Rose Hill View Analysis Summary

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.

The view from Rose Hill allotments in 1962
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.

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.

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.

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.

Aesthetic value of the allotments and playing fields
These green spaces provide attractive green gaps within the suburb that contribute a more rural quality to nearby flats and houses.

Historic interest of Iffley village’s rural Lenthall Road
Lenthall Road preserved the line of a field lane that was probably created through the inclosure of Iffley’s open fields in the 19th
setting

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.

Designed aesthetic value of the suburb and viewing place

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.

Historic interest of the allotments and green spaces

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.

The view at Lenthall Road, September 2011
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.

Topography and layout of the view:

An elevated and formerly expansive view
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.

Allotments in the foreground
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.

Meadows, City Centre in the middle ground
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.

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.

Wytham hill in the background
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.

The Green Characteristics:

A green and ‘productive’ foreground
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.

Greenery in the Thames Valley forming the rural
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...
**setting to the city** 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.

**Low green background** 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.

**Architectural Characteristics:**

**Historic skyline of high buildings** 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.

**Focal group of towers, spires and domes** 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.

From left to right the group includes:

- Tom Tower
- Christ Church Tower
- All Saint’s Church rotunda and spire (Lincoln College Library)
- The pinnacles of the gate tower and chapel of Balliol College
- The high roof and ‘flèche’ of Exeter College Chapel
- Merton College ’s tower
- St Mary the Virgin Church spire
- The Radcliffe Camera’s dome
- The Tower of the Five Orders

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.

Outlying historic high buildings

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.

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.

These buildings extend the skyline of high buildings to either side of the focal group and benefit from the otherwise low rooftscape of the City Centre.

A common palette of materials in the City Centre

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.

Aesthetic contribution of high buildings

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.

Rooftops of Iffley Village

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.

Infrastructure:

Donnington Bridge

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.
The influence of light and the Seasons:

**Seasons**

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.

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.

**Weather**

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.

Detractors:

**Street clutter**

Parked cars, modern street lights, telegraph poles and modern fencing along Lenthal Road are detractors in the view today from the assessment viewpoint.

**The lost view!**

However, the biggest detractor is the fact that the view of the historic core cannot currently be seen either from the allotments or from Lenthal 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.

Sensitivity to change:

**Changes in the viewing place and foreground**

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.

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.
### Assessing the impact of change on the unseen view

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.

### Change in the middle ground

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.

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.

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.

### Change in the City Centre

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.

### Change in the background

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.

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.

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.
An example of the Rose Hill Allotments View in October 2010.

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.