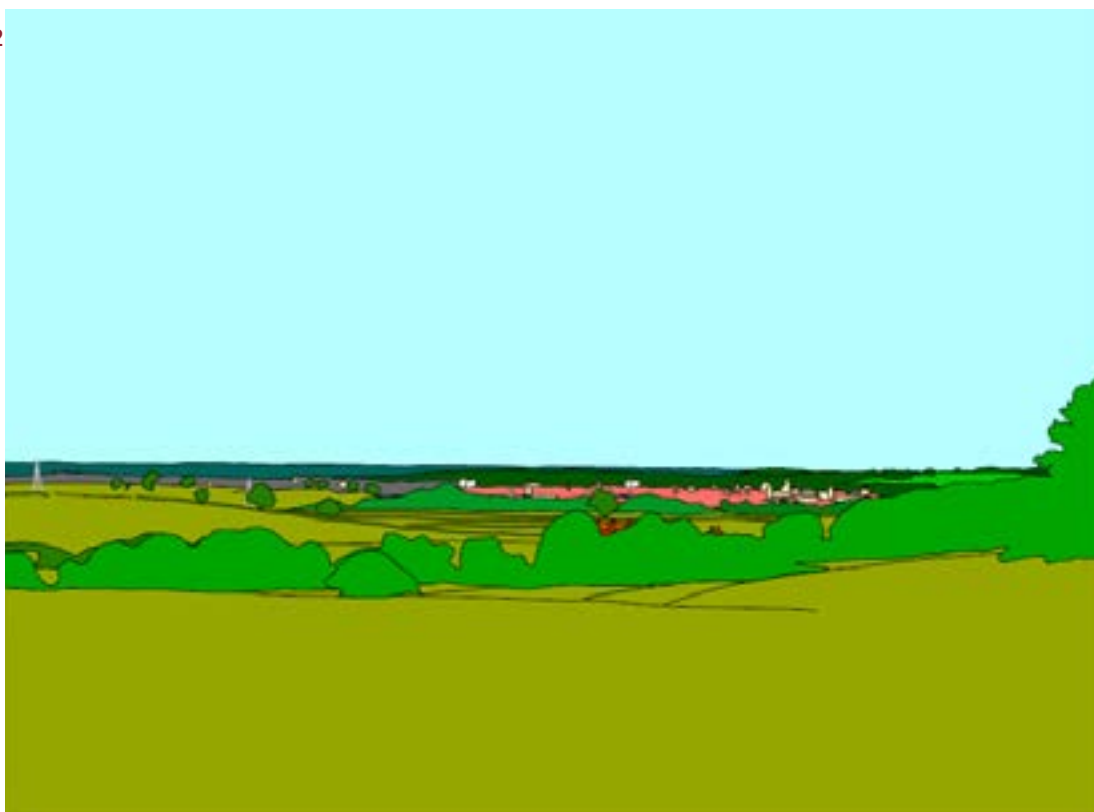
|                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Change in the rural setting</b> | <p>The view from the Old Berkeley Golf Course is one of the most unspoiled views of the city due to the careful management of the viewing place to sustain its historic rural character, and the absence of visible development in the foreground that would create a buffer between the historic City Centre and the countryside.</p> <p>Change that detracted from the rural character of the foreground or that introduced any feature which intervened in the crisp interface of the historic City Centre and the countryside setting would detract from the quality of the view.</p> <p>Removing the electricity pylons that run across the rural foreground and detract from its character by running the lines underground would represent an enhancement of the view.</p> |
| <b>Change in the City Centre</b>   | <p>The group of historic high buildings that forms the focus of this view has a pre-eminence that has remained unchanged since the age of Turner. Together these provide the distinctive skyline that makes an attractive view of a city into world class historic vista. Development within the City Centre that reduces their visibility or draws attention away from these buildings would result in harm to the view.</p> <p>The positive historic character of the City Centre's roofscape is a rough textured plain of steeply pitched short roof surfaces, with a focus of longer shallower pitched roofs adorned by numerous Gothic pinnacles marking the focus of the colleges. Development that alters this character would be regarded as resulting in harm.</p>       |
| <b>Changes in the suburbs</b>      | <p>Low-level development in the city's suburbs is unlikely to have a significant impact on the view. Loss of tree cover, either within the suburbs or in the surrounding areas that made the suburbs more prominent in the view, reducing the dominance of the City Centre as the focal area in the middle-ground would result in harm to the view.</p> <p>Taller development of any great mass in the suburbs that draws the eye away from the historic City Centre would result in harm to the view. Both the Thom Building and the Hans Krebs Tower have demonstrated this potential impact in the past. Careful design can, to some extent mitigate this impact, as for example was achieved with the stepped spire of the Said Business School.</p>                          |

Figure 2.2.1

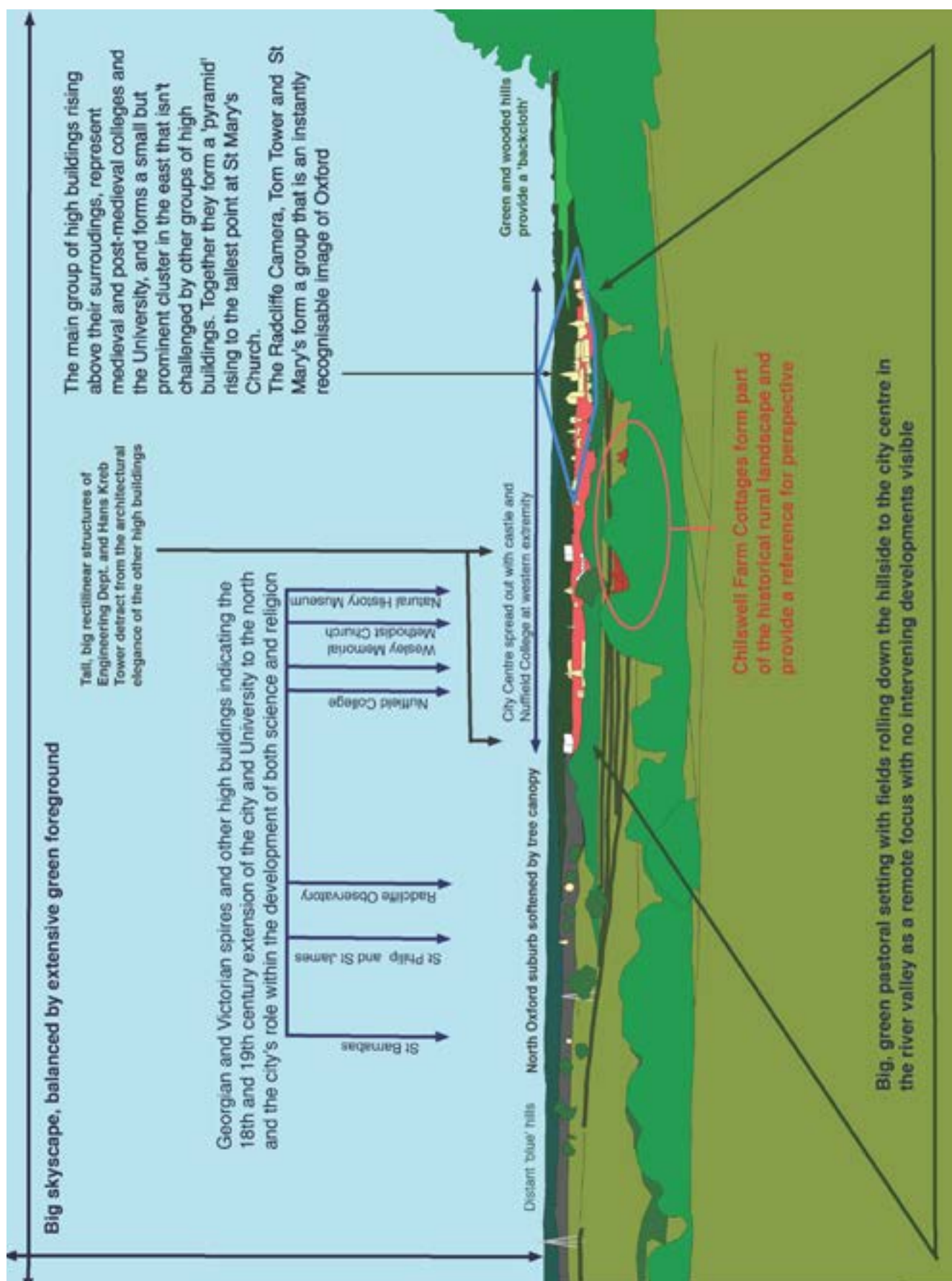


*Photograph of the view from Boars Hill*

Figure 2.2.2



*Illustration 1: Simplified render of the view from Boars Hill*



## 2.3 Hinksey Hill A34 Interchange

### View Analysis Summary

#### 2.3.1 Introduction

Recognising the prospect of the city from a modern highways interchange as a significant view may be surprising to many. However, the A34 Hinksey Interchange is in fact the site of a much older meeting of highways. It marks the point where the high road from Oxford to Abingdon over the Cumnor Hills, met the route along the west side of the Thames valley through South and North Hinksey. This has been the first view of Oxford seen by many travellers approaching from the south since the Middle Ages.

J. M.W. Turner's paintings of this view highlight the broad expanse of the floodplain with the city's historic high buildings seen at eyelevel as distant pinnacles against the sky. In his more mature work, dating from 1818 the pairing of Tom Tower and All Saints' Church (Lincoln College Library) provides a central focus to the view, whilst the grouping of St Mary the Virgin Church Spire and the Radcliffe Camera's dome

is supported by the shorter spire of Christ Church Cathedral and provides a mass to the left that adds to this focus. Other artists have focused on this central area.

The building of the interchange cemented the role of this point as the first point of arrival for many travellers approaching Oxford from southern England. The interchange provided a raised platform from which motorists would see the famous skyline across the green landscape of the valley. However, the development of dense foliage surrounding the interchange now makes it hard to see this view, whilst the two lines of pylons running up the valley from the south dominate the landscape setting of the city.

#### 2.3.2 The Viewers

This view provides a shared experience that provides a connection between past and present viewers. As a result the view can gain significance from those who have seen



*Oxford from the Abingdon Road by J. M. W. Turner (engraved by J. Pye), 1818 © Crown copyright: UK Government Art Collection*



it before, including artists and writers who have portrayed it in the past. This view is one of those portrayed by J. M. W. Turner both in his childhood and later in his career and was a regularly reproduced image in the 19th century. It has been an important view for travellers arriving on the edges of Oxford, looking down from the Abingdon Road across the green Valley

of the River Thames to the City Centre with its famous skyline. It continues to be the first view of the city that travellers arriving from the south have the opportunity to see and forms a link in the chain of views that are seen by walkers and others enjoying the routes along the line of hills west of Oxford.

### 2.3.3 Present Viewers

|                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| People traveling on the A34 and A423 into Oxford                    | This view is seen by hundreds of people everyday as they arrive in Oxford either from the A34 or descending from Hinksey Hill. Although the view from the interchange is currently screened from view by the thick vegetation on the embankment, the view is still seen looking from the A423 southern bypass between the interchange and the junction with Abingdon Road. For vehicle passengers this is likely to be a fleeting view but nevertheless is significant as a first view of the city from an arrival point in the south. |
| Local residents                                                     | Whilst the roadside environment is not an attractive prospect for a leisurely walk the footpath running alongside the A423 is still used by pedestrians and cyclists from nearby areas as part of a route between Oxford and Kennington and Hinksey Hill, to which the view to the historic city and rural setting of the meadows adds considerably to the otherwise unexceptional highways landscape.                                                                                                                                 |
| Walkers, joggers and cyclists                                       | The interchange and roadside footpath form a link in the routes from the city to the hillside walks from Hinksey Hill to Harcourt Hill that are enjoyed by many as recreational routes through Oxford's countryside setting, to which the views down to the city provide a unique historic and aesthetic value.                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Vale of White Horse District Council and Oxfordshire County Council | Designated view cone shown on both district and city council's local plan map and forming part of the Green Belt designated by the Secretary of State, County, District and City Councils to protect the historic character of Oxford.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

### 2.3.4 Viewers in the Past

|                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Travellers approaching Oxford                                              | This is likely to have been part of a route to Oxford and to the midlands from southern England since at least the late Middle Ages and will have been seen by many travellers descending the hill as their first view of Oxford and its famous skyline.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| J. M. W. Turner, copied and reproduced as an engraving in the 19th century | Turner painted this view twice. Once in 1787 as a child in a relatively naïve style (and with a number of discrepancies in the topographic detail) and again as a more accurate topographic view in (or shortly before) 1818. The latter painting was engraved and replicated, reaching a wider audience.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Other 19th century artists                                                 | Other artists used this view as a subject in the early and mid 19th century, using the hill slopes to frame the views of the valley, including the meandering course of the River Thames, which leads the eye up to the two groups of historic high buildings. Generally, these use foreground figures (including animals) to emphasise the bucolic character of the setting in contrast with the urbane subject of the city's architecture. Locating academics in the rural foreground setting is also a common motif used, emphasising the contrast of city and country. Examples include Mackenzie and Keux View of Oxford, from the Abingdon Road used in James Ingram's Memorials of Oxford 1837, J. Jackson engraving, c. 1845 and Joseph Skelton's engraving "after Malchair" (c. 1820). |

### 2.3.5 The Viewing Place

Where you see the view from can add to its significance through its historic associations as well as the visual aspects of the view and the viewing experience. Today the interchange of roads on Hinksey Hill is an unpleasant place, dominated by traffic and its associated noise and odour. However in the past this was an important point on the road network, providing the first view of Oxford from the south as the traveller descended the hill along the Abingdon Road. It provides a point in the

Oxford Green Belt from which the historic city can be appreciated in its landscape setting. The construction of the road interchange in the 1960s enhanced this viewpoint by providing a raised viewing platform. The viewpoint is now a point that thousands of motorists pass through everyday, making it one of the city's most visited viewing places. However, the growth of trees on the road embankment has now obscured the view from the interchange itself and requires management to open this out again.

|                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Part of the historic Abingdon Road</b>      | The antiquity of this route may not be apparent to many of today's travellers arriving via the A34 (Oxford's southern bypass), although it may be more obvious to those travelling down the narrow green route of the older high road Hinksey Hill (the A4183) from Abingdon or Boars Hill. Abingdon was the County town of Berkshire in the Middle Ages and the location of one of the country's largest monasteries. As such the route between the two towns is likely to have been a significant thoroughfare. |
| <b>The first view of Oxford from the south</b> | Today the interchange is important as the point where motorists leave the A34 trunk road to enter Oxford from the south. Up to this point the road is too low in the valley to afford a prospect of the city but from the interchange the first view to the city is seen.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Part of the Green Belt</b>                  | Designated in 1958 and reviewed through local plans since then recognises that seeing Oxford in its landscape setting is part of the city's special character.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>A new viewing point</b>                     | Although this is an ancient viewing point, the construction of the ring road in the 1960s created an accentuated platform at the interchange providing a new raised viewing place from which the city could be seen. The importance of the resultant view as a part of Oxford's green setting was recognised in the 1980s.                                                                                                                                                                                        |



*The historic high buildings of the City Centre are seen as a distant group across farmland. The photograph illustrates the impact of tree growth and the pylons on the view.*



## 2.3.6 The Landscape in the View

This is a medium distance view of the city looking across the green rural landscape of the Thames Valley floodplain. Within the framing of the hills to the east and west the City Centre is seen at the end of an extensive green middle ground with the historic high buildings rising above the general level of the rooftops of the city and without structures in the background to compete with them. The mass of building of Christ Church are seen from the south, forming a large block of limestone buildings with Tom Tower and All Saints' Church provided a focus to the view at the centre of the skyline. To the right, the Radcliffe Camera and the

spire of St Mary the Virgin Church provide a second focus to the view combining two of the most memorable features of the city skyline. Comparison with historical portrayals of this view demonstrate that the historic experience recorded at the beginning of the 19th century is still recognisable, partly due to the screening of the later 19th and 20th century suburbs of South Oxford on the right hand side of the view by lies of mature trees. Unfortunately the overgrown hedgerows and developing tree canopy in the foreground and on the edge of the City Centre currently obscures the view from the viewing place restricting the opportunity to appreciate it.

## 2.3.7 Context:

|                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| From the Western Hills | This is the most southerly of the views from the hills to the west of Oxford looking north east over farmland from the edge of the wooded slopes of the hill.                                                           |
| Next to a busy road    | This makes viewing the city a noisy experience with the unsettling feeling of passing vehicles. For motorists the view is likely to be fleeting, if seen at all, although many commuters could see it on a daily basis. |

## 2.3.8 Topography and layout of the view:

|                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A medium distance view looking across the undeveloped floodplain | The City Centre's historic high buildings are seen in the middle distance, some indistinctly but with sufficient clarity to make out the architectural features of the largest structures. No intervening development in the floodplain blocks the view to the City Centre.                                                                                                        |
| From the edge of the embankment                                  | The steep embankment next to the interchange provides a platform from which the view over the floodplain in the middle ground to the City Centre should be unhindered by hedges and trees lines. However, at present the embankment is covered by foliage which is blocking the view.                                                                                              |
| Rural middle ground setting to the city centre                   | The fields of the floodplain in the middle ground reflect the historic pastoral setting of the city that was admired by artists and writers in the past and continues to be both an aesthetically pleasing setting for views to the city and provides historical value to the city by illustrating the relationship of the city with its agricultural surroundings.                |
| City Centre as the horizon                                       | <p>The historic high buildings of the City Centre form prominent features on the horizon seen in the distance as a line of spires against the sky. Lower buildings are screened by the foliage of trees on the city edge.</p> <p>No other buildings are seen in the background to the view giving the historic high buildings an important role as the end point of the vista.</p> |

## 2.3.9 Green Characteristics:

|                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Green fields and hedgerows | The fields in the foreground and mid ground provide the green setting to the view of the City Centre that is part of both its attractiveness and sustain the historical experience of seeing the city in its green valley setting. |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

|                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Trees marking the railway and on the city edge</b> | The trees draw the eye up to the City Centre and contribute to the green character of the city's setting. They mark the course of the railway line, which is an historic feature, but also help to hide the engineered landscape of the modern trackside. They also screen the late 19th and 20th century suburbs of New Hinksey and Cold Harbour running down the Abingdon Road from the view, helping to preserve the green character of the city's setting. |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

### 2.3.10 Architectural Characteristics:

|                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>The historic high buildings</b> | The historic high buildings rise in a line across the central part of the view with a broad area to either side without high features visible. Nuffield College's spire marks the edge of the skyline on the left (west) side, whilst the dome of the Radcliffe Camera marks an edge on the right, with Magdalen College's tower providing an outlying high building (originally located outside the City Centre).<br><br>As a group the buildings share a common palette of materials and a vertical emphasis contributing to the famous spiky skyline interrupted by the curvaceous forms of domes. |
| <b>Two focal groups</b>            | The pairing of Tom Tower and All Saints Church spire lies close to the centre of the view and provides the initial focus, which then moves to the right where a second pairing is seen of St Mary's Church Spire and the Radcliffe Camera's dome, providing building on the skyline and the most instantly recognisable.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

### 2.3.11 Infrastructure:

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>The railway</b> | The railway line is a feature of historic interest, the construction of which influenced Oxford's continuing development in the 19th century although the modern engineered landscape is unlikely to make a positive aesthetic contribution. |
| <b>The pylons</b>  | The Pylons and power lines that cross the view are a major feature of infrastructure but are considered to mainly be a detractor in this view (see below)                                                                                    |

### 2.3.12 The Influence of light and the Seasons:

|                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Seasonal Changes</b>                        | The green character of the view is likely to be strongly affected by changes in the seasons as foliage changes in colour. There is likely to be some flooding in the low-lying meadows in the middle ground during the winter. Adding a waterscape to the view. |
| <b>Sunlight and optimum viewing conditions</b> | The view is north facing and is likely to be well lit on most sunny days. For the optimum viewing conditions the view is best seen with dark clouds in the background and the City Centre's historic high buildings illuminated by direct sunlight.             |

### 2.3.13 Detractors:

|                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>The pylons</b>                                         | The pylons are massive structures with an industrial quality to their design, which dominate this view. They are seen as considerably larger than the historic high buildings whilst the connecting power lines join them up to give them even greater visual presence in the view. Despite their 'see-through' quality they out-compete the historic high buildings from the viewer's attention. |
| <b>The overgrown embankment and the disappearing view</b> | The foliage around the interchange has grown to a point where the view is largely hidden from the viewing place. A view can still be seen from the A423 above Redbridge Hollow.                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Temporary buildings at Redbridge Hollow</b>            | The small settlement of temporary dwellings for travelling families at Redbridge Hollow has reduced the undeveloped, rural quality of the foregrounds. The single-storey structures do have the benefit of being less visible than larger conventional houses might be.                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Poor quality viewing environment</b>                   | The noise, business of passing traffic and noxious exhaust fumes of motor vehicles combine to make this a poor quality viewing environment in spite of the efforts to provide carefully managed and planted verges to the traffic intersection.                                                                                                                                                   |



