

UNIVERSITY PARKS,  
OXFORD  
CONSERVATION  
MANAGEMENT  
PLAN (VOL. I)  
MARCH 2023



UNIVERSITY OF  
OXFORD



## Hettie Dix

On behalf of Purcell ©  
104 Gloucester Green, Oxford OX1 2BU  
hettie.dix@purcelluk.com  
www.purcelluk.com

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# UNIVERSITY PARKS, OXFORD: CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLAN (VOL. I)

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# SECTION 1.0

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 PURPOSE OF THE CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

This Conservation Management Plan (CMP) has been prepared on behalf of the University of Oxford for the University Parks. Its principal aim is to provide a clearer understanding of the site's heritage and provide the framework within which its future can be successfully managed whilst respecting, protecting and enhancing what makes the Parks significant. The CMP concerns all aspects of the Parks, including built heritage and arboriculture, but has a particular focus on the site's archaeological features.

#### Key Aims of the CMP:

- To understand the component attributes which comprise the Parks.
- To set out the Parks' history.
- To identify and evaluate the Parks' significance.
- To detail the statutory designations which protect the historic environment in and around the Parks.
- To recognise the issues and opportunities facing the Parks both now and in the future.
- To create a framework of guidance, recommendations and strategies that will aid decision making and ensure the Parks' significance is respected and enhanced.
- To incorporate and reflect the priorities of the many different stakeholders who engage with the Parks and whose concern is its protection.
- To provide a record of the site as of 2022.

### 1.2 SCOPE OF STUDY

The principal study area for the CMP is the enclosed main area of the University Parks, bound by Norham Gardens to the north, Parks Road to the west, the Science Area to the south and the River Cherwell to the east. It is acknowledged that the Registered Park and Garden designation extends to Parsons Pleasure and along Mesopotamia Walk; these areas are treated as particularly important to the immediate context of the Parks and given

coverage within the CMP as appropriate. The CMP also recognises the wider geographical setting linked with the Parks, including the Science Area, Norham Gardens and the riverscape.

The principal focus of the CMP is the archaeological discipline, with due consideration of built heritage, landscape and arboriculture where the management of these disciplines have the potential to impact archaeology.



Plan 1: Principal Study Area

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.3 SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

This CMP has been supplemented with standalone arboricultural and archaeological assessment and reporting, prepared by specialists Barton Hyett and Thames Valley Archaeological Services, respectively. The full suite of this additional information is provided in a separate volume, and has been summarised and integrated within this main CMP document to provide a holistic study of the Parks.

Additional studies which have either been undertaken as a result of stakeholder conversations during the preparation of this CMP, or which are recommended to be actioned in the near future are:

- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal
- Tree Management Strategy
- Engagement Strategy
- Access Audit

## 1.4 STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

The following teams and individuals have been consulted during the preparation of the CMP in order to incorporate their experiences, knowledge and expectations:

- Parks Curators
- University Estates team
- University Parks team
- David Radford, City Archaeologist
- Oxford City Council
- Oxford Preservation Trust
- Oxfordshire Gardens Trust

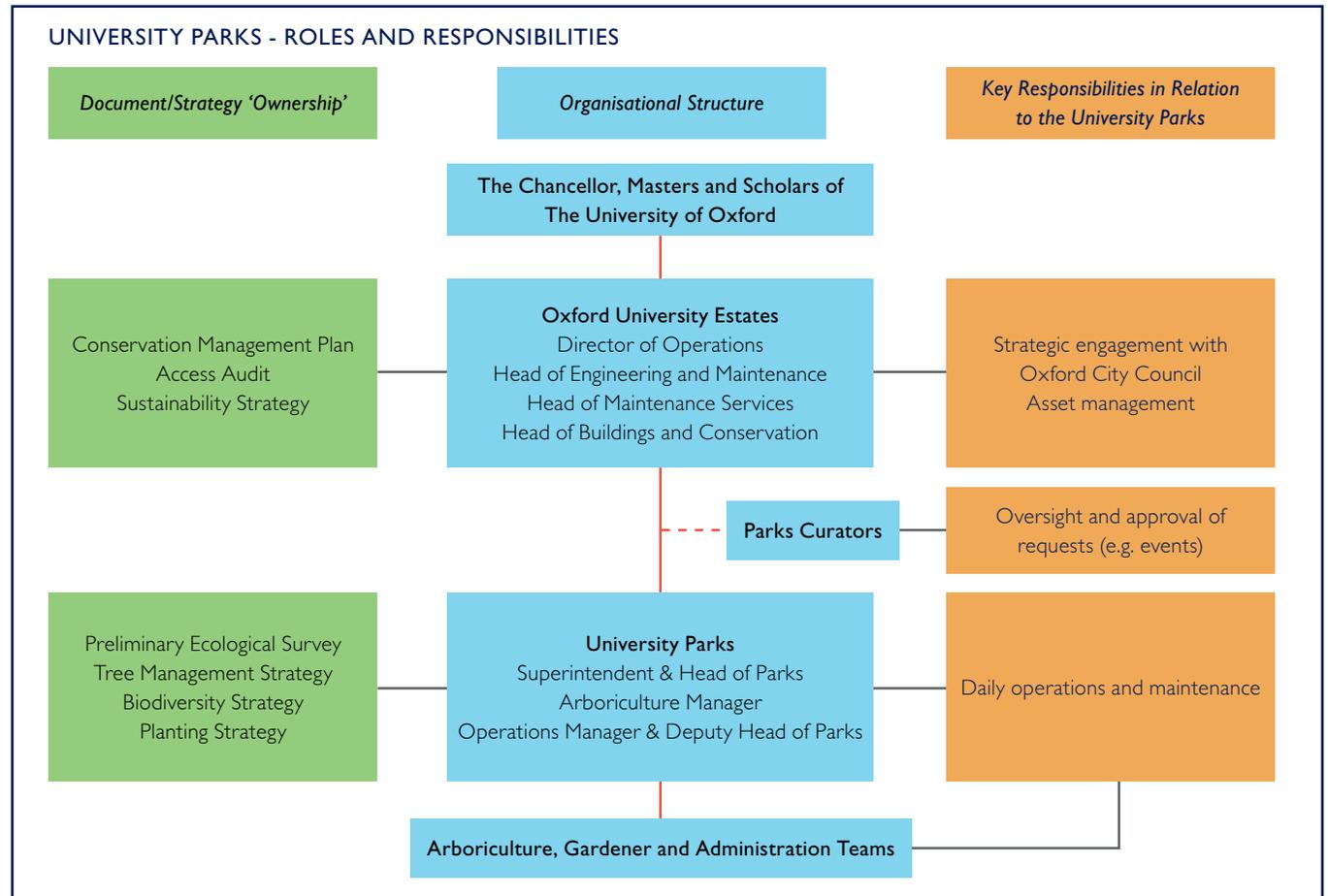
The CMP has been updated in light of the comments and insights received from these stakeholders. In particular, feedback received from interested external parties has been highly positive.

## 1.5 WHEN TO USE THIS CMP

This CMP has been commissioned by the University of Oxford's Estates Services and has a principal focus on heritage and the historic environment. It forms part of a wider series of strategies, studies and documents that focus on the specific themes and requirements that the management of the University Parks must take account of. Collectively, these form a framework to aid

decision making and are demonstrative of the different teams, disciplines and departments which must work in tandem. The CMP is primarily intended for the Estates Services but will inform the strategies developed and implemented by the Parks team.

An overview of the University's organisational structure and the key responsibilities of each management tier in relation to the University Parks is below.



