HISTORIC URBAN CHARACTER AREA 25: WORCESTER COLLEGE AND GLOUCESTER GREEN - BEAUMONT STREET AND ST JOHN STREET

The HUCA is located within broad character Zone F: Worcester Street and Broken Hayes.

The broad character zone comprises of the north-western suburb located around the former medieval open space of Broken Hayes, the route to Walton Village along Worcester Street, the site of the 12th century Royal Beaumont Palace and former monastic Gloucester College. Now comprised of the bus station, market space and shops at Gloucester Green, early modern development on Beaumont Street and Worcester College.

Summary characteristics

- Dominant period: Early 19th century.
- Designations: One Grade I and six Grade II listed building. Central Conservation Area.
- Archaeological Interest: Potential for Late Neolithic-Early Bronze Age, Saxon and medieval remains. Possible area of 8th century activity. Site of 12th century Royal Palace and later Carmelite Friary. The projected line of the Royalist Civil War defences also cross through this area.
- Character: Three-four storey late Georgian and early Victorian Regency style townhouses and Victorian terraces.
- Spaces: Beaumont Street is wide with spacious pavements and notable views. Green space is limited to short narrow private gardens with an area of enclosed private lawn and semi-mature trees on corner of Beaumont Street and Walton Street. There is no public open space.
- Road morphology: Medieval linear route-way along Walton Street. Late Georgian-Early Victorian rectilinear grid pattern with wide principal streets and smaller lanes to the rear.
- Plot morphology: Narrow regular plots on planned early Victorian estate. Smaller later Victorian terraces in long narrow plots on Walton Street.
• The natural topography is Summertown-Radley Second Terrace at a height of around 62-64m OD.
• Survival of townscape elements:
  o Walton Street is a route-way of at least medieval date
  o ‘The Beaumont’s’ an early 19th century designed suburban estate. Design features include balconies, railings and cellar grills.
  o Re-used stone in some garden and house walls in the estate may be from medieval structures (including the former Royal Palace and Carmelite Friary).
  o A brick built structure of light industrial character survives on on Pusey Lane.

Description
This character area is comprised of a row of rendered brick Victorian terraces and a 17th century cottage on Walton Street, a row of modern flats and garages on Pusey Lane, a terrace of 19th century brick townhouses known as the Beaumont Buildings and a coherent area of early 19th century terraced townhouses built in Regency Style on Beaumont Street and St John Street.

The Regency buildings are imposing three and four storey structures with dormers, built of brick and faced with Bath stone. They front directly onto the pavement and are notable for their consistency of design, with large sash windows, cellar grates and cast iron balconies on some of the larger Beaumont Street houses.

The Beaumont Buildings are three storey brick town houses, some with polychrome design. The Pusey Street flats and two storey brick and concrete with rooms over garages accessed by period stairwells. The terraced houses on Walton Street are narrow four storey buildings with smaller windows and street front light wells enclosed by cast iron railings. A small number of utilitarian modern structures have infilled plots to the rear of St John Street and Walton Street.

Walton Street is a historic routeway from the western part of the town north to the hamlet at Walton, the remaining street pattern is 19th century in date. Most of the streets in this character area have tarmac surfaces with the exception of Pusey Lane which is cobbled. Beaumont Street and St John Street have generous pavements with York Paving. Beaumont Gardens has a narrow flagstone pavement with cellar grates. Wide streets and pavements retain notable views along Beaumont Street.

Short narrow private gardens with some more generous gardens belonging to properties fronting onto Walton Street retain a significant number of mature and semi-mature trees. An area of lawn and semi-mature trees is located on the corner of Beaumont Street and Walton Street belongs to the garden of a 17th century cottage owned by Worcester College.
Historical value- means of connecting with the past
The character area is located between the historic town and the hamlet of Walton to the north. In
the 12th century the Royal Beaumont Palace was established here by Henry 1st, denoting a period
when the town enjoyed Royal patronage as a stop of point between Windsor and the Royal hunting
lodge at Woodstock. The ‘Kings Houses’ or the Beaumont Palace is notable for being the
birthplace of Richard the Lion Heart and King John. The precinct was located on the north side of
the present Beaumont Street and comprised a hall, a great chamber, two chapels, a cloister, the
residence of the king and his retinue and the functional offices of the palace and royal court.
Although it retained its status as a royal residence in the 13th century, royal visits became
increasingly rare and the site was granted to the Carmelite White friars in 1318. At the Dissolution
the friary surrendered to the Crown and in 1541 the land was granted to Edmund Powell. Surviving
structures of the precinct at the time included the house, a tenement and garden adjoining the
gate, the church, a stable, a timber yard
and two further closes. The ruins survived
until the 18th century when they were
painted by local artist John Malchair.
Beaumont Street and St John Street were
laid out between 1822 and 1837 on land
that had been acquired by St John’s
College. The plots were sold off to
speculative developers who submitted their
plans for approval to the college ensuring
the visual conformity of the street frontage
in contrast to the rear of the properties that
demonstrate a variety of forms. The
character area provides excellent
illustration of a planned early 19th century
suburb in the Regency style.

Evidential value- potential to yield primary evidence
The character has good potential for archaeological remains relating to Bronze Age funerary
activity, Saxon settlement and the medieval Royal Palace and Carmelite friary. The Urban
Archaeological Database records seventeen archaeological events in the character. Previous
notable investigations include the excavation of two Early Bronze age barrows on the site of the
Sackler Library on Beaumont Street. Small amounts of 8th century pottery from the Sackler Site
and from the Ashmolean Museum further east may indicate that this area was an early focus of
activity before the creation of a defended burh at Oxford by the early 10th century. The extent of
the medieval Royal Beaumont Palace has not been firmly established although post-medieval maps
show the redundant Carmelite precinct and indicate that this extended from Rewley House on
Wellington Square to the north at least as far as the Oxford Playhouse on Beaumont Street to the
south. Excavations at the Sackler Library noted stone foundations and a series of medieval tree-
planting pits that probably relate to garden landscaping for the palace as. A number of burials
recorded in the vicinity of the junction of Beaumont Street and Gloucester Street indicate the
location of the Carmelite cemetery. To the north of the character area an 18th century workhouse
was located at Wellington Square and burials probably related to the workhouse have been
previously been recorded.

Aesthetic value- sensory and intellectual stimulation
This character area has strong aesthetic qualities, being comprised of notable arrangements of Bath
stone Regency town houses orientated on monumental structures located to the east and west

OXFORD HISTORIC URBAN CHARACTER ASSESSMENT
along Beaumont Street. The more modest brick and rendered terraces also make an attractive contribution to the character area. Beaumont Street was constructed in the 19th century orientated on the 18th century frontage of Worcester College, which provides the focus for views to the west. Nikolaus Pevsner described Beaumont Street as ‘the finest Street ensemble in Oxford’.

**Communal value- meaning for collective experience and memory**
The character area has communal value as an attractive residential suburb linking the city with Jericho and Walton to the North. The larger streets form a notable part of the visitor experience for those approaching the Ashmolean Museum and theatres further east.

Version: 18/2/2012