*Current View of Hinksey Interchange view*

#### 2.3.14 Sensitivity to Change:

|                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Potential for enhancement of the viewing place                                     | Potential for the enhancement of the roadside environment is limited and is likely to be constrained by the needs of highways safety. However, lowering of the roadside hedgerow would provide views out towards the City Centre.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Increased and continuing loss of view through lack of management of roadside scrub | <p>Without adequate management it is likely the area from which the view cannot be seen will continue to grow. Whilst this might be regarded as a temporary harm to the view there is potential that the inability to appreciate and understand its value will result in inadequate consideration of the impacts of other change on the view.</p> <p>The current screening of the view is resulting in ongoing loss of value to the city of the experience of viewing its world famous skyline at a major arrival point in the city and a corresponding loss of the city's status.</p> |
| Change in the rural foreground and middle ground                                   | Loss of the green, open and rural character of the foreground and middle ground would result in harm to the view by disrupting the role it plays as the rustic contrast with the sublime architecture of the City Centre that has been admired over the centuries.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Change on the city edge                                                            | At present the lower scale 'brickish skirt' of the 19th and 20th century suburbs that surrounds the City Centre is hidden from view by tree lines that allow the City's historic high buildings and City Centre roofscape to be appreciated in direct contrast with the historic rural landscape. Development that raises the scale of the suburbs, such that they appear as an intervention between the City Centre and countryside setting would be regarded as resulting in harm to the view.                                                                                       |
| Change in the City Centre                                                          | The positive features of the City Centre skyline depend on the visibility and prominence of the historic high buildings as the focus of the view and the character and grain of the lower level city roofscape as a complex mass of short lengths of steeply pitched roofs representing a historic City Centre. Development that does not reinforce these characteristics would result in harm to the value of the view.                                                                                                                                                               |

Figure 2.3.1



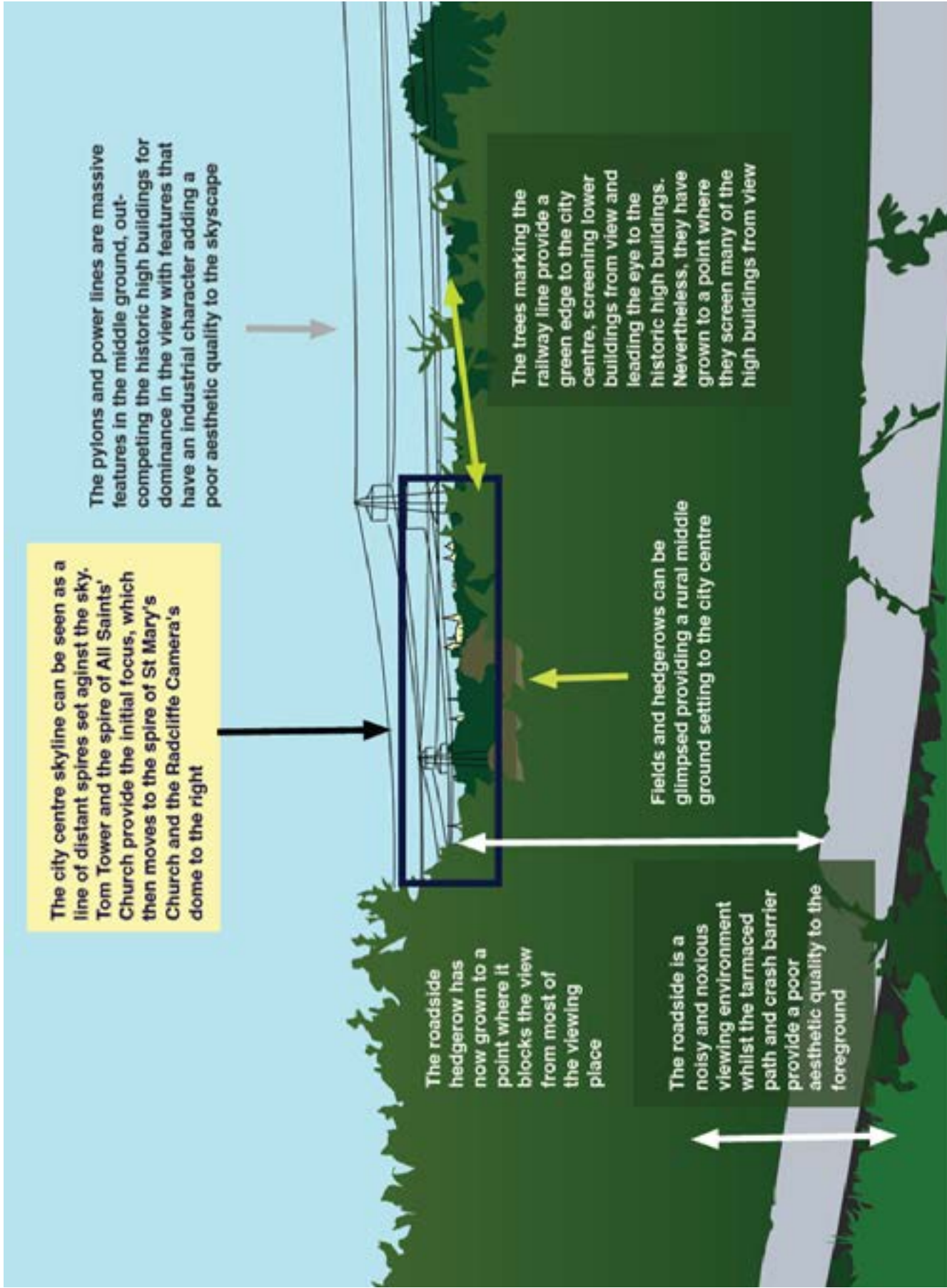
*Photograph of the view from the A420*

Figure 2.3.2



*Illustration 1: Simplified render of the view from the A420*

Figure 2.3.3  
Illustration 2: Annotated  
render of the view from  
the A420





## PART 3

# The Oxford View Cones:

## Views across the Thames Floodplain

2015 Report



OXFORD  
PRESERVATION  
TRUST



Historic England



OXFORD  
PRESERVATION  
TRUST

## 3.1 Port Meadow View Analysis Summary

### 3.1.1 Introduction

The Thames lies to the west of the historic core of Oxford and flows within flat, wide alluvial floodplains. The floodplain is particularly notable for its historic commons and meadowlands, including Port Meadow, Pixey Mead and Wolvercote Common, as well as its historic wooded groves.

The open character of Port Meadow and the history of uninterrupted use as common land have been recorded in paintings throughout the last 300 years by artists, including Malchair, William Turner, James Aumonier, Sir Muirhead Bone and Peter de Wint.

The open, low-lying character of Port Meadow allows uninterrupted and expansive views towards the city. The spires, towers and domes of central Oxford are fairly distant and small, spread out across the view, and seen against a broad open sky. In front of the historic buildings are the suburbs of North Oxford, Jericho and West Oxford, mostly hidden from view now by the trees that line the canal, railway line and the

boundary of Burgess Field, as well as those in gardens. No one building forms a focal point to the view, the eye passing from point to point in the silhouetted skyline and then back to the foreground. The expanse of the foreground with its seasonal changes of colour, forms a dominant element to the view, the skyline forming a delicate backdrop.

The view is seen by many using the meadows as an open rural space to escape the urban environment of the city. The meadow itself has a high level of archaeological interest, as well as being valued for its attractiveness as an open area of historic countryside with vistas in many directions that are unaffected by modern development. As such, the impact of the recent development of buildings at Roger Dudman Way has proved highly controversial. The meadows are linked with other viewing places, via the network of footpaths, particularly the river banks at Godstow, Binsey and Medley and Wytham Hill to the west and the bridge over the railway line in Wolvercote to the north east.



*The Port Meadow View September 2013 focused on the core of buildings surrounding Radcliffe Square (compare with photo below for the wider view)*



*Oxford, Port Meadow from Medley Fields, James Aumonier, 1880 © Image reproduced with the kind permission of Russell Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, Bournemouth*

### 3.1.2 The Viewers

Port Meadow has been used as an economic resource, as well as a place of leisure and recreation by the people of the city for over a thousand years. The experience of viewing the city from the meadow provides a connection

with the many who have gone before. This is supported by the ability to recognise the experiences of viewing recorded by past writers and artists in our own experience of the view, adding to the significance of what is seen by providing a tangible link to past people.

### 3.1.3 Present Viewers

|                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>A freely accessible and popular view</b>                     | The view from Port Meadow is seen by many local residents as part of their daily use of the area as public open space that they have free access to for their recreation. This is regarded as the outcome of the historic right of the people of the city to use Port Meadow. The meadow provides them with access to rural open space outside the city and the opportunity to enjoy its special historic interest and rural beauty within a stone's throw of their homes. The view may provide an element of their enjoyment of the space as part of their recreation or they may be visiting the meadow specifically to enjoy vistas of the green space with its fringe of woodland and, looking towards the city, its unique historic city skyline with the connections of viewing it through time. |
| <b>A view enjoyed by people engaged in sport and recreation</b> | Port Meadow and the River Thames are used as places of sport, including sailing and canoeing, as well as kite flying, running and horse riding in addition to the gentler pursuit of walking. The views make this a special place for those who have come to the meadows to enjoy these pursuits.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>A view that inspires artists</b>                             | The meadow and surrounding green spaces are a source of inspiration for many artists including photographers and painters who use the vast open space with its mixture of open grassland, floodwater or rivers, wooded horizons and vast skyspace with animals or people providing points of interest and the dreaming spires a unique backdrop or a focus in themselves.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

### 3.1.4 Viewers in the Past

|                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>The Freemen of Oxford and an unchanged setting</b> | The meadow is an ancient area of grazing land that has never been ploughed. The freemen or burgesses (townsmen with commercial rights) of Oxford held the right to graze animals on the meadow at the time of the Domesday survey (AD 1086). This may represent land granted to townsfolk in return for military service by Saxon rulers in the late 9th and 10th centuries. The freemen's collective right to graze animals free of charge has been exercised ever since.                                                                  |
| <b>18th and 19th century artists paintings</b>        | The earliest recorded view of Oxford from Wolvercote is the drawing by J. B. Malchair. It was also painted by J. M. W. Turner in 1812 and William Turner of Oxford, James Aumonier, David Cox and others. As a part of the picturesque landscape movement, artists found painting views such as this, without a clear focus in the mid-ground a particular challenge and would deliberately add foreground features or activity to enhance the composition, hence the inclusion of grazing animals, trees or sailing vessels on the Thames. |



### 3.1.5 The Viewing Place

The viewing place will contribute to what is seen in the view but may also have historical, evidential or communal value as a place for viewing the city that adds to the significance of the view.

|                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Aesthetic value of the foreground</b>     | Port Meadow is an extensive common, used for grazing. The aesthetic of the view changes with the seasonal patterns of vegetation, wildlife and livestock. Its immense scale, seen against the small, spiky skyline of domes, towers and spires and its tranquillity has high aesthetic value.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Historical value of the green setting</b> | Port Meadow has been used as common land and has not been ploughed for almost 1000 years. The ability to see the high buildings of Oxford from Port Meadow contributes to the sense of possession of the land by the city. The continuity in management of the green setting and the absence of change on the Meadow contrasts and complements the 1000 years of building history and tight urban fabric of the city.                                                                                                                |
| <b>The unchanging-views</b>                  | The expanse of open and accessible flood plain allows the viewer free access to all parts of the meadow to experience the views of the city skyline. The view remains relatively unchanged until the city's suburban development becomes more apparent in close proximity to the meadow's edges.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Archaeological and Ecological value</b>   | <p>The ancient common land has protected the visible remains of Bronze Age barrows and Iron Age farmsteads from the effects of modern ploughing which provides the potential for a level of preservation of prehistoric archaeological remains that is extremely rare in the Thames valley. Also visible are the remains of post-medieval quarrying, a 17th century horseracing course and the site of a First World War airfield.</p> <p>The meadow's exceptionally important grassland flora still reflects prehistoric usage.</p> |



*Port Meadow is a landscape that has preserved its character as open common land despite many uses over the past 1000 years*

### 3.1.6 The Landscape in the View

The view from Port Meadow looks across the floodplain to a long thin line of domes, towers and spires on the skyline. The view is long distance from the viewing point at Wolvercote

but public access across the common allows closer views to be experienced. The foreground and sky are dominant elements and the tree line on the edge of the meadow helps to conceal the presence of the city's suburban development.

### 3.1.7 Topography and layout of the view:

The historic city is represented by a delicate line of domes, spires and towers on the skyline, with extensive foreground of the meadow and a large area of sky.

The location of this viewing place within an extremely flat and wide floodplain and the direction of the view (looking south-east along the length of the floodplain) means there is virtually no topographical variation in this view.

The foreground of this view is formed by Port Meadow – an open area of historic meadow and common land, which is grazed by livestock but publicly accessible and without interruption by fences or hedgerows. The open space extends to the tree lines marking Burgess Field, the railway line and the Oxford Canal. The middle ground of the view is formed by the trees that line the Oxford Canal and the skyline buildings rising above the treeline. The wooded hills of east Oxford may just be seen as a distant backdrop.

The open character of Port Meadow provides an expansive view with no foreground screening. The spires, towers and domes of central Oxford are fairly distant in this view, located beyond the band of trees which contains the city. They are spread out across the view, and seen against a broad open sky.

### 3.1.8 Green Characteristics:

|                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Green open foreground</b>      | <p>The character of this view is heavily influenced by its soft landscape, most notably Port Meadow, the band of trees along the Oxford Canal and the trees in the gardens of North Oxford.</p> <p>The pastoral landscape of open meadows with cattle grazing amongst mature floodplain trees is vital to the character of this view, forming a tranquil and pastoral setting.</p>                                                      |
| <b>Trees in the middle ground</b> | <p>The line of trees alongside the Oxford Canal, and a variety of more ornamental trees in the gardens of North Oxford form a narrow wooded middle ground from which the historic buildings emerge.</p> <p>The trees have grown since the 1960s when this view was first identified in planning policy documents, so that they now screen more of the buildings in the historic core and also more of the buildings of the suburbs.</p> |
| <b>Trees in the background</b>    | <p>The hills of east Oxford, which may just be seen in the background, create a wooded skyline.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

### 3.1.9 Architectural Characteristics:

|                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Spikey features</b>     | <p>Only the tops of buildings (mostly spires, towers and domes) are visible as delicate spikes, spread relatively evenly across the horizon.</p> <p>The distinctive dome of the Radcliffe Camera and the prominent spire of the University Church of St Mary the Virgin form larger elements that catch the eye and help to orientate the viewer.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Spires on the edges</b> | <p>Other spires are scattered evenly across the skyline, with the spire of St Philip and St James Church on the extreme left representing Gothic North Oxford and the distinctive square Italianate campanile of St Barnabas on the extreme right marking the western edge of Jericho.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>City roofscape</b>      | <p>The main materials of the city centre's roofscape are natural slate and plain clay tile, which are dark, essentially recessive and provide a strong contrast to the limestone of the high buildings which, therefore, stand out.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Other objects</b>       | <p>The large block form of the Department of Engineering (located in the University's science area) forms an anomaly in the view being much bulkier than the spires, towers and domes that typically rise above the trees on the skyline in this view.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Pastoral scene</b>      | <p>The expansive foreground of Port Meadow with its grazing cattle and floodplain trees is a dominant influence on this view.</p> <p>The domes and spires of Oxford City Centre form a more distant focus of the view (with the Radcliffe Camera and the prominent spire of the University Church of St Mary the Virgin in the core of the view). The focus is not a conventional cluster in the centre of the view but a long line of features strung out across the skyline.</p> <p>The line of trees along the Oxford Canal forms a strong middle ground focus supported by the taller trees of picturesque North Oxford.</p> |



### 3.1.10 The Influence of light and the Seasons:

|                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Changing contribution of foliage | The trees in the middle ground change colour through the seasons, changing the character of the view. In late spring vast areas are carpeted with buttercups, bringing colour to the foreground.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Livestock and wildlife           | Horses, cattle and geese graze the meadow and many birds can often be seen.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Flooding                         | For parts of the year areas of the meadow are flooded, bringing flocks of migratory birds and changing the character of the foreground landscape, creating opportunities for reflected landscape and adding to the mystery and timelessness of the meadow.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Sunlight                         | <p>Different weather conditions also influence the view. On a sunny day the light-toned buildings of the city core are more prominent than on a cloudy day and certain building glow in the sunlight, notably the ochre of the Radcliffe Observatory.</p> <p>In the late morning, midday and early afternoon (on a clear day) the sun is largely in front of the viewer so that the skyline appears in silhouette.</p> <p>During the late afternoon and early evening, the buildings are lit from the right hand side, casting shadows on the left and helping to pick out some of their architectural detail.</p> |

### 3.1.11 Detractors:

|                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Bulky Towers                  | The bulky modern building of the Department of Engineering (Thom Building) and the adjacent Denys Wilkinson Building (Department of Physics) compete with towers and spires for prominence. They detract from the fine grain detail of the buildings behind and either side. The eye is drawn towards these buildings and away from the historic buildings in central Oxford. |
| Suburban edge of North Oxford | The cluster of red brick buildings in the near middle ground act in the same way, drawing the eye away from the more intricate buildings behind.                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

### 3.1.12 Sensitivity to change:

|                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
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| Change to the green open space of the floodplain | <p>On first sight the green open spaces of Port Meadow and Wolvercote Common appear to have remained unchanged for a thousand years. However both have seen significant changes, including the creation of race courses, use as waste disposal sites and an airfield, as well as the creation of allotments. What is evident is that in the last fifty years the meadow achieved a great deal of beauty as a rural space beyond the city where the public can roam at will, walking alongside the river or choosing their own path across the broad plain, and look back at the city. The absence of development or hard surfaces and traffic is all part of the attractive quality of the space.</p> <p>Change to this foreground is extremely unlikely to result from development, although changes in management or the effects of climatic changes could affect it. During the past few, wetter winters a large part of the meadow has remained inundated for a long period. This has served a valuable function in dispersing flood water that might otherwise have affected the city, but it is also resulting in changes to the environment of the meadow, whilst measures to manage water could introduce channels that affect both the survival of archaeological remains and the unbroken views and routes across the meadow.</p> |
|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

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|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Change to the green edge of Oxford</b> | <p>The impact of the development at Roger Dudman Way has demonstrated the potential impact of new development on the fringes of the open plain to affect the quality of views across the meadow to the City Centre. New development that is obtrusive and draws the eye away from the historic skyline and the green open quality of the meadows would be considered to harm the view by affecting its aesthetic value. Given the absence of framing to the view and the westward extension of the skyline by development such as Nuffield College and the Said Business School the potential area where development could impact on the view spreads well beyond the tight confine of the view cone in the local plan.</p> <p>The green fringe of trees beyond the meadow, above which the historic high buildings rise has grown up considerably since the 1960s when the view cone was first identified as significant. Where the urban edge of the city was once plainly seen across the canal these are now screened by trees, making an important positive contribution to the attractiveness of the views, with the spires and domes rising above the foliage. Development that makes the urban edge more apparent or loss of the trees that now provide this horizon surrounding the meadow may detract from the aesthetic quality of the views.</p> <p>However, the trees are already threatening to screen the views of the historic high buildings and without considered management there is potential that the view will be lost to the foliage.</p> |
| <b>Change in the suburbs</b>              | <p>The suburbs are inconspicuous in the views. Their presence is mainly indicated only by the historic high buildings that rise from them, including the spire of St Philip and James' Church and the tower of St Barnabas' Church. This allows the historic high buildings to act as a focus to views beyond the edge of the meadow, connecting the historic meadow and City Centre as parts of Oxford's historic landscape. Development in the suburbs that competes with the prominence of the historic high buildings in the City Centre as features of the skyline would be regarded as harming these views.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Change in the City Centre</b>          | <p>Similarly, it is the historic high buildings with their graceful or slender forms that make up the unique and historically valued skyline that unites the meadow with the historic City Centre. Development in the City Centre that intrudes into this skyline and detracts from its characteristics by introducing discordant forms, detracting from the prominence of the historic high buildings or screening the buildings from view would be regarded as harming the view and the significance of the City Centre as well as impacting on the significance of individual heritage assets.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |



*The Port Meadow view in 1962*

Figure 3.1.1



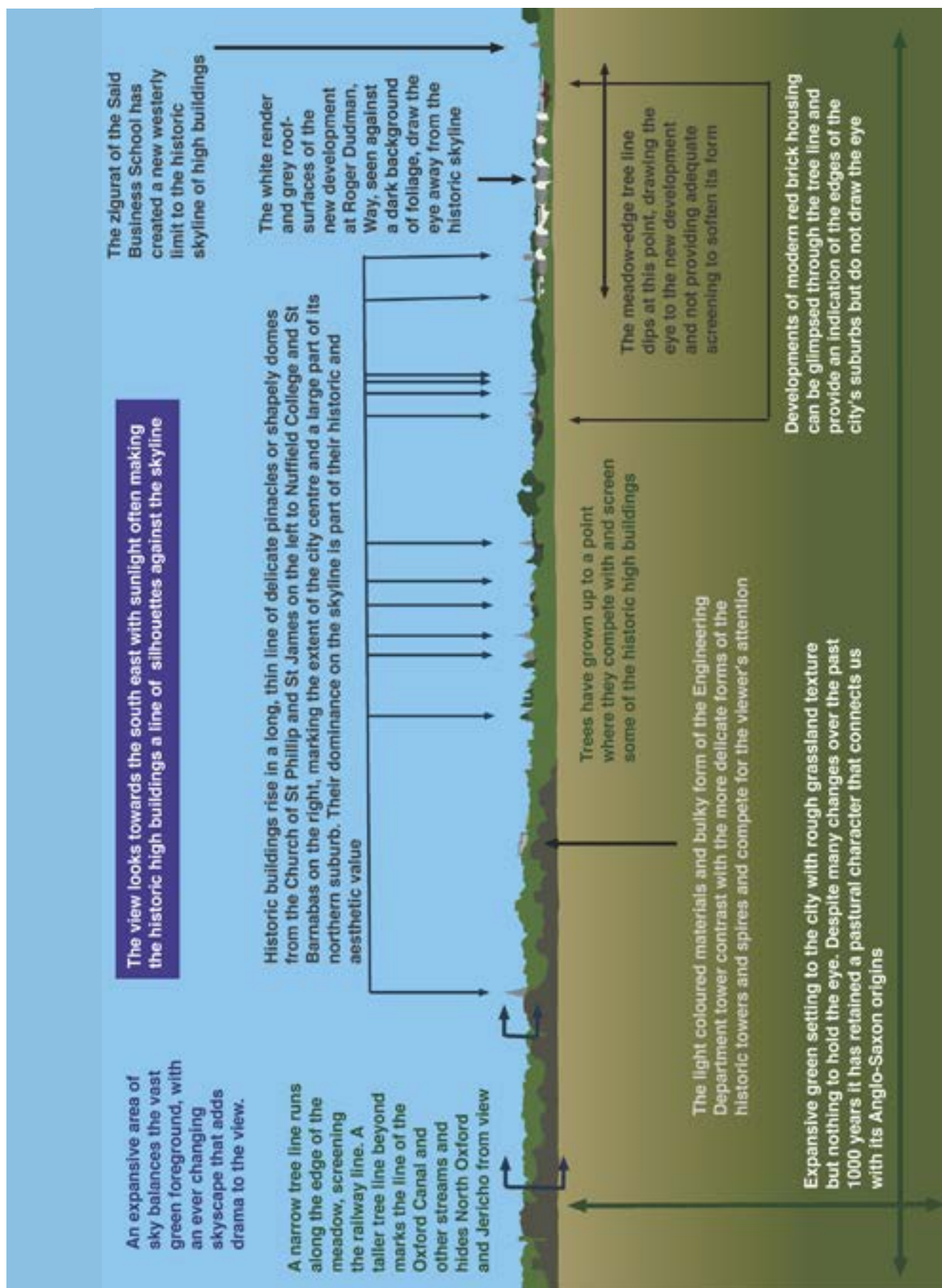
*Photograph of the view from Port Meadow*

Figure 3.1.2



*Illustration 1: Simplified render of the view from Port Meadow*

Figure 3.1.3  
Illustration 2:  
Annotated render  
of the view from  
Port Meadow





## PART 4

# The Oxford View Cones: Views from the North Eastern Hills

2015 Report



OXFORD  
PRESERVATION  
TRUST



Historic England



OXFORD  
PRESERVATION  
TRUST

## 4.1 The View from Elsfield

### 4.1.1 Introduction

From Elsfield Oxford is seen in an extensive rural landscape setting contained within an amphitheatre of hills that has been admired for centuries. The views look across the valley of the Bayswater Brook and the medieval settlement of Marston, with the 20th century suburbs of Northway and New Marston hidden by a blanket of low trees up to the edge of the historic City Centre. The City Centre is seen indistinctly as a

mass of rooftops with the historic high buildings rising above as a distant cluster of spires and domes indicating the city's historic character as a centre of religion, learning and prestigious architecture. The Cumnor Hills form a dark green backdrop with fields (including the Hinksey Heights Golf Links) lower down the hill rising to the wooded crest. The pylons on Wytham hill also break the skyline.



*View from Elsfield by J.B. Malchair (1729-1812) © Tate, London 2014*



*The Current View at Elsfield*



## OXFORD PRESERVATION TRUST

The view of Oxford from Elsfield has remained relatively unchanged since it was recorded by J.B. Malchair and Augustus Wall Callcott in the late 18th century and used as part of the landscaped gardens of Sir Francis Wise. The preservation of the foreground in the 20th century is largely a result of its sympathetic management by The Pilgrim Trust, Oxford Preservation Trust and Christ Church, following the ownership of Elsfield Manor by the writer, politician, viceroy and trustee of Oxford Preservation Trust, John Buchan. From Callcott's painting (below) it is apparent that the dense forest surrounding the city we see today was no less a significant sight at the turn of the 19th Century. The famous spires seem to be more visible than today, we also see the framing of the view within two trees, and the hills in the distance.

Buchan wrote emotively of the importance of the views of Oxford from the surrounding hills, picking out the view from Elsfield among these for the survival of the rural foreground and spread of green up to the walls of the historic city. Buchan encouraged undergraduates to visit him at the Manor as well as hosting parties for the political and intellectual elite of the day, many of whom would have experienced the view of Oxford as part of their visit to Elsfield. In *The Memoirs of an Oxford Student* (1936) the scientist John Wesley (1913-2007) provides a description of the visit to Elsfield and the view

*"We walked up the river past punts with women and punts with men, and finally crawled through fields to get to Elsfield, a village on a tidy little hillock, with a good view of the spires of Oxford showing like teeth of a saw above the trees: on a really clear day it should make a fine photo ... The fields and trees had a lovely golden tinge in the sunlight among the green and were a very beautiful sight below us."*

The John Radcliffe Hospital and Plowman Tower are both visual distractions on the left periphery of the view, as do the Engineering Building and Biochemistry Tower Block (closer to the focus of the view).

*"From the west they had the road through Cotswold, by which the pack-trains of the wool-staplers travelled, descending upon Oxford either by Woodstock or by Eynsham and the Botley causeway. From the north they also followed the skirts of Cotswold, for the valleys were too marshy. To all such pilgrims the first sight of Oxford must have come with a shock of delighted surprise; it is wonderful enough to see your goal on a far hill-top and travel with it in sight for hours or days, but it is more wonderful to come on it suddenly when you have wearily topped the last ridge. In those days Oxford was close and compact, with no sprawling faubourgs, for her ancient stones rose sharply from green meadows—such a view can still be got to-day from the Elsfield hill. The first glimpse of the spire of St. Mary's and the tall tower of Oseney—the third greatest in the land—as seen from Shotover or Boar's Hill or over the Campsfield moor, must to many a foot-sore pilgrim have come like the vision of John in Patmos."*

Memory Hold-the-door, John Buchan 1940



*John Buchan's Library bookplate depicting the view from Elsfield Manor. Reproduced with kind permission of W.D. Jordan Special Collections and Music Library, Queen's University (Canada)*



*'An Extensive View of Oxford from Elsfield'. By Augustus Wall Callcott 1800 ©The Provost and Fellows of Worcester College Oxford*

#### 4.1.2 The Viewers

Experiencing this view provides a connection with past viewers, such as Sir Francis Wise, J. B. Malchair, Augustus Callcot and John Buchan who portrayed the view of Oxford in its broad green setting. It also provides a connection to the many

generations of farmers and labourers of Elsfield who have experienced the view as part of their daily lives. Today, it is valued by the residents of the village and of the suburbs on the northern edge of the city for whom it provides a feature of their walks into the countryside beyond the city.

#### 4.1.3 Present Viewers

|                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>An accessible and popular view on the city's edge</b> | Public footpaths in Elsfield connect with paths from Barton and, via a crossing of the A40, with paths through Northway and Headington which provide opportunities for residents of a large part of Oxford's north eastern suburbs to enjoy these views as part of their recreation.                                                                                 |
| <b>The cherished scene for the local community</b>       | The footpaths providing these views are well used by residents of Elsfield as a source of quiet recreation and form part of the cherished local scene of the village. Several houses on the southern edge of the village provide this view from within buildings or gardens, whilst the garden of the manor house provides this view as part of its historic design. |
| <b>The managers of the landscape</b>                     | The landscape around Elsfield is first and foremost an agricultural landscape managed by farmers who see they views change throughout the year. The views of the city are an important element of their place of work.                                                                                                                                               |

#### 4.1.4 Past Viewers

|                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Living at Elsfield Manor</b> | <p>1726 Sir Francis Wise, Radcliffe Librarian. Decoratively and 'tastefully' re-laid the grounds of Elsfield, to reflect his eccentric personality and to benefit from the views of the city.</p> <p>1919 -1935 John Buchan, a famous historian and politician and fellow of Oxford University. After his death his ashes were returned from Canada and at his request he was buried in Elsfield church. He drew many influential people of his day to Elsfield and wrote emotively about the view.</p> |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|



|                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 18th, 19th and 20th century artists paintings and writings | <p>Malchair's (1729-1812) drawing 'A view from Elsfield'.</p> <p>'An Extensive View of Oxford from Elsfield' By Augustus Wall Callcott 1800.</p> <p>Buchan's library bookplate depicting views from Elsfield.</p> <p>Memory Hold-the-door John Buchan 1940. Various references to the welcome view of Oxford in the glen, to the weary traveller 'but it is more wonderful to come on it suddenly (Elsfield) when you have wearily topped the last ridge.</p> |
|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

#### 4.1.5 The Viewing Place

The viewing place adds to the significance of the view through the aesthetic qualities of the foreground it provides, the associations it has with those who have appreciated it in the past and those who have worked to preserve it as a place for viewing over the years. It also has value in providing access to those who continue to appreciate the view today.

The public footpath and the field viewing point provides 'kinetic' views - that is a series of changing views seen as a person moves around the fields, with views changing as a result of different angles, changing elevation in the fields and the framing effects of trees. Elsfield lies within the Green Belt of South

Oxfordshire, designated to protect the setting and historic character of Oxford, to prevent urban sprawl and to protect the countryside from encroachment. The survival of the fields, hedgerows and trees in the rural landscape surrounding the village provide the continuity of experience between today's viewers and those of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries and contributes to the character of Elsfield as a historic isolated rural community set among its own woods and fields.

In 1932 the Pilgrim Trust helped Oxford Preservation Trust acquire fields next to the Northern Bypass, and added further land later to protect the green setting of the city and the quality of the views.

|                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Aesthetic value of the foreground     | The green rural foreground view evokes the memory of the past but is also a beautiful environment with wildlife supported by hedgerows and trees.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Historical value of the green setting | <p>Elsfield was a strategic location during the civil war, because of its proximity and vantage over Oxford, becoming important marching land for troops.</p> <p>The role of the hill as a viewing place has been recorded in paintings and written about over the centuries by scholars and artists.</p> <p>The land purchased by the Pilgrim Trust and Oxford Preservation Trust on Elsfield hill to protect its role as a viewing place provides evidence of the concern to protect the view throughout the 20th century.</p> |
| The unchanging views                  | The rural landscape of the hillside has remained largely unchanged since it was drawn and painted by artists in the 18th and early 19th century allowing a shared experience with these historical admirers of the view.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |



*The View of Oxford from Elsfield at the time of the view cone's designation in the 1960s*

#### 4.1.6 The Landscape in the View

The focal area of the city centre is seen as a small and distant cluster of the distinctive spires and domes within a wider landscape setting framed by the 'amphitheatre of green hills' as described by historical writers. The survival of the rural foreground and green backcloth of woods and fields provides a timeless experience of the view of Oxford set within the ancient groves of the Cherwell Valley. Whilst the historic village of Old Marston can be glimpsed among trees in the middle ground the 20th century suburbs of the city that occupy much of the middle ground are low lying and do not interfere with the viewer's appreciation of the City Centre as the focus of the view, which is enhanced by the position of the city centre, raised slightly above the valley floor. The more exposed areas of Northway on the side of Headington Hill are

more apparent on the left edge of the view, with the tall Plowman Tower in particular drawing the eye away from the focus of the City Centre. The crest of the hill has a wooded character due to the trees of the large gardens on Jack Straws Lane and Pullens Lane, providing a green setting to the city centre, although just to the left, the mass of rectilinear buildings of the John Radcliffe Hospital has a significant negative impact by breaking the green character of the middle ground and holding the eye with a large rectilinear building of very limited aesthetic value. At best it provides evidence of the development of Oxford as an international centre of healthcare and medical research, whilst the origins of the hospital's location can be traced to the availability of clean air on the hilltop that was necessary for the treatment of Tuberculosis sufferers in the early 20th century.



#### 4.1.7 Topography and layout of the View:

|                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Rural open foreground</b>                                | The scenic footpaths that run from Elsfield Church to Old Headington offer a 'kinetic' or continually changing view of the City of Oxford with foreground and backdrop of green hills. The continuity of the historic land use provides a rural foreground setting to the views of Oxford from the hills. Whilst movement through the foreground provides a number of changing frames and settings to the view.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Mixed middle ground</b>                                  | <p>The slopes of the hill provide a vantage over the lowlands of the Cherwell Valley with the settlement of Old Marston identifiable as a cluster of red clay plain tile roofs along with the low tower of St Nicholas' Church at the transition from the foreground to middle ground.</p> <p>The suburbs of New Marston and Northway occupy a large part of the middle ground and are characterised as low level (mainly two storeys) and largely concealed in the view by the canopy of trees within the estates or along their northern edge. As such there is little to hold the eye or distract from the primacy of the City Centre as the focus of the view.</p> <p>Taller mature deciduous trees in the spaces either side of the River Cherwell contribute to the wooded character of middle ground above which the compact group of historical buildings punctuate the rear of the middle ground. The panoramic views appear as lush and verdant swathes of densely wooded land enclosing the outskirts of Oxford.</p> |
| <b>Distant focus to the view</b>                            | At three miles distance the buildings of the City Centre, including the historic high buildings, are indistinct, although the characteristic forms of the spires and domes can be recognised. Many of the spires cannot be individually identified without the aid of binoculars although this is no impediment to photographers with powerful lenses. Nevertheless the distance of the city centre emphasises the great extent of its green setting. No other buildings are seen beyond the historic high buildings, ensuring their pre-eminence as the focus of the view and protecting the historic and architectural interest.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Hills frame the City Centre as the focus of the view</b> | On the left the rise of Headington Hill forms the southern side of the Bayswater Valley and provides a frame to the middle ground. Wytham Hill, to the right, is further from the focus but still provides some framing to the view. The Cumnor Hills provide the backdrop to the City Centre.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

#### 4.1.8 Green Characteristics

|                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Green agricultural foreground</b>                         | The character of this view is heavily influenced by its soft landscape, most notably the foreground farmland, with its network of neatly trimmed hedgerows and trees.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Green 'forest' middle ground</b>                          | The dense mass of trees which surrounds the centre of Oxford in the middle ground formed by Headington Hill, the suburbs of Northway and New Marston (as well as Old Marston village) and the green spaces of the Cherwell Valley (amongst which parts of the suburbs of Oxford can be glimpsed), preserve the sense of the historic City Centre rising from 'those ancient groves' described by writers in the early 19th century.                              |
| <b>Green woodland and pasture of hills in the background</b> | The pastoral and tree covered Cumnor Hills in the background and Wytham Hill, to the right, form the backdrop to this view and complete the amphitheatre of green hills that enclose the vale surrounding the historic city. This helps to make the city the natural focus of the view. The survival of the green setting to the city provides a timeless view that is recognisable from the descriptions and illustrations that have passed down the centuries. |

#### 4.1.9 Architectural Characteristics:

|                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
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| <b>The dreaming spires as a focus</b>    | <p>The historic high buildings are distinct as a group with a clear focus surrounding the spire of St Mary the Virgin Church and the dome of the Radcliffe Camera. Other buildings in the group are harder to identify individually without binoculars or a powerful photographic lens. Nevertheless, these include the towers and rooftops of New College, All Souls' College and the Bodleian Library, along with Tom Tower and the spire of All Saints' Church (Lincoln College Library). The cupola of the Sheldonian Theatre stands on the right edge of this group while the short spire of Christ Church and the Tower of Merton College Chapel form its limit to the left.</p> <p>The tall spire of St Mary the Virgin Church and the Radcliffe Camera's Dome are the most easily recognised features in this skyline and are emblematic of the City and University.</p> <p>Further spires and towers are spread across the skyline either side of the focal group. The tower of Magdalen College chapel stands out on the right hand side for its isolated position compared to the other historic high buildings. Its location marks the eastern entrance to the historic city.</p> <p>To the right the pyramid of the Museum of Natural History, the Tower of the Winds of the Radcliffe Observatory and the spire of the Church of St Philip and James represent the northern expansion of the city and the developing role of the University as a centre of learning in the sciences in the late 18th and 19th centuries.</p> |
| <b>The rooftops of the city centre</b>   | <p>Although indistinct the rooftops of the city centre form a complex mix of materials and forms with some larger buildings standing out but with none seen clearly. The level of the rooftops varies, rising and falling in areas, but is sufficiently low to allow the historic high buildings to stand above the mass of buildings and gain the prominence that supports their historic and artistic interest.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Rooftops of the suburbs</b>           | <p>The large areas of suburban housing in the middle-ground are seen as areas of roofscape of more uniform form and materials, following a consistent level. These are mainly covered in clay or concrete plain tile of dark colour that is recessive in the view. On the side of Headington Hill the houses of Northway are consistently clad with white render providing cohesion to them as a group of buildings representing a single estate.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Old Marston buildings</b>             | <p>The farm houses and cottages of the historic village of Old Marston are identifiable through their large steeply pitched roofs clad in red clay plain tile. The village provides evidence of the historical landscape of small communities surrounding the city that characterised the view prior to the city's 20th century suburban expansion.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Later 20th century high buildings</b> | <p>The eight storeys of the Biochemistry (Hans Krebs) Tower Block and Department of Engineering tower block (Thom Building) on the Banbury Road are prominent buildings here, representing the modernist architecture of the Science Area. They are bulkier in form than the surrounding spires and domes; as a result they draw the eye.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

#### 4.1.10 The Influence of Light and the Seasons:

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| <b>Seasonal changes</b> | <p>In summer the landscape is strikingly green with the spires of Oxford, nestling amongst woodland. In late summer this is transformed as the arable fields become golden catching the light and providing a contrast with the green in the valley and complementing the limestone of the historic high buildings beyond.</p> <p>In the colder months, the wooded middle-ground trees thin out and the views into Oxford reveal the striking building spires and pinnacles that pierce the skyline of the ancient city. However the dark brown of exposed soil can hold the eye more, whilst lower light levels result in the historic high buildings receding in the view. Photographs taken at this time of year need to be zoomed in closer to the focus of the view to get the best effect.</p> |
| <b>Sunlight changes</b> | <p>On a sunny day the light coloured buildings of the city core glow, especially when lit from the left side (in the morning). From the late morning the buildings are seen in silhouette which, against the dark background, means they can become difficult to distinguish.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |



**4.1.11 Detractors:**

|  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|--|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | The view into Oxford is relatively unspoilt and shielded by the wooded landscape that surrounds city. The large bulk of the John Radcliffe Hospital and the Plowman Tower in Northway draw the eye away from the central core of Oxford. The buildings stand tall in the landscape as well as sitting on high ground with long elevations facing the viewer and have a dominating impact on the landscape. |
|--|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

**4.1.12 Sensitivity to Change:**

|                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Change in the rural foreground</b>                                  | The green, open, rural character of the viewing place and the foreground to the view is an essential element of this view's contribution to the significance of the city. Change that reduces this character, including loss of features such as maintained hedgerows, or change of use to non-agricultural uses would result in harm to the view.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Change in the suburban middle ground and as framing of the view</b> | <p>The suburb of New Marston and a large part of Northway in the floor of the Cherwell Valley is generally hidden from view by the dense tree lines on the edge of the ring road and by its own canopy of suburban trees. Likewise the North Oxford Victorian suburb is largely screened from view by its tree canopy and low scale. As such, the eye passes over these areas as a continuation of the greenery of the rural foreground to focus on the historic high buildings of the City Centre. Development that made the suburbs more prominent in the middle ground of the view, detracting from the role of the distant City Centre as the focus of the view, would be regarded as harming this view.</p> <p>Furthermore loss of the role of the tree canopy in softening the form of the buildings in the suburb would likewise result in harm to the view.</p> |
| <b>Change in the City Centre</b>                                       | Development in the City Centre that resulted in loss of the visibility of the historic high buildings as the focus of the view or that competed for prominence in the skyline with them would be regarded as harmful to the view.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Change in the rural background</b>                                  | <p>The prominence of the historic high buildings in the City Centre's skyline is dependent on the contrasting 'backcloth' of the green hills to the west of the city.</p> <p>Development that created features that stood in this background area and drew attention from the distant high buildings or made it harder to distinguish them would cause harm to the view.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |



*The Elsfeld View zoomed into the focal area of the view cone in 1962*

Figure 4.1.1



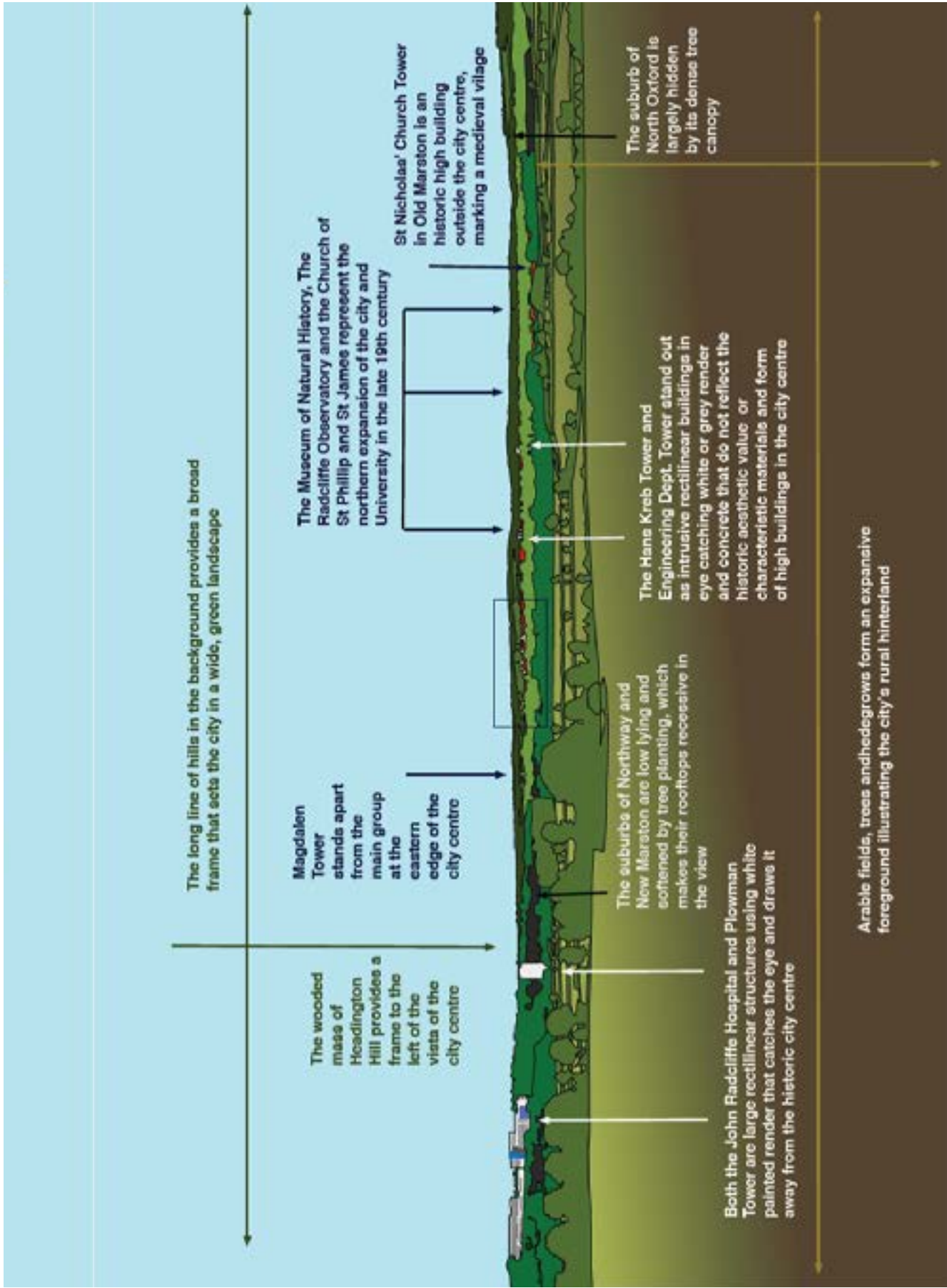
*Photograph of the view from Elsfield*

Figure 4.1.2



*Illustration 1: Simplified render of the view from Elsfield*

Figure 4.1.3  
Illustration 2:  
Annotated render of  
the view from Esfield





## PART 5

# The Oxford View Cones: Views from the Eastern Hills

2015 Report



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## 5.1 Doris Field Memorial Park Analysis Summary

### 5.1.1 Introduction

This is a less famous view than those from the western hills or the more trafficked areas of Headington Hill to the south. However, it has been accessed and appreciated since, at least the mid-18th century and recorded by artists including J. B. Malchair and J.M.W. Turner. In the mid-19th century routes across the hilltop were made more accessible as a result of enclosure and the construction of Pullens Lane. The quality of the view attracted development of large houses for middle class residents in the late 19th and early 20th century. In the later 20th century the potential impact of further development led to a campaign to protect the view from the last remnants of farmland on the hill, resulting in the Council's recognition of the importance of this view and the creation of the Doris Field Memorial Park. The Park is now a much-valued local amenity. Historically the meadows of the Cherwell Valley were more clearly evident than now as low-lying pasture at the foot of the mixed woods and fields of the hill and running up to the tree-lined course of the River Cherwell. Nevertheless, the historic high buildings are still seen above the belt of trees and against the green backcloth of Boars Hill, Harcourt Hill and Hinksey Hill. A secondary view of similar quality is seen looking across Milham Ford Nature Park (formerly the playing

fields of Milham Ford School), which is now a popular local park.

### 5.1.2 The Viewers

The view provides a shared experience of seeing Oxford's landscape and architecture with others who have admired it in the past three centuries. The view is less well known than other views of Oxford but the experience of viewing it still provides a connection with past artists of local and national importance that have portrayed and popularised it as a close up view of Oxford's historic high buildings in a green setting. Its influence on house builders in the early 20th century is seen in the positioning of buildings and landscaping of the grounds at Jack Straws Lane to exploit its aesthetic and historic value. The concern to preserve the view inspired protest and activism in the 1970s with the resultant recognition of the view's significance in the Local Plan and the protected status of the viewing place as a memorial park held in trust, allowing many local residents to experience it and building on its communal value. The secondary view from Milham Ford Nature Park influenced the design and landscaping of the former school (now Oxford Brookes School of Health Care Studies) and is now a special feature of the parkland that is accessible for the whole community.



*Oxford from Headington Hill by William Matthison. Image reproduced with kind permission of S Jenkins*



*William Turner of Oxford, Oxford from Headington Hill, early 19th century © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge*

### 5.1.3 Present Viewers

|                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>A freely accessible and popular view</b> | <p>The view is now a democratic or freely accessible view that many local people can enjoy as part of the low-density area of Headington Hill amongst the more densely built-up suburbs of New Marston and Northway.</p> <p>As it is not on a route to anywhere people using the park are likely to be visiting it specifically to enjoy the green space, wildlife and the view to the city centre.</p> |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

### 5.1.4 Viewers in the Past

|                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Artists of the 19th and 20th centuries</b> | <p>J. M. W. Turner's sketchbook from 1839 includes examples of views from the northern end of Headington Hill which are notable for the close-up view of the Radcliffe Camera's dome, with St Mary the Virgin Church spire standing to the left and the tower of St Clement's Church in the foreground.</p> <p>William Turner of Oxford's portrayal of the view capitalised on the mixed fields and woods foreground and the dip between Harcourt Hill and Boar's Hill, which draws the eye down to the Radcliffe Camera's dome and St Mary the Virgin Church spire above the belt of trees on the Cherwell to make these the focus of the view.</p> <p>Matthison's postcard view of Oxford from Headington Hill shares the appreciation of the rural foreground, and exploits the full width of the historic skyline, using Magdalen Tower to mark the eastern limit of the city against the rising shoulder of hill.</p> <p>Despite the impact of development in the valley on the rural foreground the focal features of the skyline and the wooded backdrop remain such that the view seen by these historic artists may still be appreciated today.</p> |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

|                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Early 20th century house builders</b> | The houses built around the northern branch of Jack Straw's Lane, were set out with their main frontages aligned to provide vistas looking south west over the green space to the City Centre skyline. This reflects the appreciation of these views in the early 20th century and the value they added (and continue to add) to these prestigious homes as an attractive setting that provides a connection with the historic interest and identity of Oxford. |
| <b>Late 20th century campaigners</b>     | When the view was threatened with further intrusive development, local residents, the Council and landowners came together to protect the view by recognising its special value as a preserved historic experience of seeing Oxford from its green setting. The view they sought to protect can still be experienced.                                                                                                                                           |

### 5.1.5 The Viewing Place

The Viewing Place is regarded as being the northern part of Headington Hill including the public open spaces of Doris Field Memorial Park and Milham Ford Nature Park, as well as the streets of houses on the hill that benefit from this view, either by design or through good fortune. The view from this location has inspired artists from the 18th to the early 20th century and contributed to the draw of the area

for middle class housing. The protection of the view through the creation of the Memorial Park and the construction of the terrace at Milham Ford School reflect its importance for the local area. Access is via footpaths and local roads and the viewing place is linked with the views from the Headington Hill allotments to the south and Headington Hill Hall and South Park beyond forming the group of views from the eastern hills.



*The green space of the Doris Field Memorial Park preserves a fragment of the rural foreground admired by historic viewers*



|                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Aesthetic value of the foreground</b>     | The public green open spaces of the Memorial Park and Nature Park provide a green and open foreground to views, with fringing by trees both within the parks and in surrounding gardens that provides soft, semi-natural forms and textures that contrast with the striking architectural forms and hard materials and textures of the historic high buildings.                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Historical value of the green setting</b> | <p>The parks both have a local historic interest.</p> <p>The former school fields have formed part of the life experience of many local children who attended it prior to its closure in 2003. The former school building is positioned to benefit from views over the field/park towards the city.</p> <p>The campaign to protect the view over the last fields of Jack Straw's Farm contributed to community identity within this neighbourhood of the city. This has been cemented by the park's status as a memorial to the mother of one of the main campaigners.</p> |
| <b>Changing views</b>                        | The suburbs of Oxford have grown out from the city to wrap around these public open spaces, which survive as islands of green, undeveloped land amongst the settlement. This has increased their value as opportunities to see the views of the city from a green setting.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Ecological value</b>                      | Both areas of open space have been recognised for their ecological value, which has been enhanced through management programmes. Viewing the city from sites that include a high level of biodiversity interest adds to the experience of the view through the rich and changing contribution of fauna and flora on the senses of the viewer throughout the year.                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

#### 5.1.6 The Landscape in the View

From either Doris Field Memorial Park or the terrace above Milham Ford Nature Park the viewer looks across a green open space, with a mixture of parkland and naturalistic landscaping towards the band of foliage that marks the River Cherwell, above which the historic high buildings rise against the green backdrop of the Hinksey Hill, Boars Hill and Harcourt Hill. In the foreground the pyramid-roofed houses of New Marston now create a break between the parkland greenery and the trees along the river, reflecting the early 20th century expansion of Oxford. These include attractive 'set-piece' developments such as the Croft Road Estate and Old Marston Road. Generous green verges and tree planting along the roads help to soften the outline of the roofscape in the views. The Cherwell Valley trees screen the general City Centre roofscape allowing the historic high buildings to be admired alone.

The Radcliffe Camera and St Mary the Virgin's Church take a dominant position at the centre of the view, marking the heart of the University. They form a group with the two low towers of All Soul's and the tower of All Saint's Church (Lincoln College Library) rising above the

many pinnacles of All Soul's College and the Bodleian's parapets. This creates a distinctive spiky skyline. Other high buildings support this group, including, the Tower of the Five Orders, New College Bell Tower and Robinson Tower. The flèche of Exeter College Chapel and the cupola of the Sheldonian Theatre form a slightly detached part of this group. The prominence of this group reflects the development of the University and colleges into the area north of the High Street between the 14th and 18th centuries. The group is given added prominence by the dip between Harcourt Hill and Boar's Hill, which draws the eye down to these buildings.

Although they were visible in the early 20th century, towers of Magdalen College and St Clement's Church are now screened from this view by trees. The towers and spires of Christ Church, and St Aldate's Church can be seen from some vantage points, but are much less prominent in these views (and therefore form a fragile element of the roofscape) due to their position on the falling ground running down to the river Thames beyond the City Centre. They are currently lost to view from the main viewpoint in the Doris Field Memorial Park.

### 5.1.7 Topography and layout of the view:

|                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>The skyline is seen from close up and from an elevated position to the north east of the City Centre</p> | <p>The City Centre historic buildings are viewed from just over a mile away (measured to the nearest high buildings at New College). Architectural details can be identified and are distinct.</p> <p>The viewing point is elevated with the historic high buildings rising up to the eye-line of the viewer and the foreground dropping rapidly in front of the viewer ensuring that houses in the foreground are below the viewer's eye line and do not compete with the historic high buildings.</p> <p>The hills in the background form a green backcloth against which the limestone of the historic high buildings have a strong contrast, particularly when brightly lit by direct sunlight. The dip between Boars Hill and Harcourt Hill draws the eye down to the City Centre focal group.</p> <p>This is not a framed view. Rather the groups of high buildings draw the eye to particular points where they rise above the canopy of trees in the Cherwell valley and meet the viewer's eye line.</p> |
| <p>Green open spaces within the suburbs</p>                                                                 | <p>Both the Doris Field Memorial Park and Milham Ford School are experienced as open green space, with evidence of attempts to provide naturalistic planting and the remnants of older hedgerows surrounding them. This makes an important contribution to the quality of the foreground, whereas in many surrounding streets the views out are enclosed by houses or mature tree planting.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <p>The bowl of green</p>                                                                                    | <p>The joining up of the greenery of the foreground, the trees in the Cherwell valley and the background sets the city in a bowl of greenery that has been described by writers since the early 19th century.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

### 5.1.8 Green characteristics:

|                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Green foreground</p>           | <p>Both viewing places provide an opportunity to experience Oxford from a green setting that resembles the historic rural setting from which past viewers have portrayed it.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <p>Foreground trees</p>           | <p>Trees in the parkland and elsewhere on Headington Hill preserve some of the rural character that existed before the area's suburban development in the 20th century. Nevertheless, they are a part of that suburban development and make an important positive contribution to the area's character.</p>                                                                                                          |
| <p>Trees in the middle ground</p> | <p>The line of trees alongside the River Cherwell, and a wide variety of ornamental trees in the parkland that wraps around the eastern fringes of the City Centre (continuing into college gardens) provides a mantle of greens and purples above which the historic high buildings rise. The tree canopy helps to hide much of the lower level roofscape of the city making the high buildings more prominent.</p> |
| <p>Trees in the background</p>    | <p>The hills to the west of Oxford create a wooded skyline with patches of fields providing a variety of greenery.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |



View at Sunset (late September) from Milham Ford Nature Park



#### 5.1.9 Architectural Characteristics:

|                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>The focal group of buildings</b> | <p>The historic high buildings in the north eastern quarter of the City Centre, which is closest to the viewer (defined by High Street to the south, Turl Street to the west, Holywell Street to the north and Longwall Street to the east) are the most prominent and provide the focus of the view.</p> <p>This group of historic buildings of outstanding historic and architectural interest are seen to mark the location of the City Centre and are viewed against the backdrop of the green hills without other buildings interrupting the background.</p> <p>They have a uniformity in their materials (limestone ashlar), which draws them together as a group. The multiplicity of spires and pinnacles creates a highly ornamented and complex roofscape. Above this the spires of St Mary the Virgin and Lincoln College Library and the towers of New College and the Old Bodleian provide a series of features that attracts the eye. Changing roof materials respond to the forms created, but are mainly restricted to the palette of limestone or lead.</p> <p>Together they help to tell the story of the University's growth as an institution along with notable Colleges from the 13th century (the University Church of St Mary the Virgin) through to the 18th century (The Radcliffe Camera and Lincoln College Library) with every century between represented by a building of great interest and beauty.</p> <p>The distinctive dome of the Radcliffe Camera and the prominent spire of the University Church of St Mary's are larger elements that catch the eye and help to orientate the viewer</p> |
| <b>The City Centre roofscape</b>    | <p>To the right (north) of the focal group the land in the City Centre rises gently and the spread of rooftops in the northern edge of the City Centre is seen, including the area between Mansfield Road and New Road. Those seen are mainly larger roofs of University and college buildings. The greenery of mature trees in the streets, colleges, recreation grounds and University Parks rises amongst these buildings masking lower ones (which are indicated mainly by chimney stacks) and softening the outline of taller ones.</p> <p>At intervals this roofscape is punctuated by groups of historic high building including the Sheldonian Theatre's cupola and Exeter College's chapel spire and the cluster of Nuffield College, the Wesley Memorial Church and the lower spire of Hertford College and the bell shaped cupola on the corner of No. 32 Cornmarket Street.</p> <p>At present trees in the foreground of the view from Doris Field Memorial Park screen the buildings of Christ Church College and Magdalen College. However, these were recorded as a feature of this view historically and should be expected to form a positive element of it in future.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Foreground buildings</b>         | <p>The early 20th century suburban houses that have replaced the rural landscape of much of the foreground are low buildings allowing the viewer to view the City Centre from points within the viewing places. Their roofs are relatively shallow pitched, allowing the eye to pass over them without interruption, whilst the use of mainly red clay roof tiles provides a contrast with the lighter coloured limestone, lead and copper of the historic high buildings, helping the latter to stand out.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Edges</b>                        | <p>The view has no clear edge to the right, continuing to views over the tree canopy that marks the North Oxford suburb, which is otherwise marked by the squat spire of the Church of St Philip and St James.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

#### 5.1.10 The Influence of light and the Seasons:

|  |                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | <p>Trees form a major element of this view and their changing colours through the seasons provide different contrasts with the materials of the City Centre's high buildings.</p> |
|--|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

|  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|--|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | <p>On sunny days the limestone of the Radcliffe Observatory, St Mary's Church and the buildings of All Souls' and New College in particular is illuminated, drawing attention to these buildings. An optimum time of day for this effect is late morning when the buildings are lit from the left, picking out the masonry and architectural details, whilst providing shadows that help to reveal the curving forms of the domes and spires of the buildings.</p> <p>At sunset the skyline is seen to particularly good effect as a silhouette from the terrace above Millham Ford Nature Park.</p> |
|--|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

#### 5.1.11 Detractors:

|                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Intrusive buildings</b>                                     | The bulky modern building of the Department of Engineering (Thom Building) and the adjacent Denys Wilkinson Building (Department of Physics) form part of the northern continuation of the view. They detract from the fineness of detail of the historic high buildings but do stand apart from the main focus of the view. Nevertheless, the eye is drawn towards them due to their scale and reflective materials. |
| <b>Intrusive roof materials on the edge of the City Centre</b> | Growing use of profiled sheet roofs which have narrowly spaced ribs and a higher reflectivity than the older lead roofs in the area around Mansfield Road is starting to create an area of different character that draws the eye away from the historic high buildings.                                                                                                                                              |

#### 5.1.12 Sensitivity to change:

|                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Change in the foreground</b>    | The foreground is comprised of a mixture of the green open spaces of the parks and the surrounding houses of New Marston. The survival of publicly accessible pockets of green open space and the rural character of the hedgerows on their boundaries make these views particularly special. The surrounding housing has effectively replaced the wider rural foreground and there may be some latitude for change within these areas, including change to the roofscape that would be considered harmful to the view. However it is likely that development rising significantly above the existing roof level, that is conspicuous in the views, drawing attention away from the historic high buildings as the focal feature of the views could be considered harmful to the view. |
| <b>Change in the middle ground</b> | The middle ground is made up of the tree canopy of the Cherwell Valley, including belts of trees along the river channels and within the grounds of Magdalen and St Catherine's College. No buildings in this area obtrude above this canopy (St Cat's is effectively hidden from view) allowing an unhindered view to the historic high buildings and roofscape of the City Centre. New development that broke above the canopy, arresting the eye and competing with the historic high buildings of the City Centre would be regarded as harmful to the view.                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Change in the City Centre</b>   | The City Centre roofscape in this view is made up of the graceful or slender forms of the historic high buildings, with the lower roofscape of the pinnacles and parapets of New College, All Soul's and the Bodleian and the whale-back of Exeter College Chapel, as well as limited areas of surrounding domestic buildings. These provide the focus of the view and, together the distinctive character of the University City for which Oxford is famed. Development within this area that disrupts this character by introducing discordant forms or materials or blocking views of the historic high buildings would result in harm to the view.                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Change in the background</b>    | The background of green hills completes the setting of the City centre and historic high buildings. Development that rises up between City Centre and the hills, disrupting this relationship is likely to result in harm to the view unless it is seen as a natural continuation of the fine grain roof surface of the City Centre. Change to the green character of the hills in the background is likely to result in harm to the view, although at this distance small scale development are unlikely to have a significant impact.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |



Figure 5.1.1



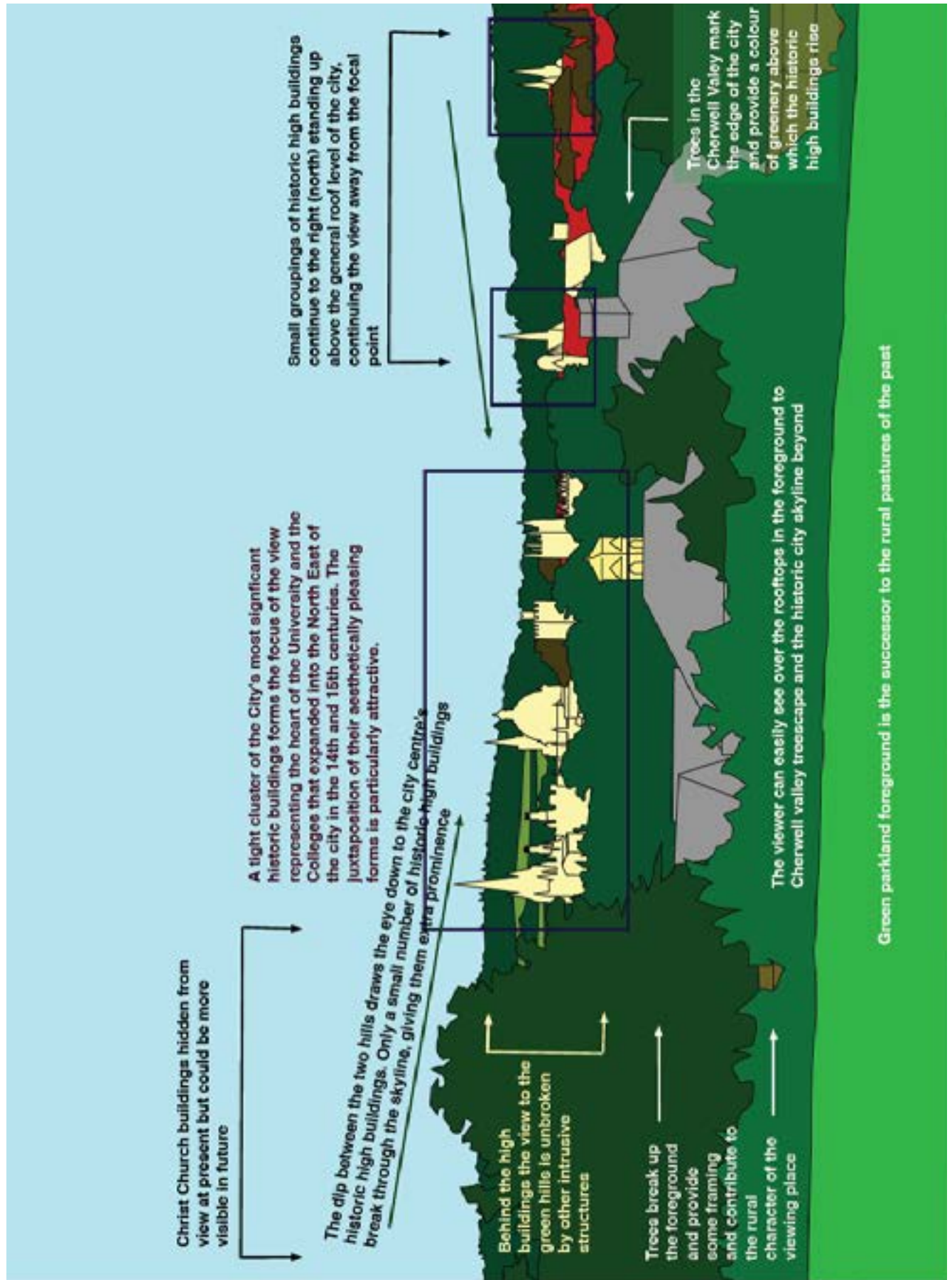
*Photograph of the view from Doris Field Memorial Park*

Figure 5.1.2



*Illustration 1: Simplified render of the view from Doris Field Memorial Park*

Figure 5.1.1.3  
Illustration 2:  
Annotated render of  
the view from Doris  
Field Memorial Park





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## 5.2 Headington Hill, Pullen's Lane and John Garne Way Allotments

### 5.2.1 Introduction

The view from Headington Hill has been appreciated since, at least, the late 17th century as an opportunity to view the city's high buildings from a rural setting just outside its boundary. Following the enclosure of Headington's open fields and the expansion of the University in the 19th century the Hill became a desirable location for new prestigious homes on the outskirts of the city which benefitted from, and were designed to allow enjoyment of, the views. The purchase of farmland by the Morrell family allowed for the preservation of the rural setting of their home at Headington Hill Hall as well as the opportunity of seeing the city from the green open landscape of the hill side. These later became allotments. During the 1970s increasing pressure for development of both housing and institutions on the open hillside prompted the Council to create an area of public open space specifically for viewing Oxford, through their Headington Hill Policy Statement (1976). Trees have grown up that obscure the view from the intended viewing point, but it can still be appreciated from points across the two sets of nearby allotments and from publicly accessible areas of Headington Hill Hall.

### 5.2.2 The Viewers

Experiencing this view provides a connection with past viewers. The views from within and around the allotments have been appreciated since the 17th century. The Rev. Josiah Pullen (Vice-president of Magdalen Hall) has been remembered for his daily walks up Headington Hill in the late 17th century which, apparently, has inspired many others to visit this spot.

The point where he turned to return along Cuckoo Lane, was marked by an elm tree called Jo Pullen's Tree and served as a popular point to view the city, although the view from the site of the tree is now blocked by the walls and tree planting of Headington Hill Hall. In around 1700 the University paid for the construction of a raised footpath that allowed scholars and fellows to take healthy exercise by walking up the hill, with a possible return route along Cuckoo Lane. The view from Headington Hill painted by J. B. Malchair in 1777 appears to be from between Cuckoo Lane and Headington Road. When the Morrells built their country house on the hill it was provided with a grand terrace and veranda that gave views over their gardens and parkland to the city beyond. They also bought the farmland to the north of their gardens in the later 19th century to preserve the rural character of the area surrounding their home. Advertisements and records of the houses built on Pullens Lane in the late 19th century record the efforts of builders to exploit the setting by providing views from the houses and their gardens over the city. Writing about Oxford and its history in the early 20th century Cecil Headlam picked out the view of the city from Headington Hill and Pullens Lane in particular as one of the finest views of the city, suggesting it was popular at this time. During the 1970s increasing pressure for development and awareness of the quality of these views led the City Council to create a special viewing place from which the public would be able to enjoy the experience of gazing down on the city. In 1986 the Council recognised the view's significance in the local plan.



*Photo of the View from the John Garne Way Allotments*



### 5.2.3 Present Viewers

|                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Local residents and allotment users</b> | Relatively few people have access to the views from the allotments or the nearby housing. However, for those lucky enough to have access the views to the City Centre provide a special value to the daily scenes, transforming a home, garden or allotment into part of a world famous city.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Walkers</b>                             | In the 1970s the City Council set out plans for a network of footpaths to run along the hillside which would join up viewing places and provide access to green spaces for residents. This network was never fully completed and local residents in cul-de-sac streets may not be altogether keen on encouraging increased footfall, nevertheless parts of the routes do exist including the links from Cuckoo Lane to William Street, which provide an opportunity for many to see the view. The opening of the route through the grounds of Headington Hill Hall has also made the view from the terrace publicly accessible. As such these views have the potential to be publicly accessible as part of walking routes through the area given appropriate management of the viewing places. |

### 5.2.4 Viewers in the Past

|                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>16th and 17th century viewers</b>              | Evidence of viewing from the hill in the 16th and 17th centuries. View of Oxford by George Hoefnagel used to symbolise the city in Braun and Hogenburg's map of Oxford c. 1570. The construction of the raised walkway up Headington Hill c. 1700 by Oxford University responded to the use of the walk onto the hill by scholars accessing the city's landscape setting.<br><br>The return route along Cuckoo Lane has been suggested as a continuation of Addison's Walk through the grounds of Magdalen College. |
| <b>People arriving in Oxford</b>                  | The experience of viewing from the hill has been part of the arrival into Oxford along the medieval road to London (Cheney Lane) and the later Stokenchurch Turnpike on the north side of the park.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>18th and 19th century artists</b>              | 1777 View of Oxford from Headington Hall by J. B. Malchair.<br><br>And again in 1790 as 'Entrance to Oxford from London' from near London Place (Ashmolean Collection).<br><br>Sketched by J. M. W. Turner (see the 1839 Mossell and Oxford Sketchbook, Tate Collection).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>The Morrells – a designed view</b>             | Exploited for the family's ostentatious country house with terraces, veranda and balcony overlooking the city.<br><br>Protected from suburban housing development by the Morrells in 1874 to preserve the green setting of Morrell Hall and surviving as farmland until the Morrell Hall allotments were created by the Morrell Trustees in the early 20th century.                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Late 19th and early 20th century residents</b> | Wealthy citizens, including professors of the expanding University bought houses on the hill top that included views down onto the city as a designed feature that added to their value.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Early 20th century allotment users</b>         | The development of the allotments opened up the views from the hillside to many more people, including residents of New Marston and New Headington.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

### 5.2.5 The Viewing Place

The contribution of the viewing place to the significance of the view includes both its aesthetic qualities and its history as a place used for looking out over the city for several centuries. This includes its associations with past viewers and the provisions made for viewing, both past and present. The view from parts of this area

is currently obscured by tree growth but the potential for the view to be experienced remains subject to changes in vegetation coverage. The viewing places within this area form the central part of the views from the western hill with routes along the hillside providing links to the views from Milham Ford Park and Doris Field Memorial Park to the north and South Park to the south.

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| <b>Aesthetic value of the foreground</b>                                                                | The publicly accessible viewing place has a naturally established woodland character of self-sown oak and ash trees that is an attractive setting for viewing the city.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Contribution of the view to the designed aesthetic value of Headington Hill Hall and its grounds</b> | The building and grounds of Headington Hill Hall (Listed Grade II*) including the formal garden terraces and the veranda and balcony of the building were designed to provide views to the City Centre skyline as part of their designed aesthetic value.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Contribution of the view to the designed aesthetic value of houses and gardens on Pullen's Lane</b>  | Several of the Victorian and Edwardian houses and gardens built on Pullen's Lane were designed to exploit the aesthetic value of the views over the city. These include the Grade II registered gardens of High Wall, designed by Harold Peto (a nationally significant Arts and Crafts garden designer) in the early 20th century.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Historical value of the rural setting</b>                                                            | The allotments and public viewing place preserve a green setting, including trees, hedgerows, streams and a 'productive landscape' that preserves elements of the rural character of the area that was cut off from the countryside by surrounding suburban development in the early 20th century. As such it provides a connection with past agricultural use of the area and the green rural landscape that provided the viewing place outside the city for artists and viewers in the past.                                                                                                         |
| <b>Detractors</b>                                                                                       | Within many of the viewing places the mature tree cover now restricts views out over the City Centre. However, the density of the tree canopy is an important contributor to the historic character of Headington Hill as a picturesque Victorian and Edwardian suburb, as well as part of its contribution to views of the City Centre from the western hills. With appropriate management and perhaps some improvement or redirection of the footpath routes the viewing place created in the former allotment site could again be a place where people can go to see the famous view over the city. |

### 5.2.6 The Landscape in the View

Although the view from the Council's viewing place is currently blocked by the growth of woodland the view can still be experienced from the adjacent allotments. This has a high aesthetic value provided by the rough texture and detail of the allotments' greenery in the foreground which leads the eye down to the richly coloured foliage on the lower slopes of Headington Hill and filling the Cherwell Valley. Above this a group of historic high buildings, centred on the iconic dome of the Radcliffe Camera, are the only buildings seen and mark the position of the City Centre. The suburbs beyond the City Centre are hidden whilst Hinksey Hill rises as a green backcloth in the far distance against which the buildings' limestone,

lead and copper provide a strong contrast adding to their prominence. The tallest high buildings break above the horizon of the hill's crest whilst the massed spires and pinnacles of the roofs of New College create a distinctly spiky skyline to this group. Other historic high buildings, including Merton College Chapel's tower, the copper cupola of Queens College and the pyramid of the Museum of Natural History form isolated points of interest spread out in the panorama of the view. On the extreme right of the view the Tower of the Thom building is seen as a disparate element with a bulky rectilinear form and a horizontal emphasis provided by its exposed concrete frame that contrasts with the masonry and strong vertical emphasis of other high buildings in the skyline.



#### 5.2.7 Topography and layout of the view:

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| <b>An elevated view point</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                | The allotments and terraces of Headington Hill Hall and High Wall provide a vantage point that is both close to and level with the upper portions of the City Centre's historic high buildings. These cross the level of the viewer's eye line near the point where they break the horizon of the wooded hillside beyond, adding to their prominence, but allowing part of their structure to be seen against the darker backdrop of the hill.                                                                                                                          |
| <b>The City Centre sits prominently in the mid-ground with a green backcloth of hills and a mixed foreground of allotments and trees, which merge into the green belt of trees in the mid ground in the Cherwell Valley.</b> | <p>The allotments and Headington Hill Park provide an open foreground area with a green character. Beyond the open space, the tree canopy carries the eye in an uninterrupted plane to the historic high buildings of the City Centre. Taller trees in the foreground provide framing to individual views and screen some taller buildings.</p> <p>Despite its elevation above the floodplain, the mass of the City Centre (as well as St. Clement's suburb) is hidden by the tree cover, allowing the high buildings to be seen in isolation from other buildings.</p> |
| <b>Tight focus of historic high buildings in the middle ground</b>                                                                                                                                                           | The view is wide and expansive with little framing. The strength of the focus of the view on the historic high buildings is a result of the tight cluster of buildings which break above the tree canopy without other high buildings competing for the viewer's attention.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

#### 5.2.8 Green Characteristics:

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| <b>Green foreground (allotments)</b>                    | The allotments preserve the characteristic of a 'productive landscape' and a more open viewing foreground that illustrates the area's rural past. The numerous plots with varied crops provide a richly textured foreground with rising and falling masses of foliage in numerous colours and shades of green, yellow and purple, as well as areas of exposed rich brown earth. The numerous poles and temporary supporting structures for plants provide further texture and vertical emphasis that leads the eye up to the horizon and the focus of the view. Allotment plots running down the hillside draw the eye forward towards the City Centre. |
| <b>Green Foreground (Headington Hill Hall and Park)</b> | The green garden and parkland foreground of Headington Hill Hall is aesthetically pleasing and illustrates the picturesque landscaped parkland and formal gardens of the Morrell's country estate, adding historical value.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Trees screening foreground buildings in the view</b> | Trees in Headington Hill Park and on the edges of the allotment help to screen surrounding buildings, including the student housing blocks built off John Garne Way, preserving the character of the foreground as a green and undeveloped landscape beyond the urban area of the City Centre. They include numerous ornamental varieties that add to the rich variety in colour and texture of foliage in the view.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Trees in the Cherwell floodplain</b>                 | The trees running alongside the River Cherwell and in the green spaces in its floodplain form a thick mass of woodland that conceals the city beyond and rises to form a rough textured blanket of foliage that seems to fill the valley.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

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| <b>Trees on Hinksey Hill</b> | The suburb of Botley is seen as a tree covered area on Hinksey Hill with trees dominating the character of the hillside, despite the dense suburban development they represent. This provides the green backcloth to the historic high buildings in the City Centre. |
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### 5.2.9 Architectural Characteristics:

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| <b>Hidden buildings between foreground and middle ground</b> | <p>Buildings between the viewing place and the focus of the view have been concealed by foliage but are also sufficiently low for this effect to be achieved. These include intentionally low-scale buildings such as St Catherine's College, designed specifically to avoid impact on the view.</p> <p>The low-rise school building at the foot of the hill is sufficiently plain as to avoid drawing the eye away from the historic high buildings. It is balanced by green open space surrounding the school and the thick tree line that bounds this.</p> <p>Although they are large buildings, the John Garne Way buildings are screened from view both by foliage on the boundaries of the allotments and by being set lower down the hill. Other buildings surrounding the allotments have a utilitarian character, generally being small, single storey buildings without eye catching ornament that would draw attention away from the focus of the view.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Hidden City Centre</b>                                    | The City Centre roofscape is hidden by foliage allowing the historic high buildings to be seen in isolation.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>The high buildings and focus of the view</b>              | <p>Historically, Magdalen Tower, Christ Church Cathedral Spire and Tom Tower were seen as a group creating a focus to the view from the hill (see the view by Malchair above). This grouping is now only visible from the terrace at Headington Hill Hall due to the thick cover of parkland trees lower down the hill. The Tower with its pinnacles, the short spire and the ogee cap of Tom Tower form a group spanning the 13th to 17th century and representing development of the University from a religious institution in the Middle Ages into a post-Reformation centre of learning with royal patronage, as well as the durability of the Gothic in Oxford.</p> <p>The University buildings group appear as a cluster of buildings with a strong juxtaposition of forms. These include the highly detailed roofscape of New College and All Souls as well as the Towers of The Bodleian Library and New College Bell Tower, along with the juxtaposed spires of St Mary the Virgin and All Saints (Lincoln College Library). In the background other spires add to this group, including the spires of Nuffield College and The Wesley Memorial Church and the Fleche of Exeter College Chapel, which all rise behind the mass of the Old Bodleian. The white paint and copper cupola of the Sheldonian Theatre provides a bookend on the right edge of the group.</p> <p>The dome of the Radcliffe Camera provides a large mass within this group and is seen particularly in juxtaposition with St Mary the Virgin spire as two strongly contrasting forms that are icons of Oxford. Both break above the skyline of the hill beyond, whilst the large dome is probably the most instantly recognisable landmark in the view.</p> <p>As a group these buildings represent the spiritual and academic heart of the University, representing its history from the 13th to 18th century.</p> |
| <b>A common palette of materials</b>                         | These historic high buildings share a common palette of materials and colours, as well as providing a strong vertical emphasis (predominantly limestone, lead and green copper) uniting them as a group despite their variety in form and design.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |



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| <b>The New Bodleian</b>                 | The rooftop of the New Bodleian Library also rises above the tree canopy in materials and is united with the group through its materials and adding to the story of the University in the early 20th century. However it has a more horizontal mass, making it distinct from the focal group.                                                                                               |
| <b>Outlying historic high buildings</b> | The Museum of Natural History and Merton College Chapel rise up above the tree canopy outside the main focus of the view, providing an indication of the extent of the historic City Centre and of buildings associated with academic activity. They have aesthetic and historical value individually but as part of the wider view also contribute to the cumulative value of the skyline. |
| <b>Recent additions</b>                 | The dome and minaret of the Centre for Islamic Studies have been carefully designed to fuse traditionally Middle Eastern architectural forms with the Gothic character of Oxford's architecture. They a, concealing the latter in this view.                                                                                                                                                |

#### 5.2.10 The Influence of light and the Seasons:

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| <b>Skyscape</b> | <p>It is seen to great effect at mid-morning, with the sun in the south east and clouds emerging over the hills to the west adding a dramatic skyscape, whilst bright sunlight is reflected by the limestone of the high buildings.</p> <p>The quality of light at sunset provides an attractive silhouette of the city with mist gently falling into the valley, blurring the roofscape and emphasising the high buildings (this effect is often reproduced in painting and photography, and contrasts with the daytime view).</p> <p>Early or mid-autumn, when the treescape provides the greatest variety of colour in the foreground and middle-ground (also the time when the allotments will have reached a stage of annual maturity) provides one of the most interesting viewing experiences. This also allows low angled sunlight to pick out the architectural detail of the buildings in the focus of the view.</p> |
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#### 5.2.11 Detractors:

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| <b>Thom Building</b> | The tower of the University's Engineering Department (the Thom Building) is seen on the extreme right of the view as a disparate element in the view, rising above the tree line with a bulky top heavy form that is given horizontal emphasis by its exposed concrete frame, contrasting with both the materials and vertical emphasis of the historic high buildings. |
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#### 5.2.12 Sensitivity to change:

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| <b>Change in the foreground</b> | <p>The allotments, school playing fields and parkland of Headington Hill Hall and Park provide an attractive green foreground that is an important element of both the beauty of the view and the historic relationship between the green open viewing place and the historic city centre. This view cone was designated partly in response to the loss of the green space to student accommodation blocks on the lower slopes of the hill that threatened to rise into the views from higher up.</p> <p>Development that introduces built forms that detract from the green and open character of the foreground, disrupting the expanse of green space that leads the eye to the trees in the Cherwell Valley and the city centre beyond would be regarded as harmful to the view.</p> <p>The specially created viewing place on the former allotment site is now so overgrown with self-sown trees that the view can no longer be seen from it, resulting in a significant loss of the amenity this space was designed to provide. Whilst it is desirable to maintain and enhance the ecological value this area of woodland provides there is potential to open out a viewing area through selective tree thinning and management, as well as creation of walks with better signage that would be beneficial in provide better public access to the view.</p> |
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| <b>Change in the middle ground</b>       | <p>The tree canopy in the Cherwell Valley provides an attractive blanket of greenery that conceals any development between the green foreground and the historic high buildings of the City Centre. Loss of the tree canopy, or development that rises above it, introducing built forms within this area that distract from the views to the historic high buildings would result in harm to the views.</p> <p>The construction of the Centre for Islamic Studies has provided an example of the inherent difficulties in trying to introduce new tall buildings in this area. The choice of a mixture of Middle Eastern forms and Gothic detailing and use of limestone ashlar has helped to provide an approach that introduces delicate forms and locally distinctive materials that complement the historic high buildings in the skyline. In views from the allotments or Headington Hill Hall it stands to one side of the main view as an isolated high building. Nevertheless adding more than isolated example of such buildings would result in a districting clutter that would be harmful to the view.</p> |
| <b>Change in the City Centre</b>         | <p>This is one of the closest views to the City Centre in which the detailing of the historic high buildings and other buildings can be clearly discerned. From this angle the City Centre skyline includes a 'jumble' of towers, long college roof areas with parapets and pinnacles and copper clad cupolas in addition to the taller spires and Radcliffe Camera's Dome. Whilst new development could add to this jumbled mass without detracting from its character, very careful consideration would be required for choices of form, materials and detailing to create a fitting addition to this mass of buildings. Development that rose above the general level of the City Centre and did not conform to the characteristics of this roofscape would be considered harmful to the view.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Change in the setting of the view</b> | <p>The view cone has a broad setting to the north with the arc of view extending well to the right of the view cone as seen from the allotments. The impact of the bulky and conspicuously coloured Thom building demonstrates the potential for new development to detract from the wider view by drawing attention away from the main focus of the City Centre skyline. Nevertheless, the finer spires and pyramids of buildings such as the Museum of Natural History demonstrate that higher development outside the City Centre can be complementary to the main focus of the view.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Change in the background</b>          | <p>The historic high buildings rise against an unbroken green backdrop of the western hills, revealing Oxford's location in a broader countryside setting. Development that introduced conspicuous built forms between the historic high buildings and the green hills that did not continue the positive characteristics of the City Centres roofscape would cause harm to the view.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

Figure 5.2.1  
Photograph of  
the view from the  
John Garne Way  
Allotments



Figure 5.2.2  
Illustration 1:  
Simplified render of  
the view from the  
John Garne Way  
allotments

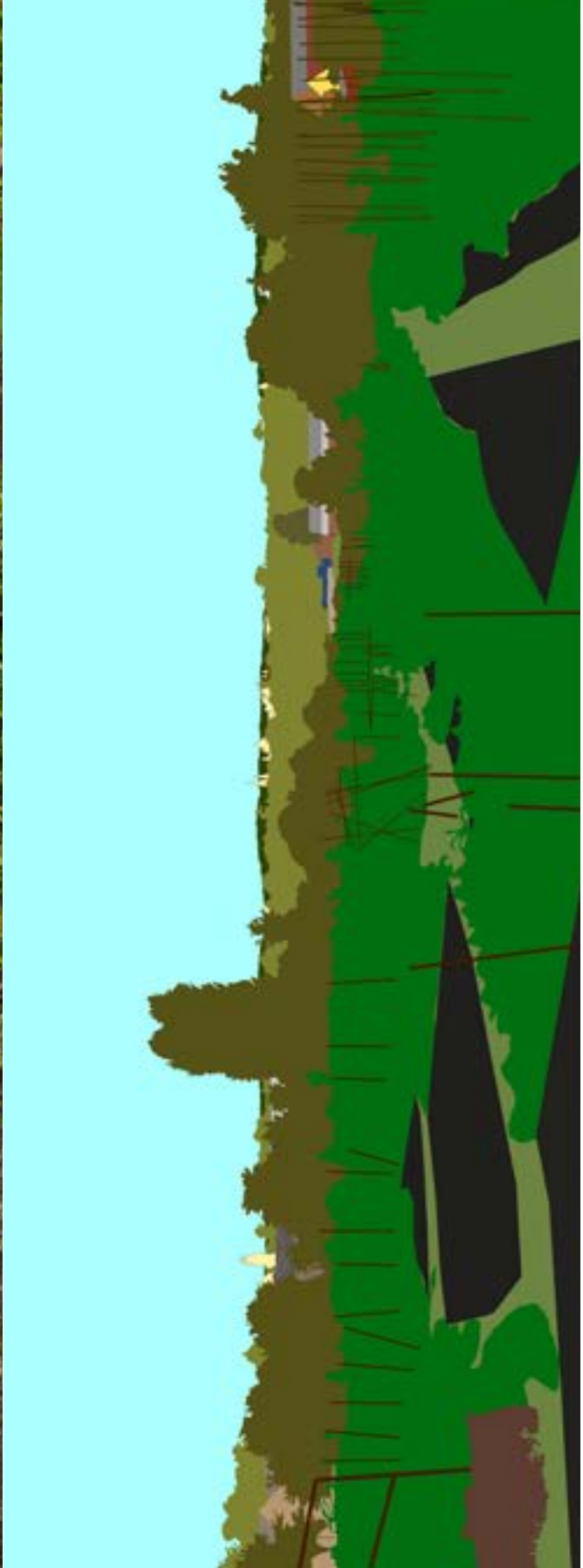
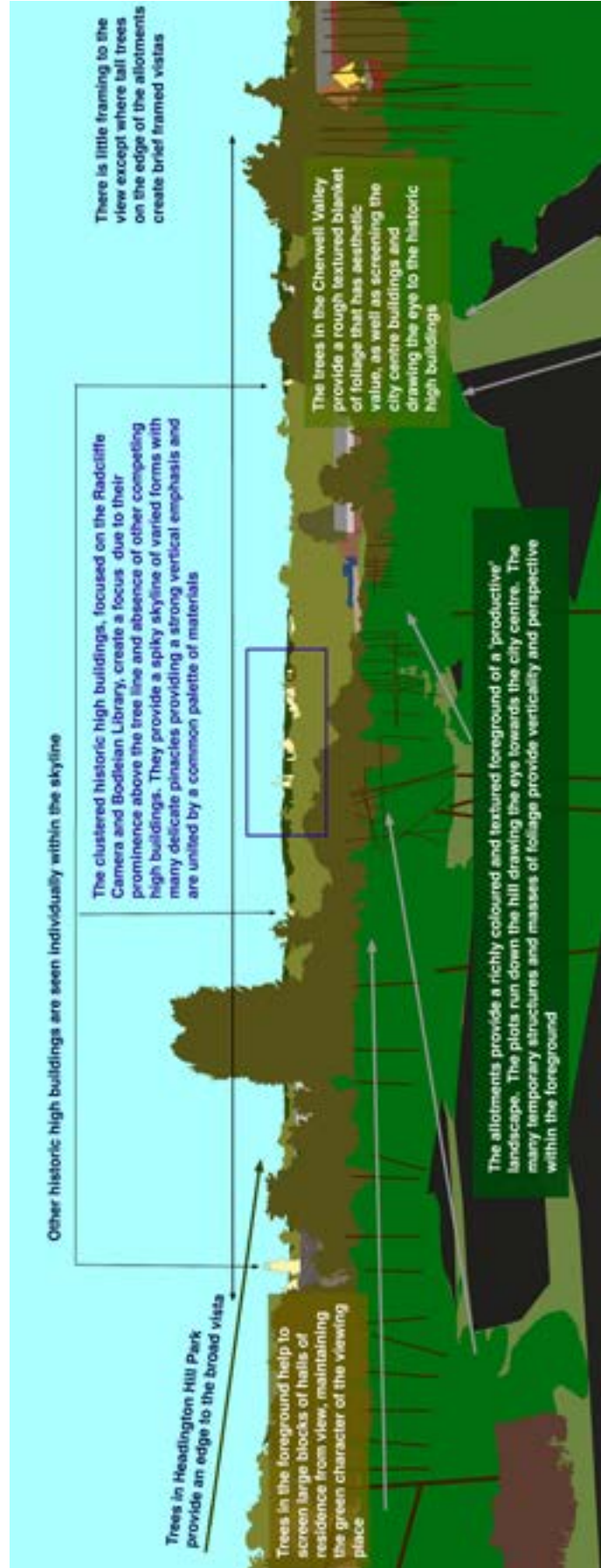


Figure 5.2.3  
Illustration 2:  
Annotated render  
of the view from  
the John Game Way  
Allotments





OXFORD  
PRESERVATION  
TRUST

## 5.3 South Park View Analysis Summary

### 5.3.1 Introduction

The South Park view exemplifies the views of Oxford City Centre from Headington Hill; a series of views from high ground east of the City Centre that have been admired since, at least, the late 16th century. This is a 'close-up' view of the city that allows appreciation of the architecture of the city's landmark buildings from an attractive historic parkland setting. Belts of mature trees in the Cherwell Valley provide a green fringe that cushions the City Centre buildings and separates them from the historic low-rise suburbs of St Clements and East Oxford. The wooded masses and fields of Wytham Hill and Hinksey Hill, including the garden suburb of South Hinksey, provide a green backcloth with a prominent dip between the hills that draws the eye down to the City's spires and domes. This is a highly democratic viewing place, enjoyed by many and photographed and reproduced in all seasons. It often forms the backdrop to public events held in the park.

### 5.3.2 The Viewers

Experiencing this view provides a connection with past viewers, including the artists who have portrayed it, the landowners who developed the parkland for private viewing and the 20th



*J.M.W. Turner's view of Oxford from Headington Hill (1803-4)*  
© Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

century activists who campaigned to protect it for the people of the City. How past viewers have recorded or depicted the view can reveal features that have historically been considered significant about it and that continue to have significance today. The view from South Park is the oldest view for which there is evidence of artistic appreciation and is one of the most frequently reproduced including its use by modern artists and photographers as the iconic view of Oxford (this is given further consideration below under Landscape in the View).





*George Hoefnagel's view of Oxford published in 1575*

### 5.3.3 Present Viewers

|                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Residents and students</b>  | The view from South Park is enjoyed by many local people as part of their daily recreation or on everyday journeys through the park as part of footpath routes. For these viewers the view is an uplifting element that contributes to the more general amenity of the park as a valued green open space away from the busy traffic of surrounding roads or densely developed urban environments of East Oxford and New Headington. The users of the view are swelled by the many students from Oxford Brookes for whom the park is a convenient open space to relax and socialise in whilst enjoying the special views of the city. The park is also a place for more active recreation including running, casual 'kick-about' football and fitness coaching. |
| <b>Inspiring Artists</b>       | The view of the city from South Park is used by many artists as inspiration for their work. Due to the ease of access, beautiful views of the city against the backdrop of Wytham Hill and parkland foreground with additional interest provided by groups of trees or overhanging foliage it is one of the most reproduced images of the city from its green setting.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Audiences of big events</b> | The Park is used by the City for large events such as the Olympics torch ceremony in 2012 or the Cowley Road Carnival. The view over the city provides a spectacular and unique setting for such events enjoyed by large audiences.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

### 5.3.4 Viewers in the Past

|                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>The earliest recorders of Oxford's views</b>     | Evidence of viewing from the hill in the 16th and 17th centuries. View of Oxford by George Hoefnagel used to symbolise the city in Braun and Hogenburg's map of Oxford c. 1570. The construction of the raised walkway up Headington Hill c. 1700 by Oxford University responded to the use of the walk onto the hill by scholars accessing the city's landscape setting. |
| <b>People arriving in Oxford</b>                    | The experience of viewing from the hill has been part of the arrival into Oxford along the medieval road to London (Cheney Lane) and the later Stokenchurch Turnpike on the north side of the park.                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>18th century painters</b>                        | 1777 View of Oxford from Headington Hall by J. B. Malchair ('foremost Drawing Master of Oxford').                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>A famous view painted by Turner (and others)</b> | Painted by J. M. W. Turner (sketched 1799, painted 1803-4 "A view of Oxford from the South Side of Headington Hill"; see Tate Collection) and others, including William Turner of Oxford (View of Oxford from Headington, Ashmolean Collection) and Peter de Wint ("View near Oxford, Tate Collection).                                                                   |

|                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>The Morrells – a designed view</b>               | Protected from suburban housing development by the Morrells in 1877 to preserve the green setting of Morrell Hall and landscaped as parkland with carriage drives allowing views down onto the city (but nevertheless maintained in agricultural use).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>The early 20th century conservation movement</b> | <p>Early 20th century struggle to protect from development. The Morrells tried to resist attempts to purchase the land to build affordable housing in the years after the First World War. Eventually just 20 % of the land was given up to build the Morrell Avenue estate.</p> <p>Purchased by Oxford Preservation Trust in 1939 to protect the green setting of the city.</p> <p>Given to the City with conditions to prevent its development and preserve the ability to see the view.</p> |



### 5.3.5

#### The Viewing Place

The viewing place will contribute to what is seen in the view but may also have historical, evidential or communal value as a place for viewing the city that adds to the significance of the view. The Park provides the southern end of

the Headington Hill (or eastern) group of viewing places with links via footpaths to a series of viewing places along the west facing slopes of the hill that have been influential to the area's development in the past 150 years.

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|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Aesthetic value of the foreground</b>                        | South Park is a large urban park with parkland landscaping creating a green viewing place that forms an attractive Arcadian foreground to the view.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Historical value of the rural setting</b>                    | The park retains evidence of the former agricultural environs of Oxford up to the late 19th century in its green open spaces and the ridge-and-furrow earthworks of ploughing. Trees within the park also provide remnants of former hedgerows. This illustrates the development of Oxford and its early post-medieval suburb of St Clement's into the rural setting and preserved the coherence of the historic city core |
| <b>Historical and aesthetic value of the parkland landscape</b> | The park retains evidence of the landscaping undertaken by the Morrells and, subsequently, the City Council, to turn the agricultural land into a picturesque landscape. This includes the openness of the space and the boundary tree planting and tree groups.                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>A number of ever-changing views</b>                          | The mix of large open space and densely planted tree groups changes the focus of the view between different groups of City Centre landmarks as the viewer moves through the space.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Archaeological value of the Civil War view</b>               | The park has potential for the survival of remains of the encampment made by the Parliamentary army during the siege of Oxford in 1646. Studying how the encampment utilised the views over the city could reveal more about the siege and the history of Oxford during this significant period in the city's history.                                                                                                     |



## 5.3.6 The Landscape in the View

What is seen in the view has been admired for centuries for both its designed and fortuitous aesthetic quality – that is, the high quality of features in the view that were intended to be beautiful and the development of groups of features by chance that we consider to be beautiful because of our taste and cultural associations. The characteristic features in the view; the green foreground, compact medieval City Centre, high buildings of architectural quality rising above the general roofscape and Magdalen Tower in a position of primacy, as well as the green backcloth of the hills beyond, have essentially remained unchanged since the 16th century providing a connection with those who have seen and portrayed this view before. Seeing the City Centre in its green setting, with St Clement's suburb in the foreground, provides understanding of its development as a medieval urban centre at the junction of two river valleys. The high buildings of the colleges and University, with strong Gothic styling, reflect the influence of the church on the development of Oxford as a centre of medieval and early modern religion and learning. Later buildings, including the domes of the Sheldonian and Radcliffe Camera, reflect the

development of classical taste in the University in the 17th and 18th centuries. The growth of St Clement's suburb, seen in this view as the gateway to the city, reflects the importance of the roads from the city up Headington Hill as the route to London, with which Oxford has held a strong connection, occasionally replacing the capital as the country's centre of government and often providing the seat of learning from which governance has sprung.

The view from the hillside looks down on the city with extensive parkland, including traces of an agricultural past in the foreground, leading the eye down to the suburb of St Clement's, indicated by Georgian town houses at London Place. From this frontage the eye passes easily over the low-level rooftops to the City Centre, wrapped in a mantle of mature trees in the Cherwell Valley parklands. The City Centre provides a fine grain roofscape with the appearance of a consistent height, broken occasionally by the mounds of foliage of mature trees. Only the traditional towers, spires and domes of great aesthetic worth and architectural quality, signifying high status buildings of the University and colleges, rise above the



*The city skyline in silhouette at dusk in September*

general level of the rooftops and so stand out and these are limited to the carefully designed prestigious features of towers, spires and domes. Occasionally, the lower portions of college buildings are glimpsed between the Cherwell Valley trees. The city's position on a gravel island holds it up above the surrounding valleys and screens the buildings of West Oxford in this view such that the City Centre is seen against the green backdrop of Hinksey Hill and Wytham Hill. A dip between the hills draws the eye down to the City Centre. Magdalen College Tower (originally located just outside the city) stands

forward amongst the high buildings and has primacy. A group of high buildings centred on Christ Church (the Christ Church Group) stand to the left and indicate the former sites of St Frideswide's Abbey and Cardinal College on the historic route into the city from the south. A second group of high buildings; including St Mary the Virgin Church, the Radcliffe Camera and the Sheldonian Theatre (the University Group) stand to the left and are seen to a greater or lesser extent as the viewer moves around the park, becoming screened by trees and the shoulder of Headington Hill in the east of the park.

### 5.3.7 Topography and layout of the view:

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| <p><b>The City Centre sits prominently in the middle ground with a green backcloth of hills and a mixed foreground of green parkland, historic St Clement's Suburb and the Green Belt of trees in the Cherwell Valley.</b></p> | <p>The park provides a large foreground area and a range of different elevations with views down onto the City Centre. Houses outside the park and trees lines within it provide a well-defined edge to the green foreground.</p> <p>The dip into the valley of the River Cherwell reduces the prominence of the buildings in St Clement's suburb and of the open spaces on the valley floor, which reduces the apparent depth of these areas in the view and allows the eye to pass easily over the buildings to the greenery and City Centre beyond.</p> <p>The City Centre's slight elevation above the floodplain adds to its prominence in the mid-ground, making it seem closer and hiding the townscape of west Oxford beyond.</p> <p>The high buildings in the middle ground rise from a fine grain roofscape in the historic City Centre but appear as a row of towers, spires and domes rising in spread across the city.</p> <p>The dip between the two hills in the background draws the eye down to the city centre as the focus of the view.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <p><b>Changing elevation and perspectives with a progression from silhouette skyline, to roofscape and finally a breathtaking panorama.</b></p>                                                                                | <p>The topography, with the rise in ground level increasing distance from the City Centre from west to east, means that moving around the park provides an ever-changing view.</p> <p>From the west of the park: the towers are seen in silhouette against the sky above the roofline of buildings at London Place, Morrell Avenue and Glebe Street.</p> <p>As the viewer moves eastward: the city's towers and spires are seen standing within the context of the wider city roofscape, with the western hills providing a green backcloth indicating the city's green setting.</p> <p>From the eastern extremity of the park: the skyline buildings recede into the distance becoming less easily identified individually, whilst the general extent of the southern part of the City Centre can be appreciated within its green setting, although the northern half (including The University Group) are increasingly screened from view.</p> <p>The view to the north is confined by the topography of the hill and tree planting. The view to the south west is more open (there is a secondary view over East Oxford towards Boars Hill including the spire of Ss Edmund and Frideswide and the rooftop chapel of St Stephen's House as landmarks).</p> |



#### **5.3.8 Green Characteristics:**

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| <b>Green foreground</b>                  | The green parkland foreground is aesthetically pleasing and illustrates both the earlier agricultural use and the picturesque landscaped parkland of the Morrell's country estate, adding historical value.                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Trees in the park frame the views</b> | Groups of trees frame views screening some areas of the skyline that are revealed and disappear as the viewer moves through the space.<br><br>Trees on the park's boundaries lead the eye down to the City Centre.                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Trees in the Cherwell floodplain</b>  | The trees running alongside the River Cherwell and in the green spaces in its floodplain (including the grounds of Magdalen College and School, St Hilda's College and Merton and Christ Church Meadows beyond), form a green mantle of foliage that defines the limits of the historic City Centre and provides soft green masses that complement harder forms of towers, spires and domes. |
| <b>Trees in the City Centre</b>          | Occasional taller trees rise amongst the spires, towers and domes and over the lower level roofscape (indicating the locations of green spaces of college gardens in the City Centre) and provide greenery and softening in the skyline.                                                                                                                                                     |