## SECTION 2.0

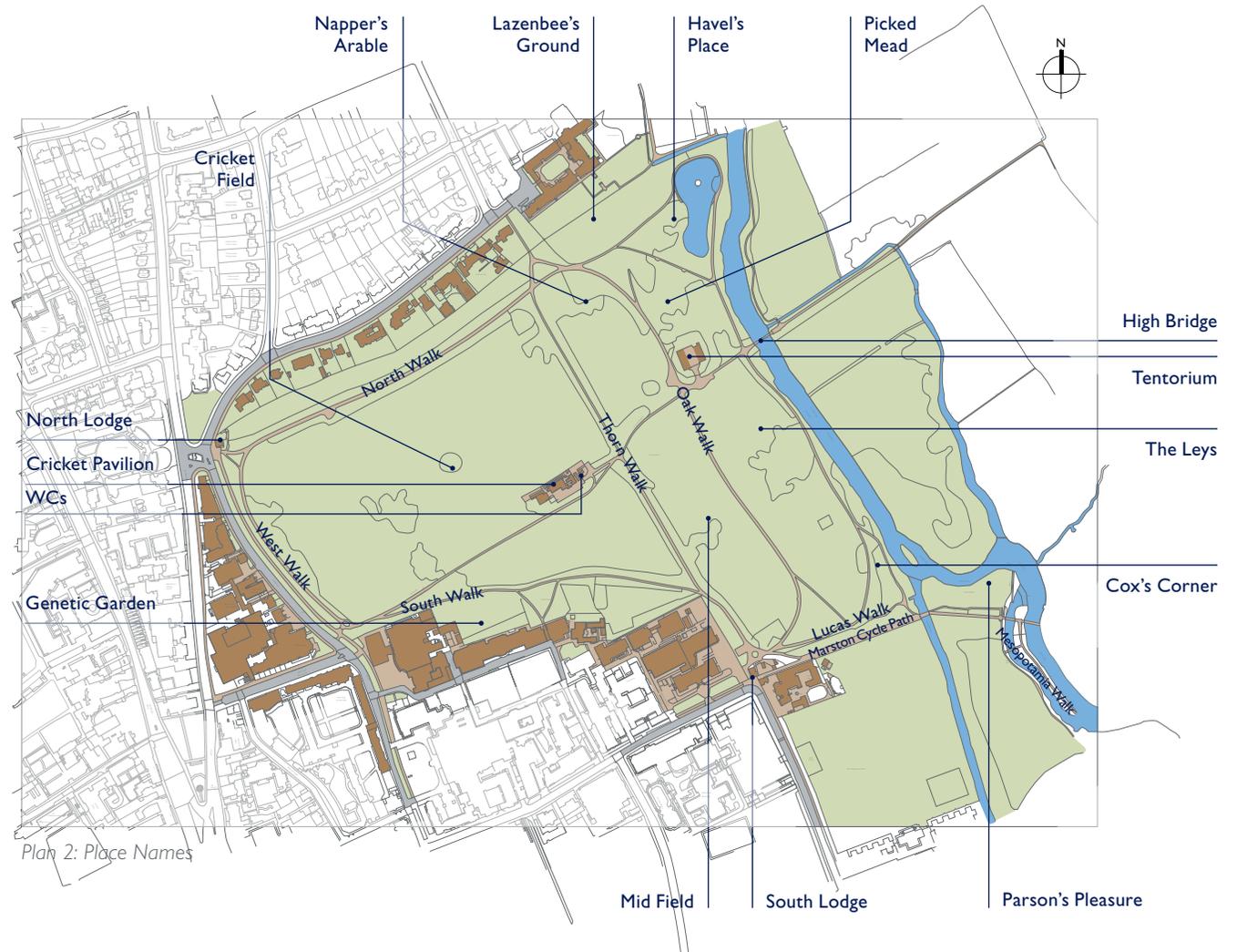
### UNDERSTANDING THE SITE

#### 2.1 SITE DESCRIPTION

The University Parks are a public open space and sports' ground. There are a series of walks around the perimeter, along the river and cutting across the Parks. Access is via various gates and High Bridge, which crosses the River Cherwell on the east side of the Parks. The north perimeter has a generous planted strip buffering the North Walk and the rear boundaries of the Norham Gardens properties. The western edge of the Parks is marked with railings, and the south edge is delineated by combination of railings and buildings. The Cricket Pavilion is located at the centre of the Parks, together with other ancillary structures and the public WCs. The Tentorium is a modern timber structure on the east side of the Parks and is the main works compound.

Parsons Pleasure is a detached enclave off the Marston cycle track. Punt rollers and a weir navigate the change in river level here. The path continues along the River Cherwell down Mesopotamia Walk towards Magdalen College.

The site's geology comprises 1st flood plain terrace (gravel) deposits at its eastern end, with 2nd Summertown-Radley terrace deposits at its west end.<sup>01</sup>



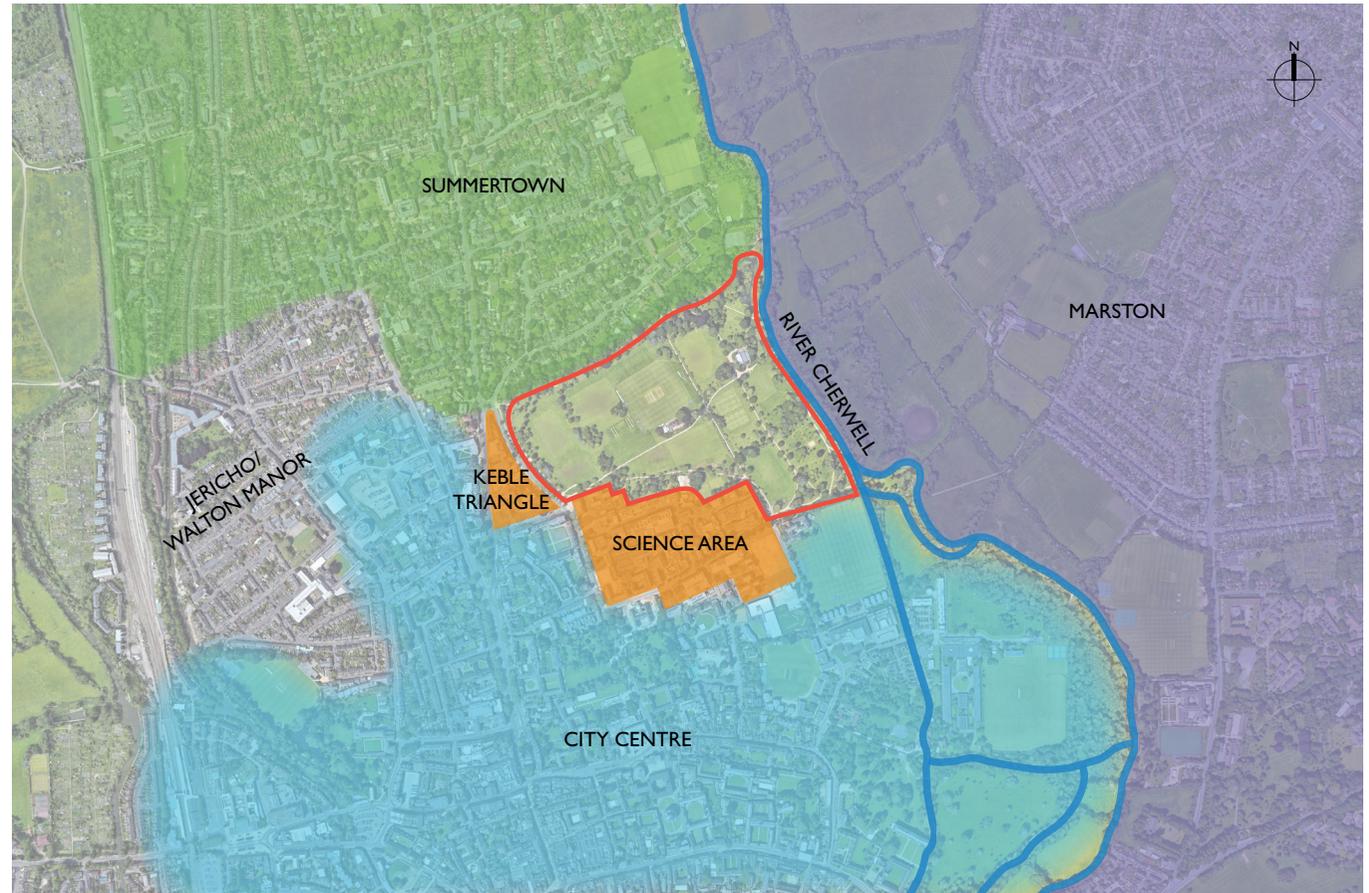
<sup>01</sup> BGS 1982, quoted in accompanying ADDBA.

# UNDERSTANDING THE SITE

## 2.2 SETTING

The University Parks are located to the north of Oxford city centre and sit at its junction with the northern suburbs. The four edges of the Parks vary greatly in character:

- To the north is Norham Gardens, a mid-19th-century suburb comprising large villas and generous grounds. Lady Margaret Hall is located at the far end, at the north corner of the Parks.
- To the west is Parks Road, with the opposite streetscape comprising the prominent departmental buildings on the Keble Triangle and the external elevation of Keble College.
- To the south is the architectural diversity of the University Science Area, which spread along South Parks Road and into the southern portion of the original University Parks.
- To the east is the River Cherwell, with footbridges and paths leading upstream towards Summertown, eastwards to Marston and southwards to the city centre.



Plan 3: Wider Setting

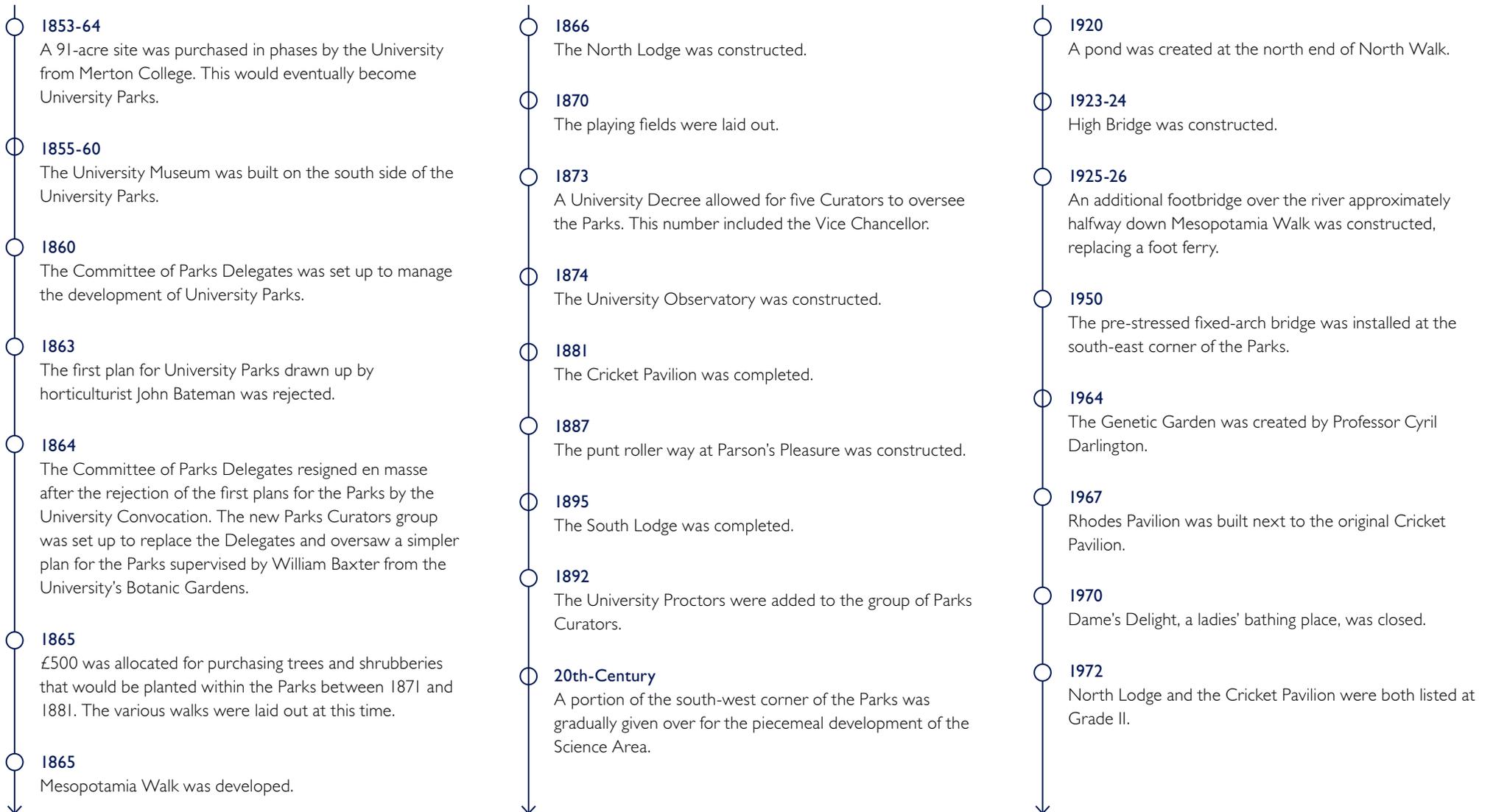
— Principal Study Area

*This plan is not to scale*

# UNDERSTANDING THE SITE

## 2.3 HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

### 2.3.1 Summary Timeline



## UNDERSTANDING THE SITE

1991

Parson's Pleasure was formally incorporated into the Parks and the men's bathing place was closed. The cycle path to Marston was opened.

