

Draft Central Oxford (City and University) Conservation Area Appraisal

8.0 Design Guidance

Contents:

- 8.1 Effects of designation
- 8.2 Making an application
- 8.3 Spirit of place: understanding site and context
- 8.4 Architectural style and authenticity
- 8.5 Plot boundaries
- 8.6 Addressing the street
- 8.7 Height and roofscape
- 8.8 Public and green space
- 8.9 Sustainability and climate change
- 8.10 Materials
- 8.11 Painting
- 8.12 Basements, foundations and services
- 8.13 Rear extensions and backland development
- 8.14 Shopfronts
- 8.15 Lighting

8.1 Purpose and scope of the design advice

This chapter provides advice to applicants, designers and owners on how the design of new development and alterations to existing buildings might be approached within the conservation area.

There is a presumption in favour of high-quality design and materials within the Central Conservation Area, as befits the international significance of the city centre and its buildings. The Council will seek to improve the appearance of structures and spaces through the planning process, requiring justification when it is claimed that this cannot be achieved. Improving the appearance and experience of the area benefits all users, bringing greater economic benefits as well as recognising the high value and importance of providing a place to be proud of.

The advice applies to proposals inside the conservation area and those outside that might affect the area's setting either because of their height, or their proximity to the boundary, or other factors.

Good design is recognised in the Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the National Design Guide as fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve, and is a core objective of the Council's Local Plan. Good design creates better places in which to live and work, affects health and well-being and promotes community cohesion.

The purpose of this Design Advice is to help applicants apply the Government's national objectives and the City Council's design policies to the specific context of the conservation area. The international significance of the conservation area demands proposals of an exceptional standard that emerge from a deep understanding of the character, history and significance of the place. Because of this, generic solutions are unlikely to be successful. However, by properly applying both an understanding of the site and the following Design Advice, development is possible that can enrich the character and appearance of the conservation area.

8.2 Making an application

Advice

Applicants should:

- Seek pre-application advice where applications are located within the conservation area or within its setting, particularly if they may have a harmful impact on the significance of the conservation area, listed buildings, archaeology or historic landscapes.
- Where the nature or scale of the proposals require, engage with the Council's Vu.City 3D model through the pre-application and planning application process by providing a 3D model of the proposal and undertaking reviews with the Council Planning Service.
- Comply with Oxford City Council's planning validation requirements.
- Follow the Oxford Local Plan Design Checklist in Appendix 6.
- Submit a Heritage Statement incorporating an Impact Assessment with any application.
- Apply the Oxford High Buildings Technical Advice Note as necessary.

Reason

The conservation area is a highly complex and internationally significant historic environment. Applicants will need to be able to demonstrate that this context has been comprehensively understood and applied to proposals in the accompanying Design and Access Statement and a Heritage Statement (which could be combined). Fully complying with the council's validation requirements and its design checklist can help to demonstrate how proposals are consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework. This will help speed up the application process.

Heritage Statement requirements. The Heritage Statement should not rely solely on this appraisal for research (see [section 8.2 below](#)). It should explain how the site contributes to the significance of the conservation area as it is defined in the appraisal - as well as other heritage assets such as listed buildings and registered parks and gardens.

It should include an impact assessment that demonstrates how the proposals conserve or enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area by reference to the significance themes in [chapter 6](#) and the analysis of the relevant character zone assessments.

The impact assessment must also assess the effect of the proposals on all other heritage assets. Where harm is found, the Heritage Statement must outline appropriate mitigation measures and any public benefits to justify remaining harm.

Views analysis. This Appraisal identifies typical types of view that characterise the experience of the conservation area and reveal its unique history, character and sense of place. It does not identify

specific views because the conservation area townscape is so rich and complex that its visual experience cannot be reduced to a selection of individual viewing points.

For this reason, whilst view points may be useful they are unlikely to be sufficient to assess the impact on setting and surroundings.

Where views analysis is undertaken, view positions should be agreed with the City Council as part of the pre-application process.