#### **5.3.9 Architectural Characteristics:**

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| <b>Historical value of St Clement's buildings as a gateway to the City Centre</b> | Terraces of Georgian and Victorian townhouses at London Place and Glebe Street illustrate the 18th and 19th century gateway to the city (reflected in the naming of London Place) creating an edge to the historic urban area. This is the entrance to the historic St Clement's suburb, established in the Middle Ages and rebuilt after the Civil War as a distinct community.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Low rise suburbs between fore and middle ground</b>                            | The low rise suburbs of East Oxford (mostly two-storey) and St Clements' (mostly three-storey) provide an introduction to the middle ground with no distracting high points that would compete with the City Centre spires for precedence.<br><br>The rooftop and horse-shoe plan of Sir James Sterling's Florey Building can be identified in the St Clement's suburb by the distinctive Lancashire red brick walls that make it stand out from other buildings in Oxford.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Intricate City Centre roofscape of small pitched roofs</b>                     | The City Centre roofscape is formed of a compact area with a densely developed pattern of generally uniform height and predominantly pitched roofs with some larger roofs representing historic college buildings. The large red brick gable end of Oxford Town Hall stands above the roofscape, giving this important civic building a presence in the skyline. The compact area of roofscape seen illustrates the confined nature of the medieval city within its circuit of walls.<br><br>The main materials of the rooftop bed of the City Centre are natural slate and plain clay tile, which are dark, essentially recessive and provide a strong contrast to the limestone of the high buildings which, therefore, stand out.<br><br>Occasionally the more intricate detailing of medieval college roofs can be seen including highly ornamented spirelets rising from parapets. |
| <b>Glimpsed views of larger college buildings</b>                                 | From the south of the park some views include the intricate detailing of spirelets on the roofs of buildings at New College<br><br>Larger buildings of Magdalen College are glimpsed through a screen of foliage running along the River Cherwell and surrounding the Deer Park and Meadow providing both historic and architectural interest.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

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| <b>The historic high buildings</b> | <p>Magdalen College Tower stands forward of the main groups of high buildings and is the first skyline building seen from the west of the park. Its prominence reflects its position outside the historic city walls, greeting the traveller from the east.</p> <p>The Christ Church group of buildings (with the spire of St Aldate's Church) is seen as an uninterrupted row identifying the location of St Aldate's as one of the oldest routes into the city. They also represent the site of St Frideswide's Priory (probably Oxford's oldest Christian community) and Cardinal College before the establishment of Henry VIII's Christ Church. As a group they rise from either side to the short spire of Christ Church Cathedral. The shape of Tom Tower stands out as having particular aesthetic value as well as its historical connection with Sir Christopher Wren.</p> <p>Merton College Tower stands between Magdalen and the Christ Church group (both horizontally and in depth) and helps to lead the eye into the view.</p> <p>The University buildings group appear as dispersed with buildings occasionally screened by trees in the park. They stand to the right of Magdalen Tower, with St Mary the Virgin still seen as the tallest point on the skyline. They illustrate both the long history and development of the University's institutions from its religious origins and practices to more secular concerns and the establishment of the Bodleian as a repository of learning. In this view the dome of the Radcliffe Camera has a high aesthetic value and is one of the most immediately recognisable 'Oxford' buildings and so is often the focus of depictions.</p> <p>Nuffield College spire stands at the rear of the focus of the view, marking the western edge of the City Centre, beyond which West Oxford is mainly hidden from view.</p> <p>The materials of the city's high buildings (and their colours) are predominantly limestone, lead and slate with, occasionally, green copper, which helps to create a group value amongst these structures despite their variety in form and design. They also stand out against the rooftop 'bed' of the City Centre and the greenery of the hills behind.</p> |
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#### 5.3.10 Infrastructure:

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| <b>Headington Road leading the eye towards the City Centre</b> | <p>Headington Road – St Clements Road provides a key area of movement with traffic into and out of the City Centre.</p> |
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#### 5.3.11 The Influence of light and the Seasons:

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| <b>Optimum Viewing</b> | <p>The view is seen to great effect at mid-morning, with the sun in the south east and clouds emerging over the hills to the west pushed by the prevailing wind adding a dramatic skyscape whilst bright sunlight is reflected by the limestone of the high buildings.</p> <p>The quality of light at sunset provides an attractive silhouette of the city. Often this is accompanied by a blanket of mist that lies in the floor of the valley through which the historic high buildings rise gaining greater prominence above the indistinct rooftops of the City Centre. This effect is often reproduced in painting and photography, and contrasts with the daytime view.</p> <p>Spring and summer provide the most green and verdant setting to the city buildings. During the winter months the London Place and Magdalen College buildings become more evident as the screening effect of the trees is reduced. The parkland in snow or a heavy frost provides an alternative white image that also contrasts the white foreground with the grey and limestone buildings.</p> |
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**5.3.12 Detractors:**

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| <b>Pylons</b> | The line of Pylons and high level electric power lines running between the hills directly behind the City Centre is a jarring feature that distracts from the historic interest of the City Centre. They have an engineered and industrial character and scale as large structures of loose steel frames that contrast with the compact stone structures and rural greenery of the city and its setting. They are particularly prominent in this view as they break above the skyline of the hills in the background. |
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**5.3.13 Sensitivity to change:**

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| <b>Change in the park</b>        | <p>The management of the park makes an important contribution to the quality of the view. This includes the protection of the historic 'ridge and furrow earthworks' that provide evidence of the area's agricultural past, and although extensive could easily be harmed by overuse of the park by vehicles supporting large events.</p> <p>Maintaining and adding to the tree stock of the park is part of the City Council's ongoing management of the area as a public amenity. However, in managing this tree stock, maintaining visibility of the views over the City Centre will need to be considered as a priority to preserve the park's special historic interest and character.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Change in the suburbs</b>     | Development that rises above the general roof surface of the suburbs of St Clement's and East Oxford that is conspicuous and draws attention away from the historic high buildings of the city centre would result in harm to the view. Some isolated examples of higher buildings of particular significance to the local area, such as the tower of St Edmund and St Frideswide's Church and the rooftop chapel of St Stephen's House are not considered to detract but would not be considered as a precedent for high scale development.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>In the Cherwell Valley</b>    | Development that detracts from the character of the Cherwell Valley as a zone of mature trees wrapping around the City Centre would result in harm to both the attractiveness of the view and its historic interest as a city rising from its 'ancient groves'.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Change in the City Centre</b> | Change that disturbs the characteristics of the City Centre roofscape of dense short, steeply pitched roofs above which only the historic high buildings rise is likely to result in harm to the view. This is due to the thinly spread nature of the historic high buildings, each easily discerned rising above the lower level roof surface.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Change in the background</b>  | <p>There is an opportunity to enhance the view by removing the pylons and overhead wires in the background of this view through 'undergrounding' the power lines.</p> <p>Development that introduces tall building that stand out as bulky structures in the background to the historic high buildings would result in harm. Seacourt Tower in Botley is seen as a background feature in some angles from the park, creating a high skyline feature in an area that is otherwise characterised as the green background. Similar development that pushes the apparent city spread into the green backdrop would be regarded as harmful to the view.</p> <p>The hills in the background include the suburban areas of Botley. These long established suburbs now have a canopy of trees that breaks up the mass of buildings and sustains the green characteristic of the background. Nevertheless, further development that increased the spread of housing along the hills in the background would detract from the characteristic of seeing the City Centre against the backdrop of the green hills that represent the city's rural hinterland and would be regarded as harmful to the view.</p> |

Figure 5.3.1



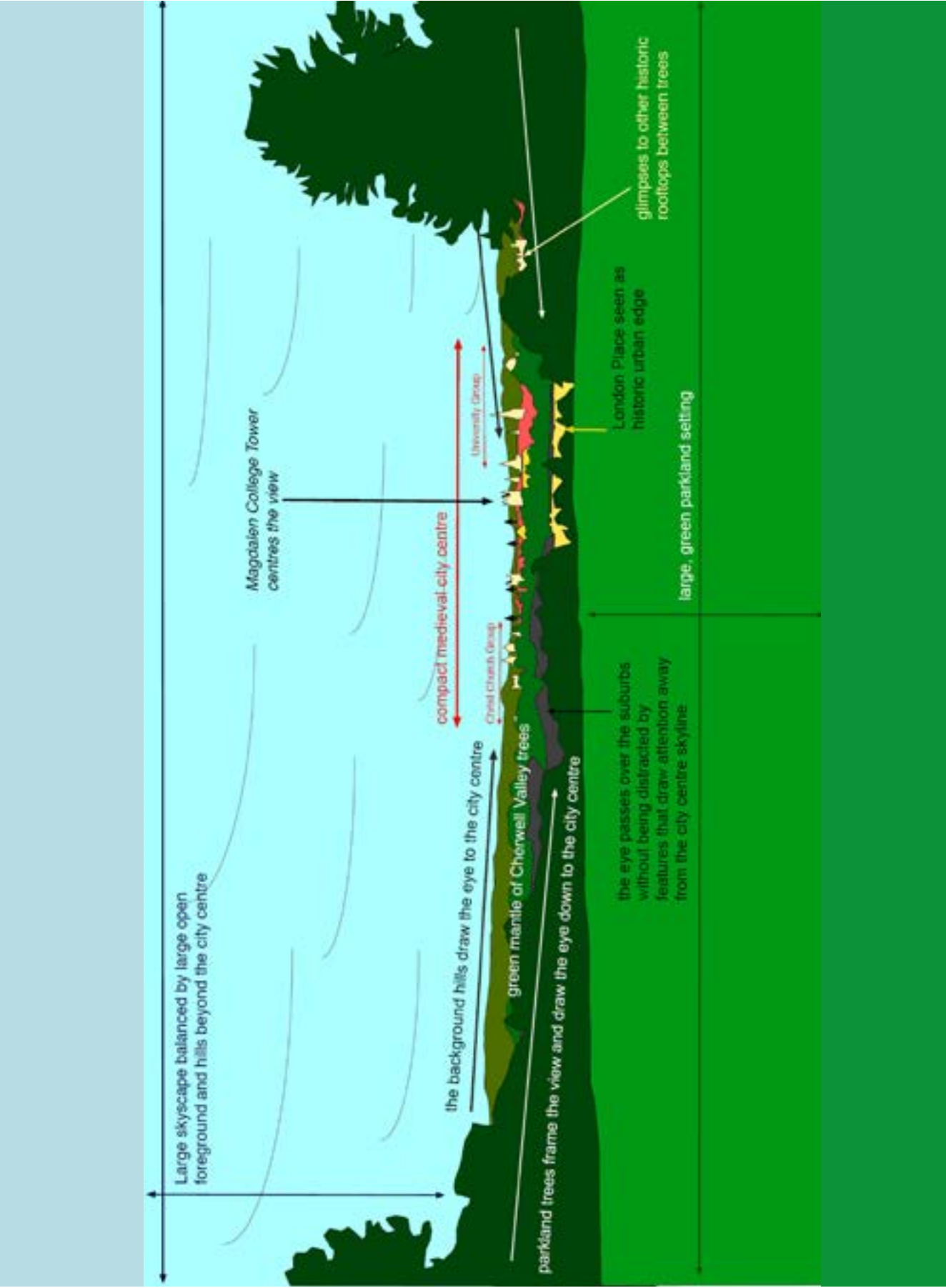
*Photograph of the view from South Park*

Figure 5.3.2



*Illustration 1: Simplified render of the view from South Park*

Figure 5.3.3  
Illustration 2:  
Annotated render  
of the view from  
South Park





## PART 6

# The Oxford View Cones: Views from South East Oxford

2015 Report



OXFORD  
PRESERVATION  
TRUST



Historic England



OXFORD  
PRESERVATION  
TRUST

## 6.1 Crescent Road View Assessment Summary

### 6.1.1 Introduction

This stands out as the only view among the ten designated view cones that has an urban foreground. The view is seen from a street developed on the edge of the historic settlement of Temple Cowley from the late 19th century with sporadic infilling and redevelopment throughout the 20th century. This has provided an architecturally diverse suburban foreground. As with the view from Rose Hill, this is not one of the historically recorded and celebrated views of the city. Nevertheless, it has been experienced by many residents of Temple Cowley in the past and continues to be a feature that transforms an apparently ordinary suburban street into a part of a world famous historic city. Comparison with the record photographs taken for this view in the 1960s reveals that the growth of trees in the middle ground has resulted in a significant change by hiding the open space of the sports fields and the rooftops of East Oxford.

The view is briefly channelled over the rooftops of houses lower down the hill to a cluster of historic

high buildings in the City Centre. The Radcliffe Camera's dome and the tall spire of St Mary's Church form the core of this group, which also includes the tower of Ss Mary and John's Church in East Oxford and the 'flèche' of Exeter College Chapel. Moving down the street, the curve of the road pulls the focus of the view across to the left including the towers and spires of Christ Church, Nuffield College, Merton College Chapel and St Aldate's parish church. Proceeding further along the road, this view is rapidly hidden as buildings block the line of sight to the City Centre with the attention switching to the wooded hillsides across the Thames Valley to the west. Looking further to the left the greenery of the middle ground is less dense and the rooftops of East Oxford become a distinct element of a more ordinary urban view.

### 6.1.2 The Viewers

This view is not noted as having any notable historical associations but nevertheless is likely to have formed a feature of the lives of local residents in the past and is appreciated by those who live on and pass along the road today.





## 6.1.3 Present Viewers

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| <b>Local residents present</b> | Today the view is experienced by the local community and motorists heading into the centre of Oxford via Cowley. This is a well used road and therefore the view is seen by a large number of people as a part of their daily life. |
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## 6.1.4 Viewers in the past

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| <b>Local residents past</b> | Historically (and at least since the 12th century), this view will have been seen by residents in and around Temple Cowley, as well as workers in the fields surrounding the village. |
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## 6.1.5 The Viewing Place

Where you see the view from affects your understanding of its significance. This can depend on how much you know about the viewing place and its history, whilst temporary features of the viewing place can have a big impact on the viewing experience.

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| <b>Aesthetic value of the foreground</b>    | This is a tranquil residential street, with green hedgerows and street trees and a mixture of architectural styles that are unified by the use of red brick and pitched roof slopes.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Historical interest of Temple Cowley</b> | <p>Temple Cowley, a rural settlement located on a prominent hillside to the south-east of Oxford, and named after the medieval house of the Knights Templar, was in existence by the 12th century and preserved its ancient agricultural character until the mid-19th century.</p> <p>The historic village has now been largely infilled and surrounded by 19th and 20th century suburban development that reflects the city's industrial expansion in the 20th century.</p> |
| <b>A residential area</b>                   | Crescent Road is a residential street that was first laid out in the 1850s. The street has continued to develop over the past century and a half and might be regarded as similar to many other contemporary streets elsewhere, were it not for the direct view to the City Centre and its world famous historic buildings.                                                                                                                                                  |

## 6.1.6 The Landscape in the View

This is a kinetic view that is influenced by the course of the street, change in elevation and the framing provided by the buildings to either side. What is seen in the view can change relatively rapidly through the growth or removal of trees. It is now seen with a green middle ground echoing the rural landscape that once separated Cowley from the city. However in the recent past the suburb of East Oxford was more visible, illustrating the expansion of Oxford in the 19th and 20th centuries for the growing workforce of its educational and industrial institutions. Nevertheless little in the middle ground rose up (other than the towers of Victorian churches) that would detract from the prominence of the historic high buildings of the City Centre as the focus of the view. These are seen as a series

of clusters that, in turn, form the focus of the changing view. The group set around the spire of St Mary the Virgin Church and the dome of the Radcliffe camera (which also draws in the tower of the Church of Ss Mary and John in East Oxford) form the main focal group, although others are also important. The historic high buildings of Christ Church, for example form a notable group. Wytham Hill provides both a green backdrop to the high buildings and draws the eye down to the main focal group where it dips to the right. The 'ordinary' suburban setting of the foreground adds another layer of historic interest, illustrating the development of Oxford in the 19th and early 20th century outside the focus of the academic institutions into suburbs that served new industries but continued to maintain links with the historic heart of the city.



*This photograph of the view for Crescent Road was taken shortly after the view cone was designated in 1962. It illustrates the major change that tree growth and infilling on the road has had on the character of the view. The East Oxford suburb is seen in the valley floor and the City Centre beyond it, raised up on its gravel terrace. The black and white photograph also helps to highlight how direct sunlight illuminates the limestone of the historic high buildings in the City Centre.*

#### 6.1.7 Context:

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| <b>A rare view</b> | Views from the hills south east of city are rare, due to the mixture of dense urban development and tall vegetation. As a result the opportunity to see the city from this angle is significant even though the view from the original assessment point recorded in the local plan is currently screened by foreground trees. The view makes an unexceptional suburban street part of a world renowned historic city. |
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#### 6.1.8 Topography and layout of the view:

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| <b>Elevated medium/long distance view</b>                | <p>The elevation and steep slope to the north provides a short section of street from which the viewer is able to see over the rooftops of buildings further down the street and trees in Cowley Marsh Sports Field to the City Centre.</p> <p>The high buildings are just over 2.8 kilometres to the north west (Magdalen Tower being the nearest). Whilst Wytham Hill is some 7 kilometres distant (at Marley Wood).</p>                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Channelled to the City Centre and busy foreground</b> | <p>The view is unusual among the designated view cones in having a suburban streetscene as a foreground with buildings on either side of a street creating a channelled view to the City Centre. These views are surprisingly rare within the city as suburban development tended to block views rather than frame them.</p> <p>The detail of the streetscene, including parked and moving cars, lampposts, telephone poles and wires, front garden boundaries and planting and buildings provides rich detail with a high potential for change.</p> |
| <b>Other viewing points</b>                              | As you approach the City Centre the view is also seen from Cowley Road, where again, the strong building lines and linear street channel the eye towards the high buildings of the City Centre. This is a lower lying view point from which St Mary the Virgin Church rises against the sky above the buildings lining the road.                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |



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| <b>The middle ground</b>            | The rooftops of the East Oxford suburb form a low-lying middle ground masked from Crescent Road by the trees in Cowley Marsh Sports Field. The towers of the Church of Ss Mary and John, Cowley Road and St John the Baptist, Iffley Road rise above the treetops, adding to the historic skyline.                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Wytham Hill as a back ground</b> | Wytham Hill provides a background and horizon to the view. The indistinct texture of woodland provides a sense of depth to the view. There are no distracting structures or modern features seen between the historic high building and the hill. St Mary the Virgin Church Spire and the Radcliffe Camera's dome are the only buildings that break above the horizon of the hill and so have extra prominence in the view. |

**6.1.9 Green Characteristics:**

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| <b>Foreground foliage in the street scene</b>                                               | Street trees, hedgerows and garden planting contribute greenery and softening to the urban foreground that helps to blend with the greenery of the middle ground at the Cowley Marsh Sports Fields.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Green middle ground of Cowley Marsh Sports Field and the Cherwell and Thames Valleys</b> | <p>The greenery of trees in the Sports Field, with other greenery in the low-lying middle ground, provides an attractive middle ground, screening from view buildings in East Oxford. Further greenery beyond the suburb screens the City Centre's buildings. As a result the historic high buildings rise from the valley's greenery in isolation from other structures.</p> <p>Trees in the valley floor provide a rich tapestry of colours, changing through the seasons and representing the mixture of native trees in the rural landscape of the River valley and more ornamental planting in gardens and churchyards within the suburbs.</p> |
| <b>Trees in the City Centre</b>                                                             | Occasional taller trees in parks and college gardens stand alongside the historic buildings. These provide a contrast to the buildings' strong geometric forms and reveal the green character of gardens in the City Centre. The edge of the City Centre is marked by the trees of Christ Church meadow. These represent a formal landscape, the recorded development of which dates back to the late 16th century as well as contributing to the image of Oxford rising from its 'ancient groves'.                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Green backcloth of Wytham Hill</b>                                                       | <p>The city is seen within a rural setting, a feature of its aesthetic value that has been appreciated for centuries.</p> <p>Wytham Woods themselves are of historic interest having inspired writers and latterly forming a gift to the University by Raymond ffennell to form a living laboratory and to preserve their green character</p> <p>The dark green foliage provides a strong contrast to the limestone of the historic high buildings, helping the latter to stand out.</p>                                                                                                                                                            |

**6.1.10 Architectural characteristics:**

|                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
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| <b>Buildings in the foreground</b> | <p>Late 19th and early 20th century suburban houses dominate the foreground. These are generally of two-storeys, in redbrick or painted render with slate or clay tile roofs, and with prominent gables either to the road or as exposed flank walls seen due to the curving line of the road. They enclose the viewing place and frame the view.</p> <p>A prominent group of later 20th century houses with mansard roofs catch the eye due to the rhythm of their exposed flank walls. The horizontal line of their flat roofs frames the focal group of buildings in the City Centre.</p> |
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| <b>Buildings in the middle ground</b> | <p>From the viewpoint buildings in east Oxford and the general mass of buildings in the City Centre are currently screened from view by the tree cover. This is a relatively recent characteristic as historic photographs reveal the townscape of East Oxford was more visible in the 1960s. It does contribute to the effect of seeing the City Centre buildings in a green setting, although this is at the expense of the historic interest of seeing the city in the context of its Victorian and 20th century suburbs.</p> <p>The historic high buildings are seen as a strong contrast with the buildings in the foreground, having a strong vertical emphasis with a contrasting palette of materials. As a result of their distinctive forms they are easily recognised as buildings associated with the history of the University and medieval city. The common palette of materials (mainly limestone and lead) draws them together as a group and makes them stand out in the landscape when they are seen in strong sunlight.</p> |
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#### 6.1.11 Focus of the view:

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| <b>Focal Group</b>          | <p>The dip of Wytham Hill draws the eye to the pairing of the spire of St Mary's Church and the dome of the Radcliffe Camera, which both rise above the tree line and form the focus of the view. Together they represent the medieval and ecclesiastical origins of the University and its flourishing as a European centre of learning in the Age of Enlightenment.</p> <p>The Tower of Ss Mary and John's Church in front of these two and the roof and flèche of Exeter College Chapel behind them add to the gravity of this focal group.</p> |
| <b>Other high buildings</b> | Other historic high buildings representing college chapels and churches in the City Centre and East Oxford add a spiky skyline of iconic historic buildings representing the history and tradition of individual colleges and institutions, as well as the city and University as a whole.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

#### 6.1.12 The Influence of light and the Seasons:

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| <b>Seasonal changes of vegetation colours</b> | This view's aesthetic value (and part of its historical value) is strongly influenced by the foliage in the landscape. This will change in character between the seasons, introducing a rich range of colour in the autumn in particular. |
| <b>Daylight</b>                               | The view is seen to best effect in mid-morning in spring or autumn with low angled sunlight directly behind the viewer and illuminating the limestone of the historic high buildings.                                                     |
| <b>Cars and gardens</b>                       | The presence of cars will change during the day. Car movements are likely to be least frequent outside either end of the school and work day, at which times the street should provide a more tranquil viewing location.                  |

#### 6.1.13 Detractors:

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| <b>Trees screening the view</b> | Street trees in the foreground and the trees in the valley beyond are growing to a point where the view to the historic high buildings is being lost. The pinnacles of Merton College Chapel, for example, are only just visible above the canopy, whilst Magdalen College Tower is lost on the right-hand side of this view behind a group of tall trees. |
| <b>Street clutter</b>           | Telephone poles, wires and street lamps have a minor negative impact due to their poor aesthetic value compared with the historic buildings and green landscape.                                                                                                                                                                                           |



**6.1.14 Sensitivity to Change:**

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| <b>Change in the street scene</b>                                       | <p>The clutter of the street scene provides an opportunity for enhancement of the views by tidying up the disparate lighting columns, street signage and telephone wires to enable the view to the City Centre to be better appreciated.</p> <p>Development within the street that blocks the view is the greatest threat to its continued value.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Changes in the middle ground (East Oxford and the Thames Valley)</b> | <p>Development that rises above the general roofscape level of buildings in the middle ground to an extent where it would be conspicuous in the middle ground and draw attention away from the City Centre and historic high buildings as the focus of the view would result in harm to the view. A small number of high buildings in this area already stand out, including the towers of the Church of Ss Mary and John, Cowley Road and the Church of St John the Evangelist, Iffley Road. However these are also historic buildings which have special significance for their historic interest and communal value and, as such make a positive contribution to the view. Nevertheless they do not set precedence for development of this scale.</p> <p>Foliage in the middle ground has increased considerably since the view cone was first designated in 1962 and now threatens to obscure the view. Careful management of the trees in the Cowley Marsh Recreation Ground in particular has the potential to increase the prominence of the historic high buildings in the view.</p> |
| <b>Changes in the City Centre</b>                                       | <p>The City Centre is seen as just a few of the historic high buildings rising above the trees in the valley, which therefore act as the focus to the view. New development that rises amongst the historic high building either blocking views to them or that fails to share their characteristic slender forms, distinctive materials or architectural richness of detailing would cause harm to the view.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Changes in the background to the view</b>                            | <p>The background of the view is formed by the wooded hills in the distance, which provide a strong contrast with the architecture of the City Centre. The close visual relationship of the City Centre and the rural hinterland is part of both the view's historic interest and attractive quality. Development that rose up between these two elements reducing the immediacy of the connection would result in harm to the view, unless it is seen as a continuation of the City Centre skyline and shares its characteristics.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

Figure 6.1.1



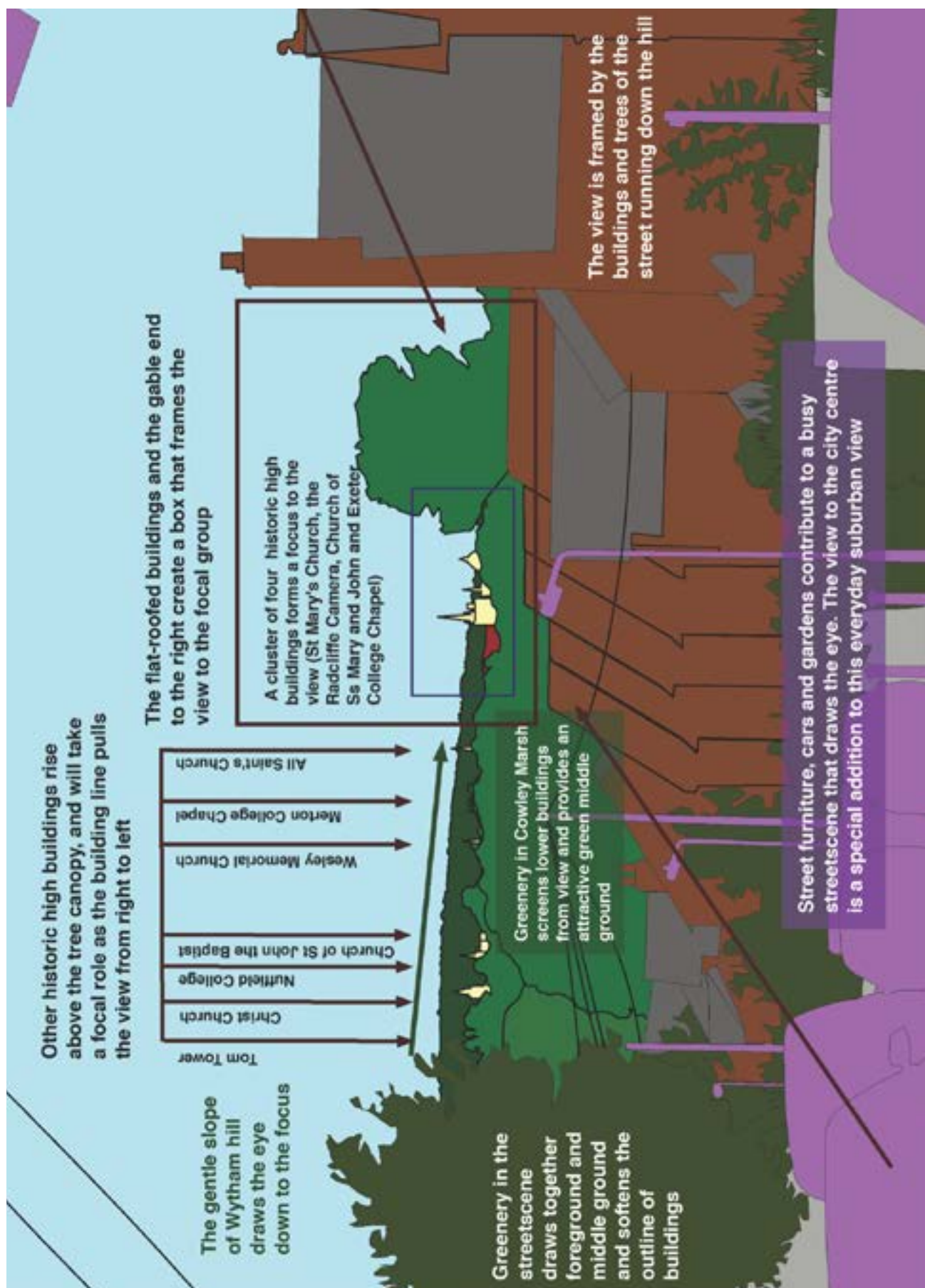
*Photograph of the view from Crescent Road*

Figure 6.1.2



*Illustration 1: Simplified render of the view from Crescent Road*

Figure 6.1.3  
Illustration 2:  
Annotated render  
of the view from  
Crescent Road



## 6.2 Rose Hill View Analysis Summary

### 6.2.1 Introduction

Rose Hill, a distinctive domed hill top, was an open and exposed vantage point until 1936 when an estate of housing was developed to house people displaced from dilapidated residential areas of St Ebbe's and St Thomas'. Other housing was built to serve the growing car factory.

Views from this area are generally less celebrated than other views of Oxford, and there are fewer records of these views in paintings or in literature. Nevertheless the layout of development, following the contours of the hillside allowed views northward from the hillside across open spaces such as the allotments next to Lenthall Road. Here the allotments provided a green foreground with the rooftops of historic houses in Iffley Village seen amongst the foliage of large gardens at the foot of the hill. Beyond, the open meadows and trees of the Thames floodplain

and river led the eye up to the city, seen as the famous spires, towers and domes rising above the mantle of mature greenery.

The view is not currently visible from the roadside or the allotments due to the high hedgerow and tree lines on the allotments' boundaries.

### 6.2.2 The Viewers

Seeing the view provides a tangible link with past viewers which contributes to its significance. It is also important to those who see it today. Understanding how the view has been appreciated in the past or made available for viewing will help to inform understanding of how change might affect its significance. This view has mainly been seen by local residents both past and present but is currently restricted by control of access to the allotments and the growth of the foliage surrounding them.



*The view from Rose Hill allotments in 1962*



### 6.2.3 Present Viewers

|                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Allotment Users | At present only users of the allotments get to see glimpses of this view through the trees to the north. However, there is potential for many others to enjoy the view through careful management of foliage. |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

### 6.2.4 Viewers in the Past

|                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Past viewers                                                  | Prior to the 20th century most viewers would have been local agricultural workers. Lenthall Road was originally an accommodation lane (a lane leading to fields outside the village).                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Recognised as a significant view in the mid-late 20th century | Development as a residential area made this view available to many more people, although this relied on the survival of a large open space on the north-facing slope of the hill for public views. Views to the north were also seen from the playing fields of Rose Hill Primary School and the recreation grounds adjacent and would have been enjoyed by many local residents. |

### 6.2.5 The Viewing Place

As well as contributing to what is seen in the view, the viewing place can add to its significance as a result of the associations, qualities or the uses it may have. Rose Hill forms part of the setting of the Iffley Village Conservation Area and has its own interest as a formally planned post-war suburb built to include a range of semi-

detached and terraced housing types, public amenities and open spaces including recreation grounds, a 'village green' at The Oval, as well as allotments. It is notable that these spaces are focused on the hill's top and northern slopes, where they provide the best opportunities to provide views towards the city's historic core and helping to unite the suburb with the city.



*The view at Lenthall Road, September 2011*

|                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Aesthetic value of the allotments and playing fields</b>     | These green spaces provide attractive green gaps within the suburb that contribute a more rural quality to nearby flats and houses.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Historic interest of Iffley village's rural setting</b>      | Lenthall Road preserved the line of a field lane that was probably created through the inclosure of Iffley's open fields in the 19th century. The lane and green space of the allotments preserves a small area of the village's hilltop fields from which there are, or could be, views down onto the buildings of the village that reflect the historic character of the village amongst its fields. |
| <b>Designed aesthetic value of the suburb and viewing place</b> | Rose Hill is a carefully designed suburb with a street pattern of radial roads leading from The Oval to concentric crescents. Within this pattern the open spaces on the northern slopes of the hill are conspicuous gaps suggesting they have been chosen intentionally because of the views towards the historic City Centre that they offer.                                                        |
| <b>Historic interest of the allotments and green spaces</b>     | The provision of allotments as part of town and country planning gained momentum during the 20th century as an opportunity to supplement the income of working families, as well as contributing to their recreation and health. The allotments form an integral part of the planned estate of Rose Hill, intended for the use of the people who would live there.                                     |

#### 6.2.6 The Landscape in the View

The view is now hidden by foliage but can be reconstructed from the photographs taken in the 1960s. The hill top provides an elevated view looking across the green space of allotments and the Thames Valley to the City

Centre's high buildings, which are set above the greenery lines of mature trees on the edge of the floodplain. The middle ground is dominated by foliage, with the position of the River Thames marked by the graceful arch of Donnington Bridge.

#### 6.2.7 Topography and layout of the view:

|                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>An elevated and formerly expansive view</b>   | This is an elevated medium distance view from a prominent hill overlooking the Thames Valley. Historically, the view would have been expansive with the spires and towers of the historic core spread across the skyline to the north.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Allotments in the foreground</b>              | The foreground of the view is dominated by the Rose Hill allotments including modern sheds (in varying states of repair) and water butts, which are part of the character of the allotments, but add little to the aesthetic value of the view.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Meadows, City Centre in the middle ground</b> | <p>The allotments are bordered by trees and hedgerows on all sides, which screen the view of the historic core of Oxford today. However, when the view was designated there would have been a low-lying foreground formed of the Thames (Isis) floodplain.</p> <p>The city core is located on a gravel river terrace between two floodplains and this means it is raised above its floodplain surroundings, giving the high buildings that indicated its presence added prominence.</p> |
| <b>Wytham hill in the background</b>             | The tops of the buildings in the historic core (the 'dreaming spires') would have risen up at the back of the middle ground, set against the mass of Wytham Hill beyond, which provides depth.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |



#### 6.2.8 The Green Characteristics:

|                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>A green and 'productive' foreground</b>                                 | The foreground of this view is heavily influenced by vegetation in and around the Rose Hill allotments – so much so that the view of the historic core is now screened. The use of the land for production of food crops provides a historical association with the agricultural past, as well as the development of the post-war housing estate.                                                  |
| <b>Greenery in the Thames Valley forming the rural setting to the city</b> | When the view was designated (in the 1960s) the green characteristics of the middle ground would have also had a substantial influence on the view – the densely vegetated Thames Valley would have provided a textured middle ground and provided a richness of colour and soft texture that would have contrasted with the limestone and angular architecture of buildings in the historic core. |
| <b>Low green background</b>                                                | The woodland covering Wytham Hill in the background would have provided a low green backdrop, above which the historic high buildings rose against the sky adding to their prominence.                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

#### 6.2.9 Architectural Characteristics:

|                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Historic skyline of high buildings</b>      | When this view was designated the key memorable features of this view were the towers, spires and domes on the skyline. Many of these buildings were designed to be seen and to embellish the skyline.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Focal group of towers, spires and domes</b> | <p>The 1960s photograph of the view indicates the key buildings that were visible in the City Centre when the view was designated. These include a definable group that represent the historic core of the University and colleges between St Aldate's and the environs of Radcliffe Square. These rise in a line above the horizon from Tom Tower on the left, becoming increasingly closely spaced towards the group surrounding Radcliffe Square and including Merton College Chapel Tower, which form a cluster on the left.</p> <p>From left to right the group includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Tom Tower</li><li>Christ Church Tower</li><li>All Saint's Church rotunda and spire (Lincoln College Library)</li><li>The pinnacles of the gate tower and chapel of Balliol College</li><li>The high roof and 'flèche' of Exeter College Chapel</li><li>Merton College 's tower</li><li>St Mary the Virgin Church spire</li><li>The Radcliffe Camera's dome</li><li>The Tower of the Five Orders</li></ul> <p>Together they represent a large part of the ecclesiastical, educational and administrative history of the University and city, spanning the later Middle Ages up to the late 19th century.</p> |

|                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Outlying historic high buildings</b>                 | <p>Other buildings act as outliers, including Nuffield College tower and the Museum of Natural History's pyramid roofed tower. These define the extent of the historic city and the enlargement of the University in the late 19th and early 20th century including developing roles in natural and social sciences.</p> <p>St George's Tower is seen further to the left (west) and well below the height of Nuffield College Tower, not breaking above the horizon of the hills behind.</p> <p>These buildings extend the skyline of high buildings to either side of the focal group and benefit from the otherwise low roofscape of the City Centre.</p> |
| <b>A common palette of materials in the City Centre</b> | The use of largely consistent materials within the city walls (i.e. limestone, lead and slate and to a lesser extent copper) unify the scene and contributed to the aesthetic value of the view.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Aesthetic contribution of high buildings</b>         | The historic high buildings share an aesthetic quality as tall narrow structures (with the notable exception of the Radcliffe Camera). However each has been carefully designed, often by architects of great skill and reputation to incorporate attractive forms, often embellished with intricate decorative detailing that is just appreciable at this distance. The curves of domes or uplifting graceful spires may have utilitarian purposes but their greatest function is to attract and please the eye.                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Rooftops of Iffley Village</b>                       | The 1962 photograph of the view records that the rooftops of houses in Iffley Village were still just visible through the trees on the northern edge of the allotments with steeply pitched roofs of red clay tile reflecting the local vernacular building tradition.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

#### 6.2.10 Infrastructure:

|                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Donnington Bridge</b> | As seen in the 1960s, the newly constructed Donnington Bridge (opened in 1962) passed across the mid-ground marking the positions of both Donnington Bridge Road and the River Thames. The delicate arch of the bridge and its parapets of fine railings helped to ensure the bridge was not a jarring element in the view. |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

#### 6.2.11 The influence of light and the Seasons:

|                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Seasons</b> | <p>This view would be strongly influenced by seasons and weather. The view contains much vegetation, which changes colour and texture through the seasons, changing the experience of the view through the year. Given the tree cover in the valley leading the eye up to the City Centre, the range of colour of leaves seen in autumn including the many ornamental trees in the village and the parkland on the city edge is likely to add considerably to the aesthetic value of the view.</p> <p>During winter months, when there are no or few leaves, there is the greatest opportunity for glimpses of the historic core, through the hedgerows and trees in the foreground and middle ground.</p> |
| <b>Weather</b> | The view is north facing and during the day the sun is often likely to be behind the viewer, helping to illuminate the limestone and detailing of the historic high buildings. However this will depend on the quality of the weather. Buildings are likely to recede in the view on more overcast days, whilst a strong contrast of bright sunlight against a sky of dark cloud can make the buildings 'jump out' in the view.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |



#### 6.2.12 Detractors:

|                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Street clutter</b> | Parked cars, modern street lights, telegraph poles and modern fencing along Lenthall Road are detractors in the view today from the assessment viewpoint.                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>The lost view!</b> | However, the biggest detractor is the fact that the view of the historic core cannot currently be seen either from the allotments or from Lenthall Road due to the growth of intervening foliage. As such it is difficult to predict the impact of change on the view that is present but unseen. |

#### 6.2.13 Sensitivity to change:

|                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Changes in the viewing place and foreground</b>       | <p>Revealing the view from the allotments both by selectively thinning trees to reveal the view whilst maintaining the green boundary to the space and by increasing public access to the allotments.</p> <p>Loss of the green and open character of the viewing place, representing a loss of the continuity this represents with the past agricultural landscape and green setting of the village and city would result in harm to the view.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Assessing the impact of change on the unseen view</b> | <p>Beyond the screen of trees it is difficult to assess how the view has changed in the past fifty years. Nevertheless, based on the characteristics of the view at the time it was designated it is possible to make some general observations about how change could affect the landscape in the view.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Change in the middle ground</b>                       | <p>When it was designated the view passed over the village buildings of Iffley to the open green floodplain of the Thames Valley up to the historic City Centre providing an attractive juxtaposition of the city and its historic green landscape setting.</p> <p>Development in the village that alters the rural, vernacular character of the roofscape including the dominance of steeply pitched tiled roofs seen at the foot of the hill would result in harm to the view.</p> <p>Development that detracted from the green and open or wooded character of the Cherwell Valley as the main area of middle ground leading up to the City Centre would result in harm to the view.</p>                                                     |
| <b>Change in the City Centre</b>                         | <p>The historic high buildings stand out individually as the prominent features on the horizon. New high buildings would be equally conspicuous and, unless they adopt the characteristic forms, materials and detailing of the historic high buildings are likely to result in a jarring impact that detracts from the value of the view as a whole.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Change in the background</b>                          | <p>The background of hills to the north west of Oxford is generally hidden behind the City Centre, with only the slopes of Wytham Hill creeping into the western edges of the view, providing framing that draws the eye down to the skyline of historic high building and revealing the rural setting to the west of the City.</p> <p>Development that creates a new background to the view, detracting from the role of the historic high buildings as the dominating feature of the horizon would result in harm to the view.</p> <p>Development that rose between the City Centre and the hills to the west of the city, creating visual separation between the city and the rural background would be regarded as harmful to the view.</p> |

Figure 6.2.1  
Photograph of the  
view from the Rose  
Hill Allotments

A rendered image  
of this view has not  
been produced due to  
the impact of foliage  
that screens the  
view of the Spires  
and Domes from the  
allotments.





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