1996

The north pond was altered to create its present form.

Late 1990s

The alleyway entrance to the Parks along the side of Lady Margaret Hall was repositioned.

2002

The Parks was added to the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens in England (at Grade II). The Tentorium was also established on the east side of Oak Walk.

2005

Permission was granted to install gates at the south-west corner of the Parks, using a pair of cast and wrought iron gates originally made in 1899.

2008

The gates at South Lodge were replaced and the entrance was widened. Permission was also granted for a rainwater attenuation scheme at the south end of the Parks.

2011

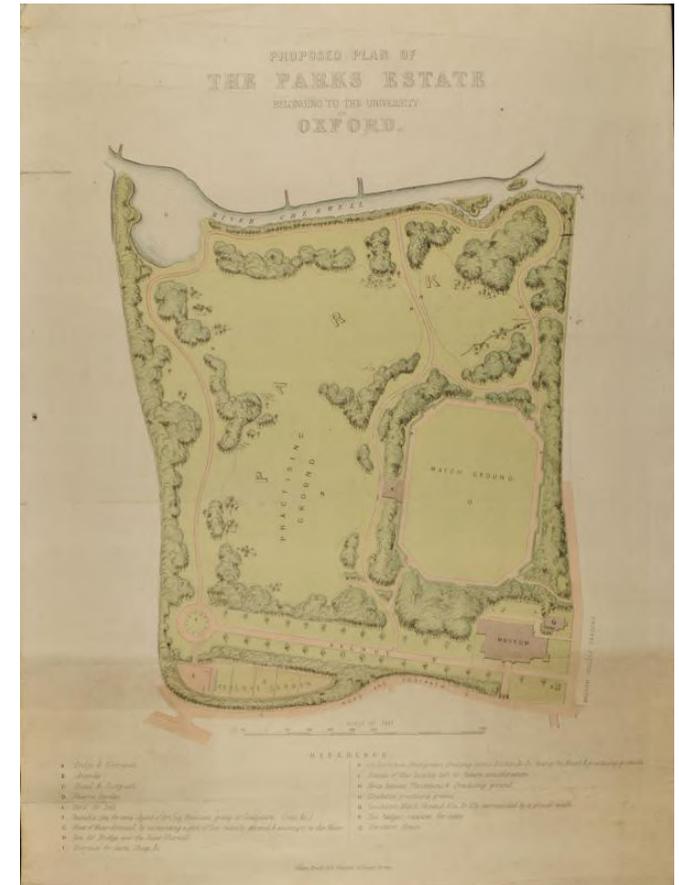
A new gate and section of railings were installed at the Lady Margaret Hall entrance to the Parks.

### 2.3.2 Development of the University Parks<sup>02</sup>

The origin of the Parks is rooted in the University's recognition that space was needed to create a hub dedicated to scientific learning. An area of 20 acres was purchased by the University from Merton College in 1854, with an additional 72 acres along the river purchased over the next five years; altogether, the acquisition on this land cost in excess of £37,000. Four acres was given over to the University Museum of Natural History, which was built between 1855 and 1860.

Early documents cite that the land acquired was intended for recreational use and as an arboretum. However, expenditure during the early decades of the Parks was severely restricted, with only £200 allocated for running expenses; a quarter of this was for the Superintendent's wages. The initial development of the Parks was consequently constrained by the finances made available, as well as the internal bureaucracy.

In 1853, a plan was set out by James Bateman but was ultimately rejected on the grounds of cost. Some ideas were ultimately taken forward, however. This included tree-lined walks, iron railings along the perimeter of the Parks, a pond and bridge over the River Cherwell.



An early plan for laying out the University Parks, as proposed by James Bateman in 1853. He proposed a cricket pitch on the east side of the University Museum with training grounds to the north of this. The principal access was from in front of the Museum, with a smaller path route directly into the cricket ground from South Parks Road. A perimeter walk encircled the Parks, with a section of the river bank excavated to create a pond in the north-east corner.

<sup>02</sup> Unless otherwise referenced, this section has been informed by *The Oxford University Parks: The First Fifty Years*, by John Steane.

## UNDERSTANDING THE SITE

The early evolution of the Parks ultimately continued in a piecemeal fashion. Iron railings were approved in 1865 and were intended as a means of security to protect against damage to the trees and planting. Iron gates were purchased from Gill and Ward.

The siting of lodges at the principal entrances into the Parks was also recognised as a means of ensuring the security of the Parks. The North Lodge was built at the corner of Parks Road and Norham Gardens in 1866 and was designed by H. W. Moore. The South Lodge was designed by local architect, H. G. W. Drinkwater and built in 1893.

In terms of landscaping, early proposed levelling works were met with intense scrutiny, with dissenting voices lamenting the damage this would cause to the archaeology across the site. The proposals were ultimately amended and carried out in localised areas, only.

Upon acquisition of the land 190 willows, 59 elms, 1 oak and 1 poplar were documented in the Parks. Gifts were gratefully received from the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew but a suggestion by Sir Henry Acland (1815-1900) to relocate the University's Botanic Garden to the Parks was fiercely opposed and ultimately defeated on the grounds of cost. Labels were installed across the Parks in 1874, providing plant names in English rather than Latin.

Shade was recognised to be an important provision within the Parks. However, the location of tree clumps could not be determined until the location of any cricket grounds was decided. In 1867, 28 trees were planted to create a winter garden along the northern edge of the Parks, which also provided a buffer for the newly-developed Norham Gardens. In 1873, many of the willow trees along the banks of the River Cherwell were felled to open up views across the wider landscape.

The Parks have always had an important relationship with the river and Oxford's boating traditions. A bridge over the Cherwell was under construction by 1862, with repairs documented in 1895 and 1913. The rollerway which enabled punts to navigate the weir was installed in 1887. Parson's Pleasure, a detached area of land between the main body of the Parks and Mesopotamia Walk was designated as a male bathing place, with any passing women having to disembark from their boats and re-join the river further down. A separate bathing place for women, Dame's Delight, was established further downstream in 1896.



*Parson's Pleasure*, by Lancelot Speed (1860-1931).

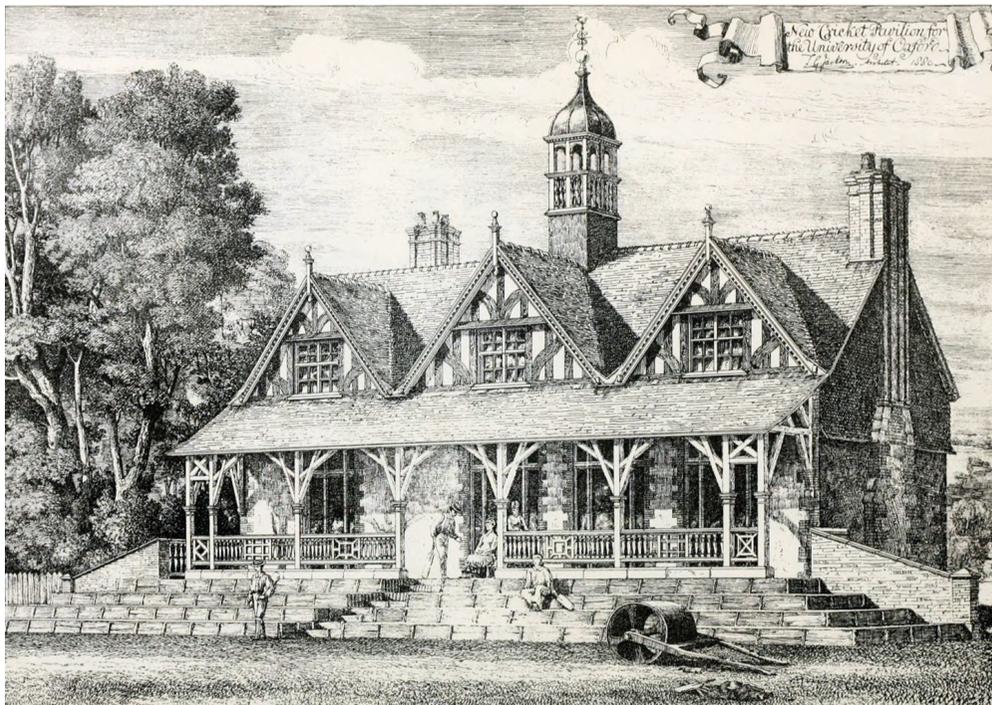
## UNDERSTANDING THE SITE

The relationship of the Parks with sporting activity developed at a slower pace. Applications for leasing cricket grounds were invited in 1867 and was ultimately granted to the University Cricket Club. However, the Club did not officially move to the Parks until 1881, after a new pavilion designed by T. G. Jackson was built. Other than the lodges, this was the second structure to be built inside the Parks, following the construction of the observatory in 1874.

Pressures from other clubs and groups soon built and the Parks Curators gradually made pitches available for other sports: rugby was allowed in 1873, tennis and croquet were permitted in an area between the Museum and Observatory (later the site of the Genetic Garden in 1964), and a hockey pitch was laid out in 1902. Further built development was resisted until the early 20th century when the Science Area started to encroach on the south side of the Parks.