High buildings. Proposals for taller buildings and structures that might break the skyline, whether inside the conservation area or not, could have a significant impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area and the settings of listed buildings and other heritage assets. Proposals for such development should be developed in accordance with the methodology and guidance set out in the Oxford High Buildings Technical Advice Note, as well as section 8.7 below.

Pre-application advice. Seek pre-application advice from the Planning Department. This may help you to prepare proposals that are more likely to be supported, saving wasted time and cost.

8.3 Spirit of place: understanding site and context

Advice

Successful proposals will:

- emerge from a comprehensive understanding of the history of the proposal site and the nature of its context.
- reflect and demonstrate a strong sense of place.
- understand whether a site is suitable for restrained architecture or a landmark.
- provide this analysis and explanation in pre-application and application documentation, such as Heritage Statements and Design and Access Statements.

Reason

To be successful in an historic environment as complex and significant as the centre of Oxford, the nature and design of proposals will need to exhibit a deep understanding of the context in which they sit. Successful proposals will have a strong sense - or spirit - of place. Spirit of place is the unique, distinctive and cherished aspects of a place derived from the history and character of both the site and its context and setting. Spirit of place is not just the physical appearance of a location, but how a place engages with all of the senses. To understand this, it may be necessary to look beyond the immediate context and consider the relationship between the site and the wider city.

The Design Checklist appended to the Oxford Local Plan should be used to help answer these questions, as part of a comprehensive approach to design development.

One important conclusion to determine from analysis of the history and character of the site and its context is whether a site is suited to a landmark building or to more reticent architecture that defers to its neighbours. Oxford city centre contains exceptional historic buildings, but its character and appearance is a subtle balance between these landmarks and 'good ordinary', for example the combination and juxtaposition of the colleges and University buildings on the one hand, and more modest houses and shops on the other. In this context, not every site is appropriate for a landmark.

8.4 Architectural style and authenticity

Advice

- Successful design is not a matter of style.
- Successful design will authentically express its purpose and location.

Reason

Good design is not the same as architectural style. Therefore no one architectural style is more likely to be successful in the conservation area than another. Nevertheless, Oxford has a strong and recognisable building tradition, one that has long been associated with the use of limestone and the Gothic language, creating a townscape of warm, matt tones, deep shadow-casting reveals, careful and delightful details and an animated roofscape.

As the many fine Classical buildings and the best of postwar architecture illustrate, different architectural styles can work successfully within this earlier tradition if they:

- Intelligently apply a thorough understanding of site and context, as explained in 1.3 above:
- understand the 'grain' of the townscape, and when to defer and when to assert
- respect historic building footprints and organisation
- respect the scale of neighbouring buildings
- treat the roofscape as importantly as any facade
- use appropriate materials and high-quality detailing
- use high quality building methods
- authentically express their function

The following sections provide more advice on these elements.

8.5 Plot boundaries

Advice

- Development should respect and reflect historic plot divisions in elevation, plan and roofscape.
- Where opportunities arise, redevelopment should reinstate the pattern of historic plot boundaries where these have been lost or merged.
- Historic boundary walls, railings and other structures should be conserved.

Reason

Analysis of townscape and significance, supported by consultation, identified the importance of plot size and shape in defining the character and appearance of the conservation area. These historic plot boundaries reveal historic land uses and organisation. They are fundamental to generating the character of streets and sites and make a major contribution to the architectural composition of streets by determining the width of elevations. In the historic core, long narrow plots date back to the Saxon Burh and medieval town and are hugely historically significant. They were combined to create colleges and other significant institutional buildings. Outside the core, boundaries are often larger and relate to, for example, historic landownership or field boundaries.

As they are significant, these boundaries should be expressed in the new development. This includes rear boundaries, such as walls.