Developments into the 20th century largely focussed on the addition of bridges over the Cherwell, improving the east-west route connecting the city centre with Marston. This included High Bridge in 1924, which replaced an earlier foot ferry and was intended as a relief project to support those without employment. Another bridge designed by civil engineer, Alfred Goldstein at R. Travers Morgan & Partners, was built in 1950. This is believed to be the earliest pre-stressed fixed-arch bridge in the world. The pond at the north-east corner of the Parks, much like as proposed by Bateman in 1853, was excavated in 1925 and was later extended in 1996. During the Second World War the area between Oak Walk and Thorn Walk was 'Dug for Victory' as vegetable allotments. Rhodes Pavilion was constructed adjacent to the main Cricket Pavilion in 1964 and was intended to be temporary.

The only substantial built development to have taken place in the Parks in the 21st century is the construction of the Tentorium to provide administrative and storage space for the Parks team. It was built in 2002 and designed by Gray Baines and Shew.

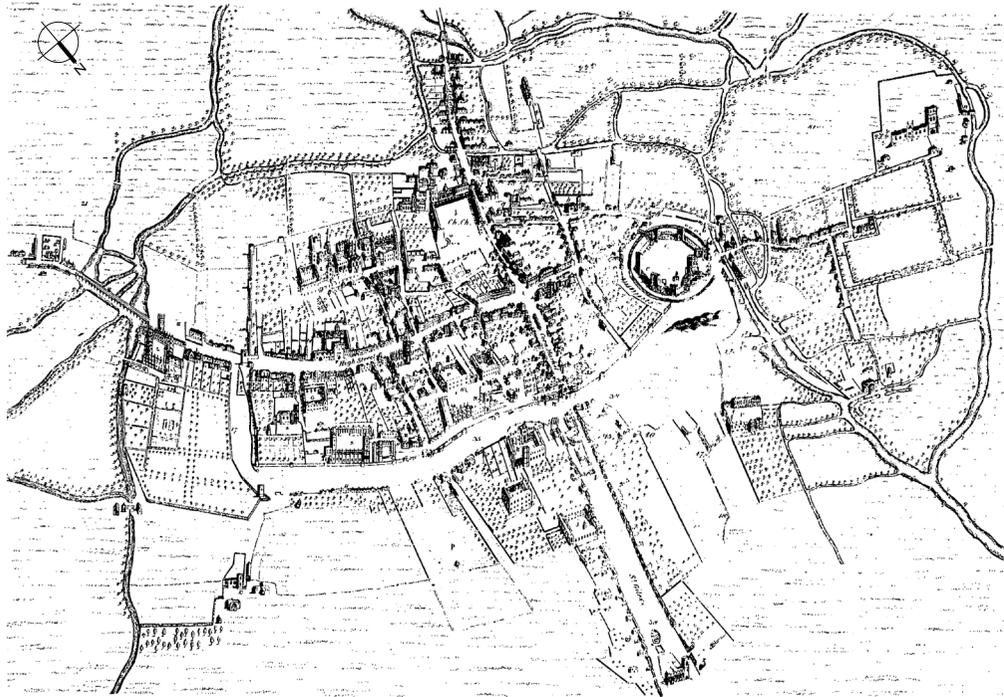


*The new Cricket Pavilion design, published in Building News (1881). The clock in the central gable today appears to have not originally been intended.*

# UNDERSTANDING THE SITE

## 2.3.3 Map Progression Ralph Agas, 1578

The 1578 plan of Oxford surveyed by Agas in 1578 shows the city orientated with north at the bottom. The undeveloped rural space outside of the city, beyond the site of the Augustine Friary (now Wadham College), is where the Science Area and University Parks beyond that would ultimately be located.



## John Speed, 1605

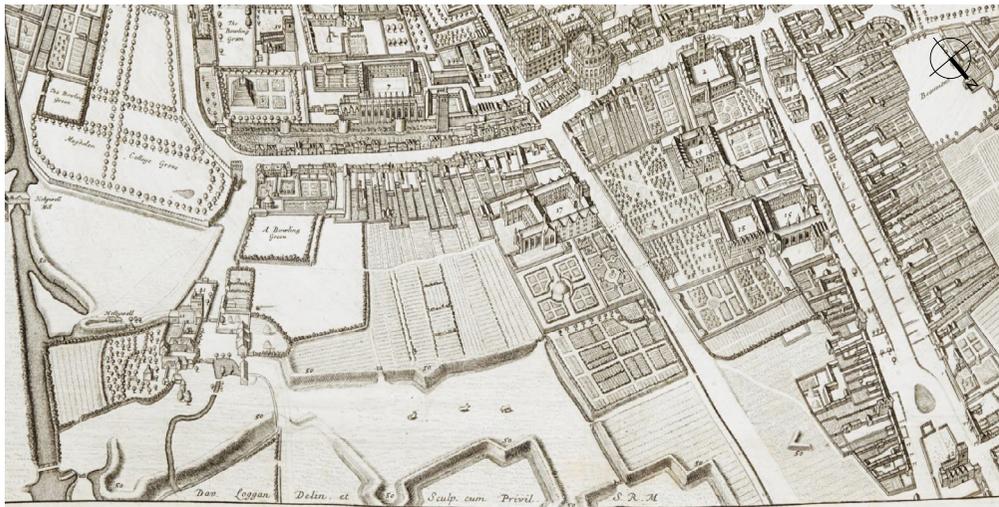
In the early 17th century, the city boundary had not expanded much further north than in the earlier 16th-century map. The University Parks is located off the bottom left corner of the map, depicted as green space.



# UNDERSTANDING THE SITE

## David Loggan, 1675

Loggan's map is the earliest to survey the city in close detail. The University Parks is located just off the bottom of the map. The Civil War defences are clearly marked and labelled as 'The Ruins of the Fortification', but the area still retains its rural character outside the city, with evidence of crop growing and animal grazing indicated on the map. Unlike the previous map, Loggan indicates that Parks Road is becoming a more prominent route north out of the city centre.



## Nathaniel Whittock, 1850

An 1850 aerial illustration of Oxford shows Parks Road on the left-hand side with Holywell Street across the bottom. The area soon to be occupied by the University Parks and Science Area is in the distance, behind the quad of Wadham College. The illustration is likely to have been slightly romanticised, but the overall character of this area remained predominantly green and rural at this time.



## UNDERSTANDING THE SITE

### Ordnance Survey, 1876

The 1876 Ordnance Survey is the earliest map to show the layout of the Parks in detail. The University Observatory is clearly shown in a then-isolated position at the southern end of the Parks. The perimeter paths are indicated, as well as Oak Walk and Thorn Walk. A well is labelled in the norther quarter. North Lodge is labelled; South lodge is not, but is present on the map.

There is an indication of a building screened by surrounding trees on the east side of Oak Walk, on approximately the site of the Tentorium. Its use is not clear but this is likely to have been a base for the Parks team.

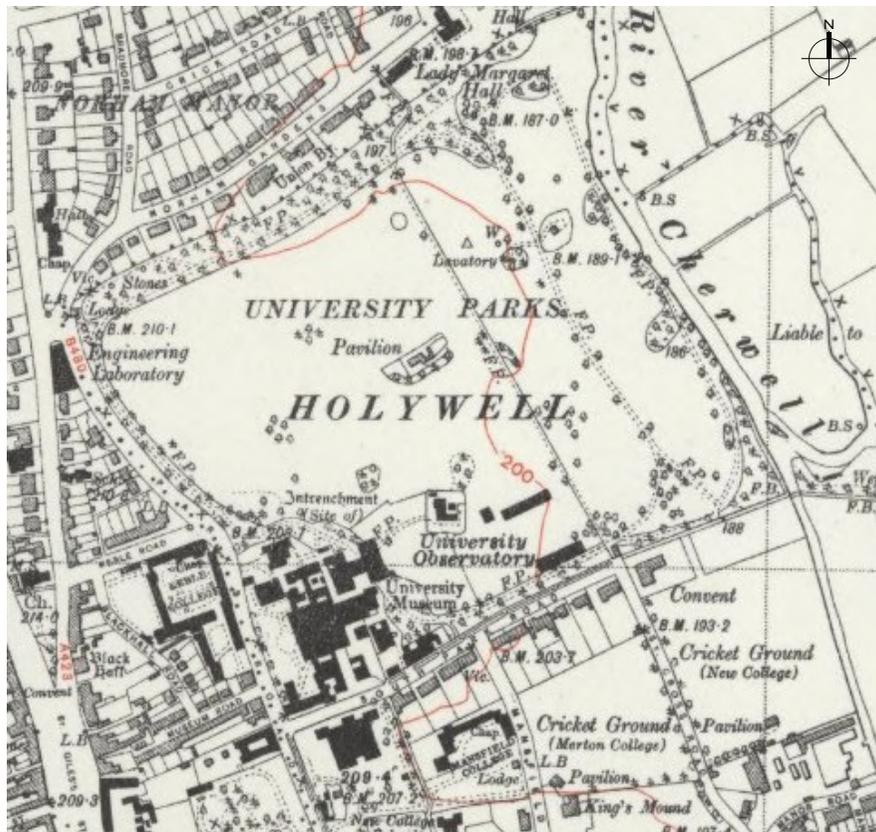


## UNDERSTANDING THE SITE

### Ordnance Survey, 1938

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By the second decade of the 20th century, the encroachment of the Science Area on the south side of the University Parks was being to gather pace, with the construction of the pathology department and Dyson Perrins Building. Development continued rapidly during the following decades, with the construction of the Sherrington Building ultimately re-defining southern boundary of the Parks.



## UNDERSTANDING THE SITE

### 2.3.4 Archaeological Overview

The following is summarised from the appended Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment prepared by Thames Valley Archaeological Services.

The University Parks occupy the site of a prehistoric ritual and funerary landscape and has long been known from a series of parchmarks. These were first identified by Dr Plot, the first keeper of the Ashmolean Museum, in the 17th century and confirmed by aerial photography undertaken in the dry summer of 1976.

The most notable features are a linear arrangement of Bronze Age ring ditches interpreted as having surrounded now-eroded barrows. These form part of a Middle Neolithic to early Bronze Age ritual and funerary complex that extends under central and north Oxford. The eastern part of a distinct linear barrow cemetery, a key component of this landscape, survives within University Parks.

Features within and around the Parks have been identified as from the following principal periods:

- Neolithic (4,000 BCE – 2,200 BCE): A sub-rectangular enclosure of Middle Neolithic date, perhaps a mortuary enclosure, was excavated at the Radcliffe Infirmary site to the west of University Parks. This was found enclosed within the ditch of a later barrow forming part of the linear Bronze Age barrow cemetery that runs west to east across the gravel terrace from Jericho into University Parks. The implication is that the later linear cemetery may have been orientated on much earlier earthworks that were still visible in the landscape. A number of dispersed and undated features, perhaps post-hole arrangements, excavated at the Radcliffe
- Infirmiry site provide an indication of the kind of satellite features that may survive around the focal monuments of the ritual and funerary complex. Within University Parks a single pit of likely Neolithic date has been identified to date during works at the substation. Nearby at St John's College, a massive ditch between Keble Road and Parks Road is interpreted as a Neolithic henge.
- Bronze Age (2,600 BCE – 700 BCE): A late Neolithic-Early Bronze Age linear barrow cemetery runs east-west through the Parks with a number of likely satellite barrows identifiable from parch marks and geophysical surveys. Further satellite burials (both inhumations and cremations) and other structures (post structures, pyre pits etc.) can be expected in the vicinity of the barrows. Just to the south of the Parks in the University Science Area, small scale excavations have been undertaken on a double concentric ring ditch at the nearby Rex Richards building and a barrow at the Centre for Gene Function. Here the barrow was placed over an earlier flat grave (i.e. a burial that predated the barrow) containing inhumations, one of which exhibited signs of interpersonal violence. Two paleochannels (ancient river courses) are recorded in the north corner of the Parks and are possibly Bronze Age or earlier. A truncated Bronze Age monument has also been excavated during the construction of the attenuation tanks on the south side of the Parks.
- Iron Age (800 BCE – 43 CE): Parch marks and geophysics suggest the presence of an Iron Age rural landscape of farmsteads, enclosures, trackways, droveways and pits within University Parks, with further excavated evidence to the north around Northam Gardens and Park Town, and to the south within the Science Area.
- Roman (43 CE – 410 CE), including crossover with the preceding period: Geophysical survey of the Parks has revealed an agricultural landscape and community, further evidenced by the type of parchmarks visible. The nearby Banbury Road is considered to date back to the Roman period.
- Saxon (410 CE – 1066 CE): An early Saxon sunken featured building excavated at the Radcliffe Infirmary to the west illustrates that, in a similar fashion to other Upper Thames ritual and funerary complexes, the prehistoric barrows at Oxford became a focal point for settlement in the early Saxon period. Further such structures and associated features (including burials) may be anticipated within University Parks. In the late Saxon period a mass grave of 35 individuals, likely to be Danes, was placed in the ditch of the nearby Neolithic henge, demonstrating that prehistoric earthworks remained features in the landscape at this time.
- Medieval (1066 BCE – 1500 CE): An area of ridge and furrow is recorded at the north corner of the Parks. The Holywell Mill Stream at the south-east corner of the Parks was diverted from the River Cherwell to a 13th-century mill.
- Post-Medieval (1500 BCE – 1837 CE): Most notably the Civil War defence ditches recorded in historic maps and images, the line of which may just cross through the south-west corner of the Parks.

## UNDERSTANDING THE SITE

### WHAT IS A BARROW?

A barrow is a mound of earth and/or stone of various shapes and sizes. These are characteristic earthwork monuments dating from around 5,800 to 3,400 years ago. The sites were made from different combinations of timber, turf, rubble, small platforms and enclosures or ditched structures.

Over time, the mound typically becomes level through erosion, meaning that the most striking feature recorded from the air is the ditch which occurs as a circular vegetation or soil mark and is sometimes referred to as a ring ditch, although it should be noted that not all ring ditches are necessarily the remains of barrows. While barrows are often isolated, many occur in groups, sometimes of just two or three, but occasionally of up to thirty or more. These are called barrow cemeteries and typically consist of barrows in a variety of forms that have accumulated over many generations. They have traditionally been attributed as high-status burial grounds, but this may not always have been the case.

*Referenced from Prehistoric Barrows and Burial Mounds: Introductions to Heritage Assets (Historic England, 2018).*



*A reconstruction drawing of the barrows on the site of the University Parks. North is on the right-hand side of the image; the track running horizontally across the centre roughly aligns with Parks Road and Banbury Road. (MOLA, 2009 provided by David Radford, City Archaeologist).*

## UNDERSTANDING THE SITE

### WHAT ARE PARCH MARKS?

Parch marks are exposed during periods of intensely hot and dry weather, leaving defined areas where vegetation has become more easily scorched. This is because the top soil over archaeological features is typically thinner, thereby making the vegetation more vulnerable in these extreme weather conditions. The parch marks in the University Parks were first documented in the 17th century by Dr Robert Plot, the first Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum. He attributed the extensive rings across the as-yet undeveloped northern expanse of the city as having been caused by lightning strikes. He noted in his publication *The Natural History of Staffordshire* that had observed rings '30, 40, and 50 yards Diameter' including several 'in New [University] Parks near the City of Oxford where there is always plenty of them.' He also noted similar rings near St Giles' Church and in Jericho.

Parch marks are different to crop marks as it takes a specific set of weather conditions to expose them. Crop marks can be present in a variety of environmental conditions and are caused by similar differences in the depths of the soil above buried archaeological features.

(See also: [www.historicengland.org.uk/cropmarks](http://www.historicengland.org.uk/cropmarks))



*Parch marks recorded in the University Parks in the 1970s. The hot weather in 2022 also exposed the parch marks, which have been re-documented using drone photography by Historic England.*

# UNDERSTANDING THE SITE

## 2.4 WIDER HISTORIC CONTEXT

### 2.4.1 North Oxford Suburbs

Prior to the mid-19th century the area north of St Giles' Church was largely open countryside owned and leased out by St John's College. The Oxford University Act 1854 meant that the college did not have to renew leases upon expiration, meaning that land could be used more economically. The aspiration was to create a suburb for the middle classes and secure long-term income via the lease of new properties.

In the mid-1860s Norham Manor was one of the earliest developments to be built and was designed by Oxford architect, William Wilkinson. Norham Gardens was the first road to be laid out and is a characteristically leafy boulevard – a feature that was ultimately repeated across much of North Oxford. The houses were large Gothic Revival or Italianate villas surrounded by generous gardens. Park Town to the north and Walton Manor to the west are similarly early enclave developments which marked the start of the suburban development to the north of Oxford city centre in the 19th century.

As well as residential developments, part of Norham Manor was sold to Lady Margaret Hall, where the college was able to build their own building having previously taught in whatever space was available for the education of women in Oxford.

### 2.4.2 Science Area

The University Museum was the inaugural building in what is now the University's Science Area. Development started in 1855 in what was previously open countryside. It was intended that the Museum would become the centre for the University's emerging scientific disciplines and included the Abbot's Kitchen, one of the first custom-built laboratories in the country. Development spread eastwards from the Museum, eventually taking up 30 acres. There is a cluster of historic buildings around the University Museum:

- Clarendon Physics Laboratory (north-west side), built 1867-69.
- Pitt Rivers Museum (east side), built 1885-86.
- Radcliffe Science Library (south), built 1898-1901 (extended 1933-34).
- Department of Zoology (now Atmospheric Physics) and Morphology Laboratory (north), built 1898-1901.
- Human Anatomy department at the Le Gros Clark Building, built in 1873.

Development extended along South Parks Road in the early 20th century, with landmark buildings including the Dyson Perrins Building (1916/1921), Plant Sciences (designed before the Second World War but not opened until 1951), Sir William Dunn School of Pathology (1927).

Other development extended off the back of the South Parks Road facing buildings, including the Physical Chemical Laboratory (1941) and the Sherrington Building (1953), as well as a series of late 20th and early 21st-century buildings. The Science Area continues to evolve rapidly at a pace to match the developments in the science, although no longer encroaching into the Parks. This has most recently seen the construction of the Beecroft Building at the south-west corner of the Parks, the new biochemistry building at the centre of the Science Area, and the Life and Mind Building on the corner of South Parks Road and St Cross Road.

### 2.4.3 Public Parks

Before the 1840s, there were no defined green spaces in England that were freely open to all.<sup>03</sup> The intense urbanisation of cities and towns in the 18th and 19th centuries pushed the countryside that previously directly bordered settlements further afield, making it more difficult to access. In recognition of the public benefits of recreation space and need to manage air pollution, efforts were poured into the creation of public parks. Most were municipally funded and remain so today. Oxford, however, is unique in this regard as the two principal open spaces which were historically and remain freely accessible to the public are made so at the will of the University (the Parks) and a college (Christ Church Meadow).

<sup>03</sup> <https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/debate/recent/public-parks/the-victorian-legacy/> (accessed May 2022).

# UNDERSTANDING THE SITE

## 2.5 MANAGEMENT AND USE

The University Parks are overseen by 11 curators:

- The Chair, appointed by the Vice-Chancellor
- Both Proctors
- The Assessor
- The Chair of the Buildings and Estates Subcommittee (or another member of the subcommittee nominated by its Chair)
- Two people elected by Congregation
- Two people appointed by Council
- Up to two co-opted members.

Day-to-day management is carried out by the Parks Superintendent, who oversees a team of gardeners and arborists.

The Parks are open daily from 07.45 and close 30 minutes before dusk (with Mesopotamia Walk closing 30 minutes prior), with the exception of Christmas Eve when the Parks remain closed. As much as possible, the Parks are open free of charge for use by University members, local residents and visitors. Occasional commercial hiring is permitted at the discretion of the Curators.

Sports pitches are maintained for organised fixtures and formal training. Informal games are restricted to specific areas of the Parks.

Cycling or pushing bikes through the Parks is prohibited except for by members of the Parks or Security Services teams.