Where historic boundaries have been combined in the twentieth century the opportunity should be taken to reinstate them when such sites are redeveloped. Limiting such reinstatement to the front elevations is likely to be superficial and unconvincing if it is not also extended to the plan, massing and roof arrangements of the building and the organisation of the site. This might be an opportunity to introduce or improve foot and cycle routes across sites, in order to encourage walking and cycling.

8.6 Addressing the street

Advice

Street frontages should:

- include activity at street level
- be designed with care and attention to detail regardless of whether they are the primary or secondary facades of the building
- have a building line that follows the prevailing historic character
- retain historic gaps between and under buildings and restore them where they have been lost
- retain historic boundaries; where these have been lost it is desirable to restore them.

Reason

The relationship of buildings to streets makes a strong contribution to the distinctive character of the conservation area, and to the way in which this changes from one part of the conservation area to another. In the medieval and Saxon streets, buildings are built up tight against the pavement line. This differentiates them from areas developed since the nineteenth century, where front areas or gardens are more common. These characteristics should be conserved, including historic boundary structures such as railings. The same characteristics should be incorporated into new development. Further, active frontages in new development are encouraged because these are historically characteristic of the conservation area.

Gaps in street frontages are often historic access to yards, gardens or other historic backland use. These are shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1876. Where these survive they should be retained.

College perimeters are a highly distinctive part of the character and appearance of the conservation area. By design, the historic college precincts have a perimeter with few openings and little activity.

Development within gardens and grounds: proposals for historic college sites should respond very carefully to the characteristic perimeter treatment of these precincts. Walls and railings provide glimpses of gardens and create openings in the skyline that are highly characteristic of the distinctive sense of place and historic land use in central Oxford. These gaps in building frontages and the sense of green spaces beyond should continue to be legible (see also [section 8.8 below](#)).

Conversion of residential, retail and commercial buildings: to provide additional accommodation, colleges convert buildings. These may adjoin historic college precincts, enabling direct access from the rear into college, for better security and collegiate interaction, but at the expense of traditional street activity that is part of the character of the conservation area. Therefore, the City Council encourages active use of building frontages in these circumstances, such as continued use of historic front doors and shop units.

Development on other sites: accommodation and other development on satellite sites such as playing fields should be designed to address the street in a positive manner rather than face predominantly inwards behind a fence or wall, because the concept of a traditional college perimeter is not appropriate to the more suburban or open character and appearance of these locations, outside the historic core.

8.7 Height and roofscape

Advice

In order to conserve and where possible enhance the internationally famous roofscape and skyline of the city centre:

- all new or altered roofs should make a positive contribution to the roofscape and skyline by creating animation and delight
- large or unbroken areas of flat roof are not considered appropriate
- plant should be fully integrated in roof design and screened, or located elsewhere
- the appropriate height for new development should be informed by the prevailing context and a full understanding of the impact on views, roofscape and Oxford's precious skyline
The City Council will strongly encourage the use of VuCity to assist with this
- the process, visual tests and guidelines of the Oxford High Buildings Technical Advice Note should be applied where appropriate
- in exceptional circumstances it might be acceptable for elements to break the existing skyline; the location for these must be carefully chosen, and the proposed design must be of the very highest architectural quality corresponding to the significance of the skyline and the historic structures that form it
- Where possible and appropriate, new or altered roofs should be designed to prevent additional water run-off through the use of innovative green and/or blue roofs
- Applications for roof terraces and/or gardens should be accompanied by careful analysis of long distance and high level views to ensure that appreciation of the famous city skyline is not impeded.

Reason

Character and design. The highly significant and world famous skyline of the city is created by a balanced combination of spires, domes and towers emerging from a roofscape of pitched and leaded roofs, chimneys, parapets, pinnacles, party walls, turrets and other details, creating a combination of strong horizontal and vertical accents. All development proposals, whether alterations to existing buildings or new construction, should contribute positively to this roofscape through animated and

delightful design, showing as much care as the main elevations.

Flat roofs. Large, unbroken flat roofs are not part of this tradition; until the 20th century only narrow spans were technically achievable, even for large complexes.