# UNDERSTANDING THE SITE

- University Sports Pitch
- Public Play Area
- Cricket Field

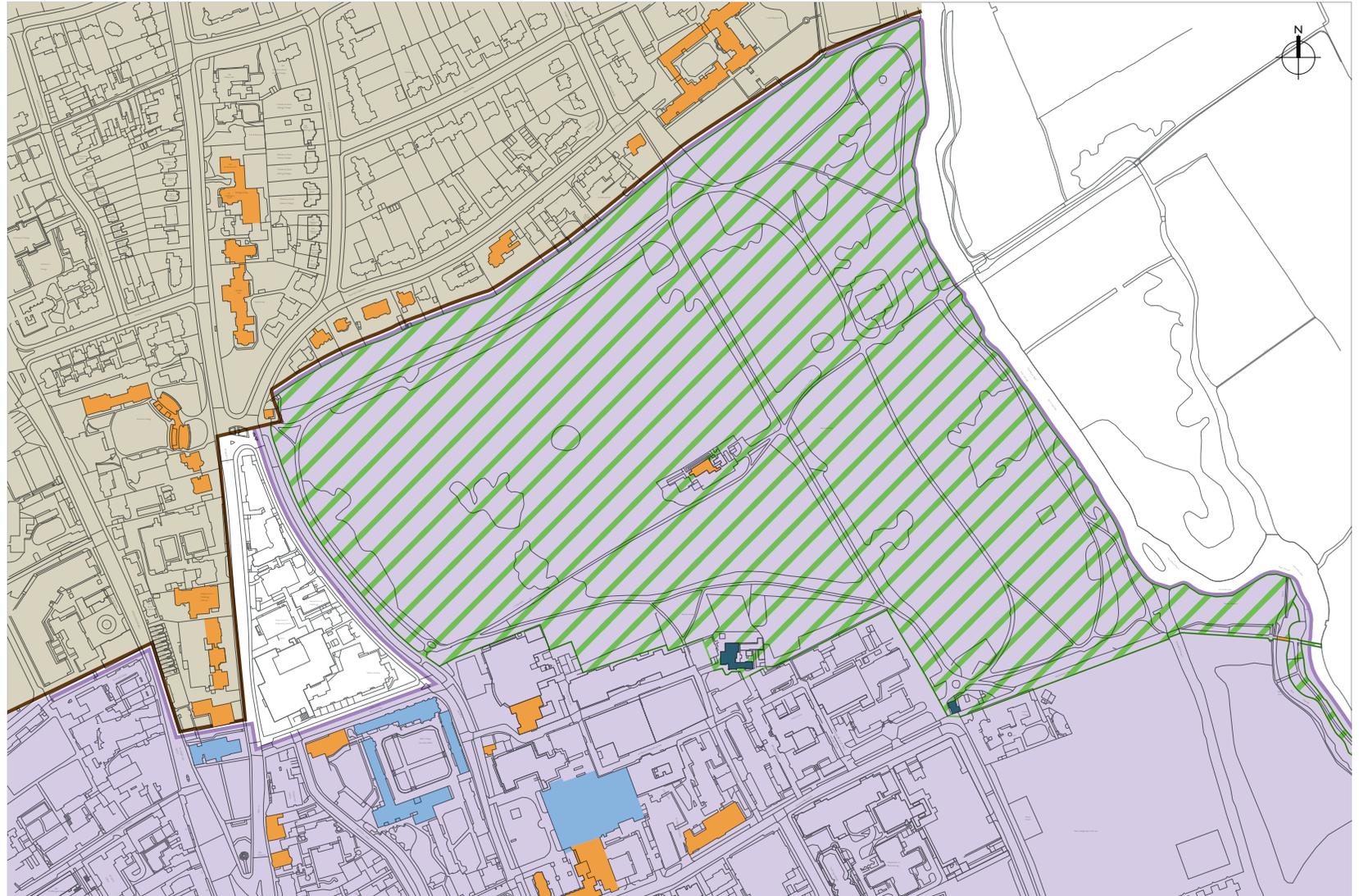
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Plan 4: Access and Uses

# UNDERSTANDING THE SITE

## 2.6 HERITAGE ASSETS



Plan 5: Heritage Assets

## UNDERSTANDING THE SITE

### 2.6.1 Listed Buildings

Within the CMP study area, North Lodge and the Cricket Pavilion are Grade II listed buildings. There are numerous other listed buildings around its peripheries (particularly along Norham Gardens) and within the immediate area. Listed buildings are protected under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and are designated for their architectural or historical interest. Protection also extends to their setting; i.e. *'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 the asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral'* (NPPF). Setting itself is not designated but impact on this will be given material consideration in any planning decisions.

### 2.6.2 Registered Parks and Gardens

The whole of the University Parks, together with Parsons Pleasure and Mesopotamia Walk are recognised as a Grade II registered landscape. Parks and gardens which have special historic interest are identified by Historic England and recorded within their register, as authorised by the Historic Building and Ancient Monuments Act 1953. Such landscapes are defined as designated heritage assets under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) but are not subject to a separate permission process (as is the case with listed buildings). Where proposals concerning the University Parks (or in the context of its setting) are submitted for planning submission, the conservation of the Registered Park will be a material consideration during the decision-making process.

### 2.6.3 Conservation Areas

The whole of the CMP study area is located within the Central (City and University) Conservation Area and is directly adjacent to the North Oxford Victorian Suburbs Conservation Area. Conservation areas are also protected under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, which requires local authorities to designate and form policies to protect areas of special architectural and historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. Substantial or complete demolition of any building within a conservation area will require planning permission; the local authority must also be notified of any works to trees within a conservation area.

### 2.6.4 Non-Designated Heritage Assets

A non-designated heritage asset is a site or structure which has no statutory listing in place but has recognisable heritage value. Within the context of a conservation area, the term 'positive contributor' is often used. Within the CMP study area, South Lodge is a non-designated building with demonstrable historic interest by virtue of its age, as well as architectural value and an important association with the development of the Parks. Just outside of the CMP study area, the Observatory is also of historic interest and architectural value. The below-ground archaeological landscape within the Parks is recognised as a non-designated heritage asset due to the importance of the ring ditch features and subsequent phases of activity.

## SECTION 3.0

### HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

#### 3.1 CRITERIA AND METHODOLOGY

Significance is the industry-standard term given to the total sum of the cultural and heritage values that make a place special to this and future generations. It encompasses not just the physical attributes of a site but also its setting, contents, use, history, traditions and wider context; these may be tangible or intangible (i.e. physical or thematic). It is therefore unique to each place and relative significance can vary from element to element: a building or space may be significant for one or several overarching reasons, but a specific element may be more or less significant than the whole for different reasons.

The methodology used in this assessment of significance is taken from definitions, requisites and guidance set out in the *National Planning Policy Framework*, the *Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990* and *Historic England Advice Note 12* ('*Statements of Heritage Significance: Analysing Significance in Heritage Assets*').

The NPPF defines significance as 'the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest'. The phrase used within the *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990* is 'special interest'. These terms are used interchangeably.

Significance is derived from one or a combination of different interests (or values), including:

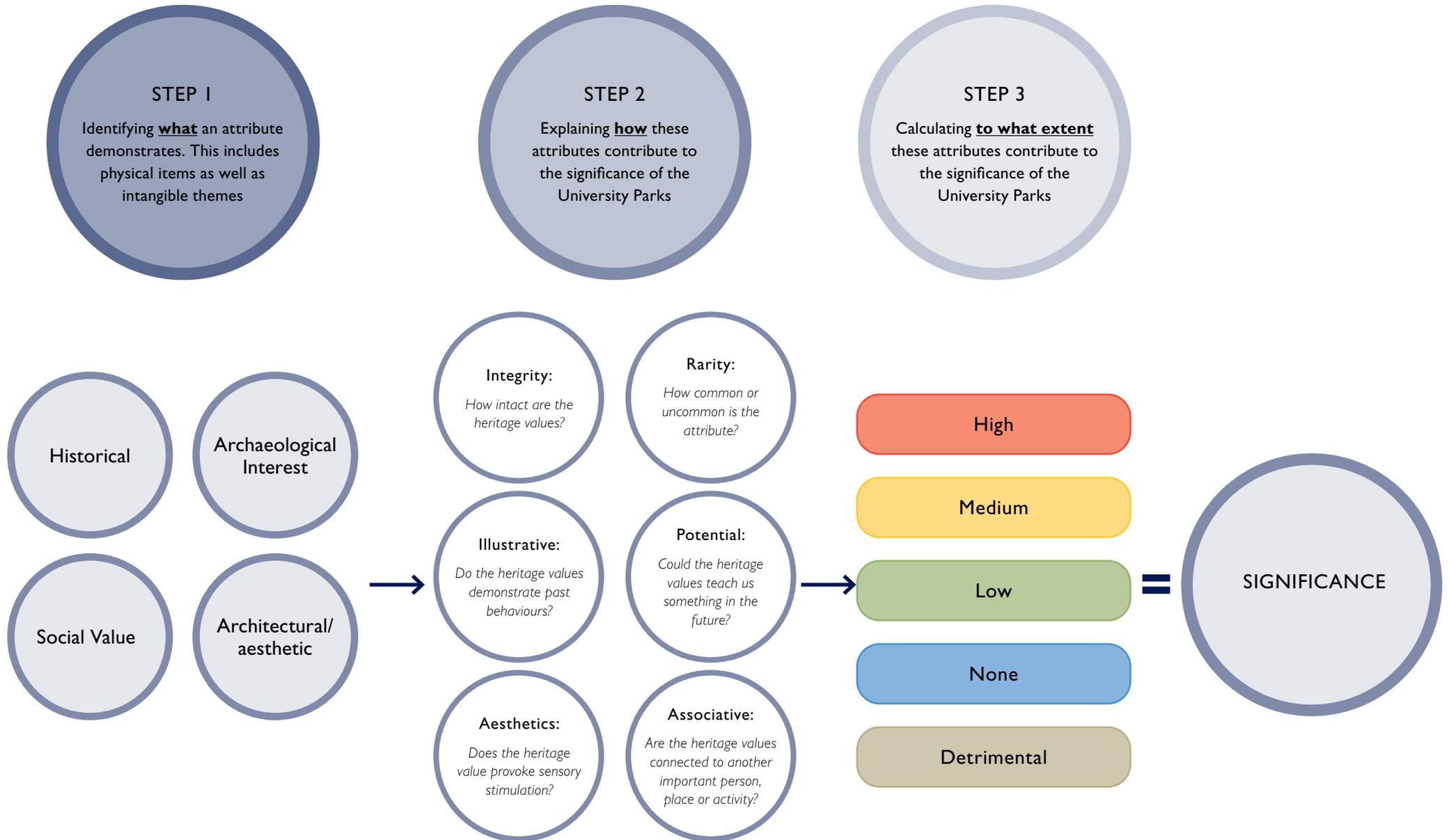
- **Archaeological interest** – either known or the potential to yield.
- **Architectural/artistic interest** – the design and aesthetics of a place, either consciously or fortuitously created.
- **Historic interest** – illustrating or associated with past lives or events.