Plant and services. Visible or poorly integrated mechanical and electrical engineering plant does not contribute to this exceptional roofscape and requires careful screening or relocation.

Higher buildings and roof extensions. There is a presumption against proposals for new buildings or roof extensions that are greater than the prevailing heights in the vicinity. Any such proposals will have to be justified by a comprehensive analysis of place and setting (see [section 8.3](#)) and by demonstrating compliance with the recommended process, the four visual tests and the design guidelines of the High Buildings Technical Advice Note.

New landmarks. The character of the roofscape and skyline of the conservation area is created by a combination of mostly average building heights and relatively few taller landmarks. It follows that not every site will be suitable for a new landmark without causing harm to the character and appearance of the conservation area. Where it can be demonstrated and agreed that a location for a higher building or landmark element will make a positive contribution to its setting and the skyline, it will only be acceptable if it is of the very highest design and that design is demonstrably consistent with the design traditions of Oxford.

8.8 Public and Green space

Advice

Creation of new publicly-accessible green space is encouraged.

The character of new public and green space should reflect and respond to local characteristics, which vary across the conservation area; this includes soft and hard landscaping, seating, use of both innovative and traditional materials, sensory features, and future maintenance.

Development on green space will be resisted where this will cause harm to the character and appearance of the conservation area and other heritage assets.

Reason

Green space makes a substantial contribution to the distinctive character and appearance of the conservation area, by its extent, history, ecology and design. Much of this is visible or publicly accessible, such as the University Parks and the water meadows of the flood plain.

Colleges and gardens. In the centre and east of the conservation area there is much less green space and the majority is private college land and rarely accessible. It nevertheless contributes to significance by:

- virtue of its inherent significance as historic gardens and grounds (many Registered)
- its expression of historic land use (education, recreation, produce)
- its fundamental contribution to the distinctive arrangement and character of the historic college precincts.

This is experienced in the streets of the conservation area as gaps in building frontages that are filled with boundary walls and allow more openness to the sky, by glimpses of gardens through gates and by overhanging trees and planting.

For all of these reasons, development on these green space may affect the character and appearance of the conservation area whether it is visible or not.

New green space. Green space is good for biodiversity, for well-being and for the climate. New publicly accessible green space is therefore encouraged, especially in the centre and east of the conservation area where there is little. The design of such space should draw on the long tradition of gardens and parks in the city centre to avoid a generic appearance that does not reflect the character and appearance of the conservation area.

New public space: the medieval street pattern is easily navigable but contains few areas of public space. New publicly accessible space is encouraged where it would be an enhancement of existing facilities or the creation of new ones. It should be easily accessible for all users and encourage a variety of uses, including after-dark entertainment spaces. New public space should be carefully designed to sit comfortably with existing historic structures and streets, using a variety of hard and soft landscaping techniques and materials.

8.9 Sustainability and Climate Change

Advice

We are facing a climate emergency and must take actions to help address the challenges this poses through mitigation and adaptation. For example Oxford has a particular vulnerability to flooding which must be considered. Proposals in Oxford must also pay careful consideration to the issue of carbon emissions.

Historic buildings are inherently sustainable. The inherent embodied energy (i.e. the energy expended and encapsulated within the fabric of a building in its construction) of historic buildings means that their retention and care is consistent with modern concepts of sustainability and with the ambitions of reducing carbon emissions.

There are a range of measures that can be taken to improve the performance of existing buildings and even more options are available when designing new buildings and spaces. In a conservation area there are some additional considerations to be had around the choice between those options including the impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area.

As a broad principle, historic features should be retained wherever possible, this does not mean that buildings cannot be made more energy efficient however, for example historic window frames and glass should be retained because they contribute strongly to the character and appearance of the conservation area and historic buildings, but options such as careful maintenance, draft proofing or secondary glazing can offer real but sensitive benefits.

Solar panels can be appropriate in the conservation area where it can be demonstrated that their appearance and attachment will not cause harm to significance of historic buildings and the character and appearance of the conservation area.

Proposals to improve the thermal efficiency of buildings must take into consideration the performance of historic fabric and construction techniques, including breathability.

Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging:

The City Council recognises the potential of EV uptake to address air quality in the conservation area.

The historic environment should not, in and of itself, be a barrier to the installation of charge-points and the City Council strongly encourages early pre-application discussions to help identify any potential issues and opportunities. There may still be a limited number of cases where proposals would cause unavoidable and unacceptable harm.

For listed buildings and scheduled ancient monuments additional permissions are likely to be required (Listed Building Consent and Scheduled Monument Consent, respectively).

In response to the needs of local authorities, the market is developing more varied and elegant designs, some specifically tailored to be more sensitive in historic environments. Low-profile charge points that are incorporated into lamp columns or bollards are more likely to be acceptable.

The following should be considered when assessing the impact of EV charging points in the conservation area:

- Proposals must be informed by an understanding of the character and appearance of the site and its setting
- The size of the infrastructure should be kept to a minimum and should not add clutter to the local environment either physically or visually
- The colours should be sensitive to the immediate setting
- Avoid siting a charge point close to trees to prevent risk of damage to the canopy and tree roots

Hub locations could provide opportunities to create a new urban space with multi-functions. This could add to the location's attractiveness for users to wait while charging their vehicle. Seating in such locations would also be beneficial for disabled users of hubs and should be a consideration. The location of the charge point should have sufficient room to take account of tree roots and to avoid causing an obstruction to pedestrians.

Please refer to the Heritage and Sustainability Guidance for Householders TAN and emerging Climate Change and the Historic Environment TAN for more detailed advice.

The following is an example of a pathway to climate adaptation and carbon reduction:

1. Adapt to our changing climate:

For example:

- Changes to gutters and downpipes to cope with more intense rainfall
- Better shading, to prevent overheating during heatwaves

2. Reduce carbon emissions:

Typically, 80% of a home's carbon emissions are generated by heating rooms and water. Tackle this by (and in this suggested order):

- reducing the need: better controls, fewer drafts, improved insulation, window improvements
- Switching from carbon emitting gas to renewable electricity, and generating your own energy.

3. Take a whole building approach:

- understand how your building 'works', and target improvements to maximise gains and minimise harm to its heritage importance ('significance') otherwise you may not be granted consent, and you might unintentionally create new problems, such as damp.

Reason

In 2019 Oxford City Council declared a climate emergency. This followed in the footsteps of the UK government's signature of the Paris Agreement, committing the country to reducing its carbon emissions to zero by 2050.

Buildings – including historic buildings and Conservation Areas – have a significant part to play in these efforts. The Heritage and Sustainability Guidance for Householders TAN and emerging Climate Change and the Historic Environment sets out how building and home owners can take practical steps to reduce carbon emissions and adapt buildings for changing weather, without harming those characteristics that make the historic environments special and significant places.

Every case will be unique and where permission or consent is required proposals will be considered on their own merits, but actions may include:

- More efficient heating and lighting controls
- Additional internal insulation, and in some circumstances external wall insulation
- Window improvements, and in some circumstances, replacements
- Use of air source heat pumps
- Installation of solar panels where circumstances allow

Works are also needed to adapt buildings to our changing climate, such as more intense rainfall and heatwaves.

The Council's 2050 Vision is for new and existing homes to be carbon neutral or net positive, with solar panels, green roofs, high-quality insulation and battery power storage required for new-builds and retrofitted on existing homes.

In implementing this objective, the City Council will take account of the character and appearance of the conservation area and the significance of historic buildings and landscapes. There are good case studies to show how for example solar panels or better insulation can be incorporated successfully, but individual proposals are likely to require bespoke solutions supported by assessments of the impact on historic fabric, architectural appearance and setting and views.

8.10 Materials

Advice

The character and appearance of the conservation area is shaped by a range of long-established materials, originally sourced locally.