Factors such as rarity, integrity and group value will further contribute to significance. Setting – the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced or is otherwise linked to – is also a key consideration.

Significance and the interests/values which contribute to this are measured against a sliding scale: whilst many elements will be significant, not all will be significant to the same degree. It is important to recognise these variations so that future change is determined proportionately to significance.

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE	MEANING
High	Features or themes which make an essential contribution to the unique character of a historic place.
Medium	Features or themes which make a substantial contribution to the unique character of a historic place.
Low	Features or themes which make a minor but still noteworthy contribution to the unique character of a historic place.
None	Features or themes which neither contribute to, nor detract from the unique character of a historic place.
Detrimental	Features or themes which detract from the unique character of a historic place.

# HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE



### 3.2 SUMMARY STATEMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of the University Parks draws on a wide variety of themes, resulting in a unique and complex site. It has an immense historical value that extends further back than many will realise, with evidence of important Neolithic and Bronze Age archaeology surviving with an anticipated high degree of integrity below ground that has the potential to yield further information about prehistoric ceremonial activity across the area to the north of Oxford's city centre.

As a designed landscape, the Parks have high aesthetic value stemming from the experience of the configuration of the paths, open lawns, and planting, as well as its relationship with the adjoining streetscapes and River Cherwell. The volume and variety of trees throughout the landscape are particularly character-defining features.

The Parks are a much-valued community amenity, providing leisure space for both town and gown for over 150 years and increasingly still at a time when wellbeing and the benefits of the natural environment are prominently recognised. They illustrate the 19th-century move towards the provision of public green spaces within urban centres and also academia's shift towards a more holistic university experience facilitating both learning and leisure.

### 3.3 HERITAGE INTERESTS, VALUES AND THEMES

#### 3.3.1 Archaeological Interest<sup>01</sup>

Geophysical survey has confirmed the presence of four late Neolithic/early Bronze Age ring ditches in a linear arrangement in University Parks, adding further evidential weight to the parch mark observations made over the course of several centuries and known activity from this period in the wider area. The evidence can beyond reasonable doubt be interpreted as a series of below-ground features of archaeological interest. Barrows excavated further west, on the site of the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter, and part of the same cemetery complex, provide further information concerning the likely characteristics of the ring ditches within the Parks, and makes their survival all the more significant by virtue of increasing the rarity of their intact state within the local context of the significant cemetery group.

The ring ditches and any associated burials have the potential to provide insight into the funerary and ceremonial practices of Neolithic and Bronze Age Britain. This is known to be the case nearby where excavation of a barrow on the site of the Centre for Gene Function found evidence of high-status burials from this period, as well as a rare example of violence being inflicted on the bodies.

Further to this, a sequence of four similar landscapes along the Upper Thames Valley form an important group with the University Parks barrows; two of this group have already been lost as a result of quarrying and the fourth is protected by scheduling. This wider regional context emphasises the high significance of the University Parks archaeological interest.

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<sup>01</sup> Please also refer to the detailed archaeological reporting in Volume II of the CMP.

## HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

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### Summary from the Oxford Archaeological Plan

The following criteria and scoring sets out the significance of the University Parks barrows, as assessed for the Oxford Archaeological Plan.

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Does the asset (i.e. the group of barrows) characterise a category or historic period?	Yes – to a high degree
What is the rarity of the asset in terms of regional and national context?	High – of the group of four similar landscapes along the Upper Thames Valley, only two survive
To what extent is the significance of the asset enhanced by existing documentation, or lack thereof?	High – the site has been recorded in 17th-century observations, later through aerial photography, geophysical surveys and excavation of associated sites
Is the value of the asset enhanced by its associated with related contemporary monuments or with monuments of different periods?	Yes – the extensive funerary monument that extend westwards across St John's College to the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter
What is the estimated level of above and below ground survival?	Medium – there are no surface earthworks but excavation of the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter barrows indicate the likely features which survive below ground
What is the asset's susceptibility to change?	Medium – the site is within a Registered Park and Garden but has been subject to planning applications requiring excavation work
Does the asset possess a combination of high-quality features?	Yes – based on excavations of similar monuments at the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter, parallels with other similar landscapes in the county and geophysical survey results
Is there a likelihood that currently unrecorded evidence can be anticipated?	Yes – a strong chance
<b>Overall assessment of archaeological interest</b>	<b>High</b>

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## HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

### 3.3.2 Social and Communal Value

The University Parks are a highly significant community asset available to and utilised by all sectors of Oxford's society: residents, students, sports' players and visitors. Green open spaces, especially within an urban context, play an important role for public health. This has always been the case but has been particularly emphasised in recent years by the popularity of local parks during periods of lockdown. The Parks offer a variety of recreational spaces, including a series of walks, sports' pitches and benches, all of which illustrate the increased desire for leisure facilities in the mid-19th century. It was at this time that the University moved towards more progressive education, facilitating sports and recreational activities alongside traditional academia.

### 3.3.3 Commemorative Value

The work and lives of a variety of individuals are commemorated in a number of ways within the University Parks. This includes:

- The Genetic Garden, which commemorates the contribution to the field of genetics by Professor Cyril Dean Darlington and was laid out in this location in 1964. The collection planted here highlights the diversity, flexibility and evolution of the plant kingdom.
- Planting and plaques honouring the relationship between much-respected figures and the University, notably M. K. Gandhi and J. R. R. Tolkien. The species planted also reflect their life and work: a Pride of India to honour Gandhi, and trees representing Laurelin and Telperion from Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*.
- Havel's Place, one of a series of global installations comprising a pair of chairs and a table to symbolise and promote contemplation and democratic debate. Václav Havel was a human rights activist and President of Czechoslovakia and Czech Republic.
- Benches dedicated to the memory of local residents and University figures.

### 3.3.4 Landscape Value

The University Parks is a designed landscape cultivated from what had historically been the open plains surrounding the medieval city. Its character is that of a public park maintained to an exceptional standard, contrasting the urban character of the city centre to the south and flowing into the leafy character of the suburbs to the north. Within this context, the landscape of the Parks helps illustrate the changing attitudes to recreation and urban growth in the 19th century.

The strategic planting and configuration of the paths promote movement around the Parks, and also facilitate the viewing experience, most notably including:

- riverside paths and views;
- framed vistas along tree-lined avenues;
- glimpsed views through planting;
- views across to landmark features such as the cricket pavilion; and
- kinetic experiences where a series of related views are encountered whilst moving through the landscape.

The perimeter paths are characteristic features of the landscape, promoting movement around the Parks, and are augmented by the planted borders, benches and spots to pause. The continuation of the paths along the River Cherwell extends the experience of the green landscape beyond the physical boundaries of the Park, particularly towards Parson's Pleasure and Mesopotamia Walk.

The significance of the landscape is recognised in its inclusion on the Register of Parks and Garden at Grade II.

## HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

### 3.3.5 Architectural Interest

The architectural interest of the Parks comes from the few landmark features designed to supplement its recreational purpose and operational management.

**Cricket Pavilion:** Known as the Parks Pavilion, this building is listed at Grade II. It has important associations with its architect, T. G. Jackson, and, by extension, his wider portfolio of contemporaneous work for the University. The building displays a high standard of architectural design; the integrity of the Parks Pavilion external envelope remains largely intact as originally designed. It therefore has a high architectural value which is further emphasised by its landmark status as the central focal point in views across its accompanying cricket pitch from the north side of the Parks. The composition of the Parks Pavilion within its immediate setting of mature and varied planting, and highly-maintained pitches has a very high aesthetic value. The contribution the Pavilion site makes to the wider landscape value of the Parks is highly significant.<sup>02</sup>

**North Lodge:** The North Lodge is a Grade II listed building designed by architect H. W. Moore, who also designed a number of North Oxford houses. Architecturally, it echoes the 19th-century Gothic of the University Museum further down Parks Road, as well as the typical style of the Victorian suburbs that grew up beyond the Parks. It is also notable for its status flanking the entrance into the Parks from Parks Road, providing a landmark both within the streetscape and the landscape of the Parks.

**South Lodge:** Not a listed building, but significant for its pairing with North Lodge, as well as its relationship with the landscape of the Parks and its historical value. It flanks the south entrance and was designed by architect Harry Drinkwater, whose other Oxford designs included several pubs. Within the streetscape of St Cross Road and South Parks Road, it forms an important architectural group with Linacre College, which uses a similar red brick palette, contrasted with white painted windows.

**Tentorium:** A structure is first documented in this location as early as the 1876 Ordnance Survey. By the 1950s, maps indicate that a cluster of buildings had developed, most likely in response to the growing Parks team and operations. The Tentorium structure is modern and not significant in terms of its fabric, but there is some value in its sympathetic modern design and also the important supporting role it plays in the upkeep of the Parks.

### 3.3.6 Contribution to the Conservation Area and Setting

The Central (University and City) Conservation Area recognises the significance of the historic core around which Oxford has evolved. This is characterised by an amalgamation of 'town and gown', and how this has directed urban development from the 12th century to today. Within the northern portion of the Conservation Area, the University Parks acts as a buffer between the densely-packed Science Area to the south and the leafy residential suburb of Norham Gardens to the north, which is part of the North Oxford Victorian Suburbs Conservation Area. The villas to the north are illustrative of the residential developments which ran in parallel with the University's increasing leisure provisions: providing the recreational space for those living, working and studying in the city centre.