The use of other materials will require strong justification.

Hard, reflective materials such as glass, metal or ceramics are not part of the historic character and appearance of the conservation area.

The highest quality workmanship and careful detailing are central to the architectural qualities of the conservation area and are expected in all development and alterations.

Depth in the use of the materials, creating shadow and articulation, is an important architectural characteristic of the conservation area and is strongly encouraged.

Consideration must be given to how materials will change over time, both in appearance and performance.

Reason

The choice and use of materials is central to successful design in the conservation area.

Historically, a limited range of materials was employed in the conservation area, frequently from local sources. They therefore express a specific sense of place by the direct link to the geology on which Oxford is built. Individually and in combination these are significant and contribute substantially to the character and appearance of the area.

Oolitic limestone is the most famous and is used as ashlar and rubble. Because good quality stone from the local quarries at Headington and Wheatley is worked out, limestone may now be sourced elsewhere. Bath stone is considered a good match in many circumstances. However, it is always necessary to carefully match stone to adjoining walling, which may vary considerably because of the employment of different stones over the centuries.

Other types of stone have proved less successful, for example because their tone does not complement local materials or because of the chemical reaction with oolitic limestone. The merits of other stones must therefore be carefully assessed against their context. Importantly, this must take into account how the stone will weather, both in terms of how its appearance might change over time, how quickly it will deteriorate or fail, and how it may interact chemically with any existing adjoining stone.

Brick has been used in the conservation area for hundreds of years. Until the middle of the 19th century, it was handmade from locally dug clay, creating a texture and warm tone. From the 19th century onwards, modern manufacturing permitted outstanding new effects, with multiple colours and details. Keble College is the most celebrated example of this. Subject to analysis of the site and its context, new brick could be employed but it must always to be a very high standard of material quality and detailing.

Concrete. Concrete has been used successfully in the conservation area when it is employed with a tone, texture, level of detail and articulation that is consistent with the architectural traditions of

central Oxford.

Glass, metal, ceramics. Aside from 19th century retail architecture, there is no tradition for the use of reflective materials for elevations. Therefore, glass facades and reflective metal panelling are not consistent with the character and appearance of the conservation area.

Other materials may be considered. Applicants will need to comprehensively and convincingly explain why the proposed materials and the way they are to be used would preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area where development is proposed, taking into account impacts on setting and wider context.

Detailing and workmanship. Attention to detail and the highest standards of workmanship characterise much of the architecture in the conservation area. In particular, the conservation area is distinguished by the exceptional quality of masonry and the City Council will expect stonework, brickwork and concrete to be detailed and executed to the highest standards, consistent with the exceptional significance and the celebrated architectural and craft traditions of the city centre.

Depth of facades. Deep reveals for windows and doors, together with projections such as buttresses and cornices, are a characteristic element of the distinctive tradition of architecture in Oxford. By casting deep shadows, they create architectural rhythm and a sense of depth and solidity. These characteristics should be applied to the handling and modelling of materials in new development. Thinly moulded and poorly articulated façades are unlikely to be successful in this architectural and townscape context.

8.11 Painting

Advice

Where new rendered elevations or a change in the colour of existing painted elevations are proposed, the colours must be agreed with Oxford City Council in order to conserve and where possible enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area.

The use of brilliant white or bright tones will not normally be supported because these are not historically accurate colours.

Reason

Painted render, in a coordinated range of colours, is an important component of the character and appearance of streets in the historic core, decorating historic town houses and complementing the limestone facades.

In the mid-twentieth century most of these buildings were painted in whites and greys. Beginning in the 1970s the City Council has pursued a policy of repainting these in colours carefully chosen to enhance the conservation area. Earthy tones – such as ochres, pale greens and blues, and browns have been selected to respond to the, limestone, brick, light conditions, architecture and townscape of the city centre.

With a few exceptions, buildings are not unified compositional groups such as terraces. Therefore colours have been applied in combinations to enhance the mixture of architecture and townscape: exploiting and emphasising changes in height, projection, finish and design.

Brilliant white and bright tones will be resisted unless they can be convincingly justified in the

specific context of the proposal because they are not historically appropriate - they were not achievable with the lead based paints used until the mid twentieth century – and because they look harsh against the warm earthy tones of limestone and brick. For woodwork, therefore, ivory is preferred.

In most cases limewash is not considered necessary because it requires frequent reapplication, but there may be occasions where it makes a significant contribution to the significance of specific historic buildings or is preferred as part of a fabric conservation strategy.

8.12 Basements, foundations and services

Advice

Development proposals must take account of the below ground archaeology of the conservation area and Oxford City Council's policies for managing this.

Development will not be permitted where it would have an unacceptable effect on nationally significant remains or their settings, whether scheduled or not.

Reason

The archaeology of the conservation area forms part of the City Centre Archaeological Area and is of national significance, with, for example, particularly good survival of the Saxon and medieval town and medieval and Civil War fortifications. Proposals for basements, foundations, including piling, and for buried services could have a substantial impact on these and other remains and should be discussed with the City Archaeologist at an early pre-application stage. A desk-based assessment may be required.

Development should seek to avoid harm to archaeology through design. Where the loss of significance can be justified by the merits of an application, the City Council will require developers to record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage assets to be lost (wholly or in part) in a manner proportionate to their importance and the impact, and to make this evidence (and any archive generated) publicly accessible.

8.13 Rear extensions and backland development

Advice

Proposals for rear extensions or development on plots behind existing buildings will only be supported where:

- they would not require the destruction or obscuring of significant fabric or evidence of historic uses and activity.
- the footprint, height and architectural character are demonstrably subordinate to the building on the front of the plot (so that its roof and roof form remains clearly visible) and allow views from public areas of the rear of the host.
- historic plot shapes, divisions and boundaries are maintained, and are clearly legible in the plan, elevation and massing of the proposals.
- architecturally, the proposals respond thoughtfully to a thorough understanding of the character and significance of the host buildings and context, and use high quality materials.
- any necessary access via the main frontage can be incorporated without harming the significance of historic elevations and shop frontages.
- proposals for bin and bike storage are incorporated within the development site.

Reason

Rear elevations may have considerable significance regardless of any formal architectural qualities. They often reveal evidence of the history and evolution of the building that can be absent from the main frontage where it has been refaced. They can also illustrate important functional aspects of historic buildings and plots, such as stairs, cooking and sanitary facilities, workshops and other ancillary facilities.

For these reasons, it is important that the significant aspects of rear elevations and roofs are retained and remain visible in proposals for rear extensions

Rear plots make an important contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. They provide the setting and ancillary space to the frontage building and afford views of it. They indicate historic land divisions, and frequently demonstrate the narrow historic plots that are characteristic of the area. They provide evidence for the history of ancillary uses and businesses in the conservation area, and sometimes include freestanding buildings. Existing buildings on rear plots may contribute positively to the character and appearance of the backland areas of the conservation area, because of historic uses or design.

In considering if and how to develop on plots behind buildings, there is not one standard solution. It is necessary to comprehensively understand the particular character and significance of these areas in order to develop and justify proposals that avoid harm to the conservation area and listed buildings (see section 8.3).

8.14 Shopfronts

Advice

Proposals for new or replacement shopfronts should:

- retain and refurbish historic elements and fabric where this survives
- use durable, high quality materials. Timber is historically appropriate in most cases; alternative materials will be considered subject to the quality of the proposed design.
- avoid entirely frameless designs
- include retractable awnings rather than Dutch blind canopies
- contain fascia signage within the historic fascia zone of shopfronts, and it should not be boxed out
- locate projecting/hanging signs within the fascia zone (it will be resisted on the elevation above)
- incorporate illuminated signage (fascia or projecting) only if by trough or tube lights, or with backlit or halo lit lettering
- employ open grille shutters unless, in exceptional circumstances, it can be demonstrated that a specific security risk requires solid security shutters
- integrate shutter guide rails carefully into the shop surround
- locate roller shutter housings discretely within the framework of the shopfront

Reason

Historic shop fronts and elements. Oxford was established as a trading centre a thousand years ago and shops have been an integral part of the character and appearance of the conservation area for centuries. Many historic buildings were built or used as shops, though there are few complete or largely complete shop frontages and interiors. Therefore any surviving historic shop elements are considered significant. These elements illustrate the historic function of the building, how retail and shop designed has evolved over time and are often attractive and carefully considered pieces of design in their own right.

For this reason proposals to remove such features will not be supported if they are capable of repair. These include historic fascias, pilasters, cornices, consoles, awning boxes and stall risers.

New shop fronts. Choice of design and materials for new shop fronts will need to be justified by analysis of the history of the site and its context. Large areas of glazing are more likely to be acceptable if they are composed in a framework that responds to the architecture of the building above and / or neighbouring buildings if these are historically and architecturally relevant.

Signage. Shops signage – both on the fascia and projecting – has been a characterful component of Oxford's shopping streets for hundreds of years. The City Council's Shopfront and Signage Technical Advice Note advises recommends retaining the traditional elements of the shopfront, returning signage to the traditional fascia zone, removing extraneous signage above and beyond the fascia zone and as a result reducing visual clutter and improving the appearance of the individual buildings and area as a whole.

Security shutters. The appearance of security shutters can create a blank and hostile appearance which is harmful to the character and appearance of the conservation area, particularly out of shopping hours. The City Council therefore views all applications for replacement or new security shutters as an opportunity to enhance the appearance of the conservation area. The ideal is for no

shutters within the conservation area. Where these can be justified, they should be open mesh or 'brick bond' roller shutters, with or without a solid lower panel. The existence of similar or inappropriate shutters at or near the application site will not be accepted as justification for the approval of similarly inappropriate shutters.

8.15 Lighting

Advice

Applications for lighting within the conservation area should:

- Include a lighting assessment that takes into account the historic environment, existing lighting facilities and fixtures, and propose alternatives which not only provide more appropriate light levels (e.g. for security), but also enhance the appearance of the area.

The City Council will:

- Consider an holistic, collaborative approach to lighting within the city centre to balance light and dark to meet both a functional and aesthetic need
- Encourage lighting to be used architecturally to enhance places and spaces, highlight key landmarks, and provide conditions to support night-time events
- Use conditions to control lighting colour temperature, hours of illumination, fittings and fixtures.

Landowners and developers are encouraged to:

- Take opportunities to upgrade poorly functioning light sources with lower energy LEDs with appropriate colour temperatures for the location.

There is a growing interest in adding architectural lighting with the conservation area. Excessive, poorly designed lighting can have a harmful impact on the character of the conservation area during the day and night. Within conservation areas, this can harm the visual appreciation of the historic environment, particularly where seemingly small changes can cause cumulative erosion of the character.

Poor lighting can obliterate striking architectural details and the colour of building materials. Bright white LEDs are more energy efficient than older low-pressure sodium orange street lights, but they have a harsh appearance which drains an area of colour and vibrancy. Strings of lights across wide streets can de-value their appearance while providing minimal lighting, whereas their use in narrow and vibrant streets can enhance the experience for users.

Good lighting positively contributes to a human scale after dark, improving safety by providing legibility through vertical surfaces. Well-designed, the overall amount of light can be reduced, thereby improving energy use and amenity, by using it strategically where needed rather than flooding areas which would not benefit from it. The flexible use of lighting can enhance an area's character by changing it as needed, utilising existing historic light fittings, reducing the impact on amenity and ecology.

Safe and secure cycling and walking can be achieved after dark with a coordinated approach to lighting throughout the city centre. This would involve working with landowners, applicants, and the

County Council's highways department to ensure that lighting is functional yet appropriate for its historic setting.

DRAFT