Rather than existing purely behind a defined boundary, the character of the Parks seeps out into the surrounding streetscapes, especially the avenues of mature trees the line South Parks Road, and continues along the banks of the River Cherwell down Mesopotamia Walk. This is also reflected in recent Science Area developments with the re-landscaping of the thoroughfares between the departmental buildings on South Parks Road and the new public plaza in front of the Life and Mind Building.

### 3.3.7 Associative Value

The University Parks has an indelible link with the history, reputation and accomplishments of the University of Oxford. The Parks are illustrative of the University's move towards a more progressive education in the 19th century, combining the purity of its traditional academia with sports and recreational activities. Today, the Parks continue to be a key facility for the University as a means of public outreach, sports' grounds, and teaching and research opportunities.

<sup>02</sup> Please also refer to the Conservation Management Plan for the Cricket Pavilion: <https://estates.admin.ox.ac.uk/conservation-plans#widget-id-1264101>

# HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

## 3.3.8 Significance by Feature

### Buildings and Structures:

- Parks Cricket Pavilion: High Significance
- Rhodes Pavilion & buildings to west of Parks Pavilion: Neutral (i.e. no significance)
- Tentorium: Low Significance
- North Lodge: High Significance
- South Lodge: Medium Significance
- Perimeter Railings and Gates: High Significance

### Areas of Archaeological Interest:

- Location of ring ditches: Very High Significance
- Location of other known cropmarks and enclosures: High Significance
- Areas with unrecorded below-ground archaeology: Potentially High Significance

### Green Spaces and Features:

- Sports' pitches: High Significance
- Trees and shrubs: High Significance
- Genetic Garden: High Significance
- Flower Beds: Medium Significance

### Paths and Walks:

- North Walk: High Significance
- South Walk: High Significance
- Thorn Walk: High Significance
- Oak Walk: High Significance
- Riverside Walk: High Significance
- West Walk: High Significance
- Path from Keble Gate to High Bridge: Low Significance



## 3.3.9 Additional Values

### Arboricultural Value

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Trees have been a formative theme of the Parks since its original design, reflected in the naming of the early formal paths on the east side of the site (Thorn Walk and Oak Walk). The Registered Park description text specifically identifies several groups of trees for their particular contribution to the character of the landscape, including:

- The belt planted with mature conifers, laurel and yew along North Walk.
- Seven giant redwoods (wellingtonias) planted in c.1888 in the west corner of the Parks, near North Lodge.
- Cedars and pines throughout the Parks.
- Willow trees along the banks of the River Cherwell.

The arboricultural value of the Parks also has an important association with the mature limes along South Parks Road, which originally delineated its southern boundary before the expansion of the Science Area in the 20th century.

Aside from the heritage value of mature specimens, green infrastructure, and particularly large trees, is especially significant for the vital role it plays today in mitigating the impacts of a changing climate. Trees, shrubs and grasses capture and store carbon, and intercept and slow the movement of rainfall, thereby regulating stormwater and incidences of flash flooding. Large tree canopies reflect short-wave radiation and provide local shade which has a cooling effect, mitigating the impact of the urban heat island effect where hard surfaces in cities capture and reflect heat.

### Habitat and Biodiversity Value

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The University Parks are a highly valuable asset for biodiversity by virtue of the variety of plant species and habitats available here, particularly within the context of the wider urban setting. The variety of planting is a long-established practice, as evidenced in the plant groups recognised in the Registered Park description. There is a wide range of tree species, including native, flowering and fruit-bearing trees which will provide specific foraging grounds and habitats. This has been recognised and augmented by the University with the installation of supplementary features including the swift tower. The retention of deadwood hosting a variety of fungi, the ponds and river, and leaving certain areas unmown add to the biodiversity value of the site. There is an increasing social awareness of the importance of biodiversity which further emphasises this aspect of the significance of the Parks.

The University Environmental Sustainability Strategy specifies a goal of achieving Biodiversity Net Gain by 2035 and there will be biodiversity improvements across the whole estate during that time. A recent Ecology Report commissioned for the University Parks indicated that there is still significant potential for biodiversity enhancement on the site. Initiatives to satisfy some of this potential will contribute to the goals of the Environmental Sustainability Strategy.

## SECTION 4.0

### RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

This section of the CMP assesses the needs of the University Parks both now and in the near future, and where there is potential for these needs to impact the significance of the site. The policies set out in response to each theme in section 5 address specific risks and opportunities, and provide targeted advice so that the significance of the University Parks is protected and, where possible, enhanced through considered change. It is important that any pressure or opportunity for change at the University Parks, both those identified in the CMP and any which arise subsequently, is balanced against significance and that these two threads come together to inform a sensitive solution.

#### 4.1 RISKS

##### 4.1.1 Access

Accessibility audits are regularly carried out by the University. The findings of the most recent inspection should be referred to in order to identify current risks relating to the accessibility of the University Parks.

Headline issues as of Autumn 2022 include:

- Some entrances into the Parks are not accessible for wheelchair users.
- The cricket pavilion and changing rooms have no step-free access (NB: these facilities are managed by the University Sport team).
- The steep incline/decline of High Bridge and the footpath to Marston are not accessible to all.

Mitigation actions which have the potential to address accessibility concerns but also to have an associated heritage impact include:

- The provision of wayfinding and other information in different formats – this could have a visual impact on the character of the Parks, as well as a physical impact if new postholes are required.

- The provision of a different variety of seating types – this could mean the removal of traditional benches and move away from memorial benches or the inclusion of new seating areas.
- Upgrades to the WC facilities could involve external works to the existing building which will need to be carefully considered to to reconcile the character of the Parks as a RPG designation and groundwork which has the potential to affect below-ground archaeology.

##### 4.1.2 Archaeological Sensitivities

The archaeological resource below the surface across the University Parks is highly significant should be treated as a non-designated heritage asset. Although underground, the archaeological features can be damaged as a result of above-ground operations, including:

- Unregulated ground work
- Soil compaction (heavy vehicles, temporary structures, etc.)
- Root growth
- Trees uprooting in extreme weather
- Soil erosion as a result of high footfall or traffic, exacerbated by extreme weather
- Introducing new planting or removing existing planting
- Burrowing animals<sup>01</sup>

Geophysical survey of the Parks has been carried out insofar as is possible in light of magnetic and other disturbances which affect the accuracy of the surveying techniques. Such disturbance is often caused by the proximity of buildings and areas which are densely planted. Notwithstanding these localised areas where survey has not been possible, there is now a sufficiently detailed record of the below-ground archaeological potential to understand how sensitivity varies across the Parks.

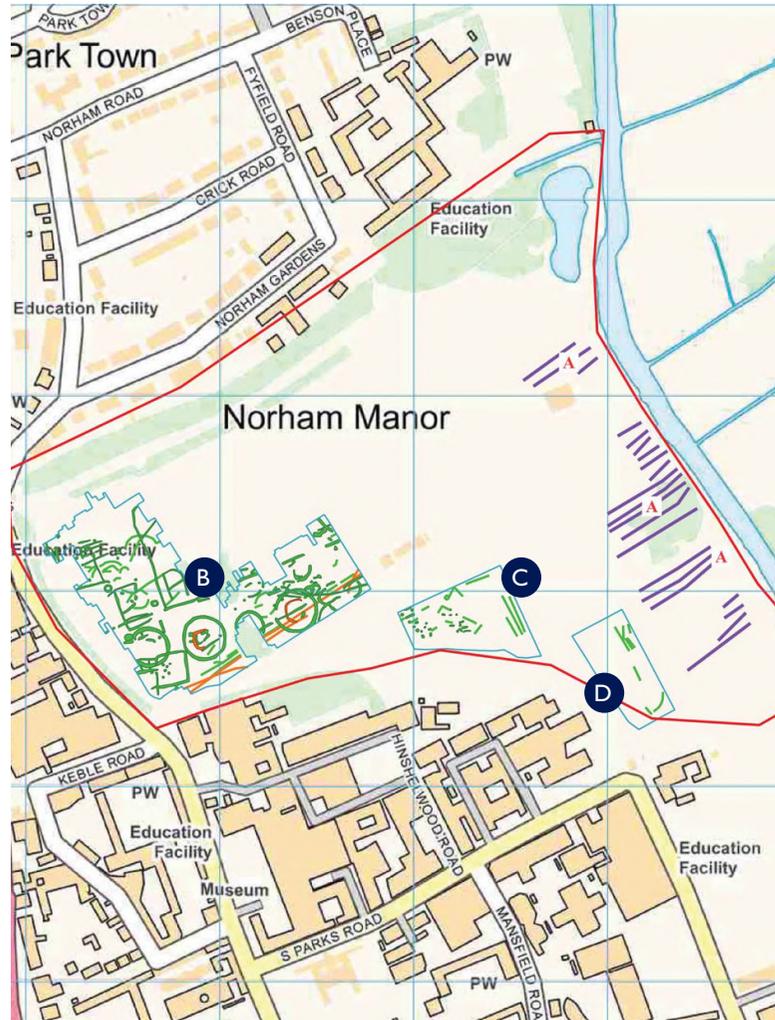
The following map extracts and table identify where archaeological features have been recorded through geophysical investigation and, where possible, what these features are likely to be evidence of. In summary, the portion of the Parks to the north and west of the Cricket Pavilion is highly sensitive with evidence of ring ditches associated with the Bronze Age linear cemetery which extends across the north side of the city centre, as well as features indicating considerable activity thereafter through to the medieval period. Areas of low archaeological sensitivity are concentrated to the south and east of the Cricket Pavilion, with the exception of the ridge and furrow evidence along the west bank of the River Cherwell.

It should be noted that geophysical surveying has its limitations and confirmation of the exact form and historical period of the features identified can only be sought through excavation. Therefore, no areas within the Parks can be definitively identified as not archaeological sensitive at all, nor can exact boundaries be ascribed to the areas of varying sensitivity. However, there are clear instances where recent developments will have impacted the archaeological potential; e.g. the rainwater attenuation works.

<sup>01</sup> Mitigation measures concerning the management of burrowing animals must be kept under regular review to ensure activity is not displaced to a different area of archaeological sensitivity.

# RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

## SUMMARY OF GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY FINDINGS

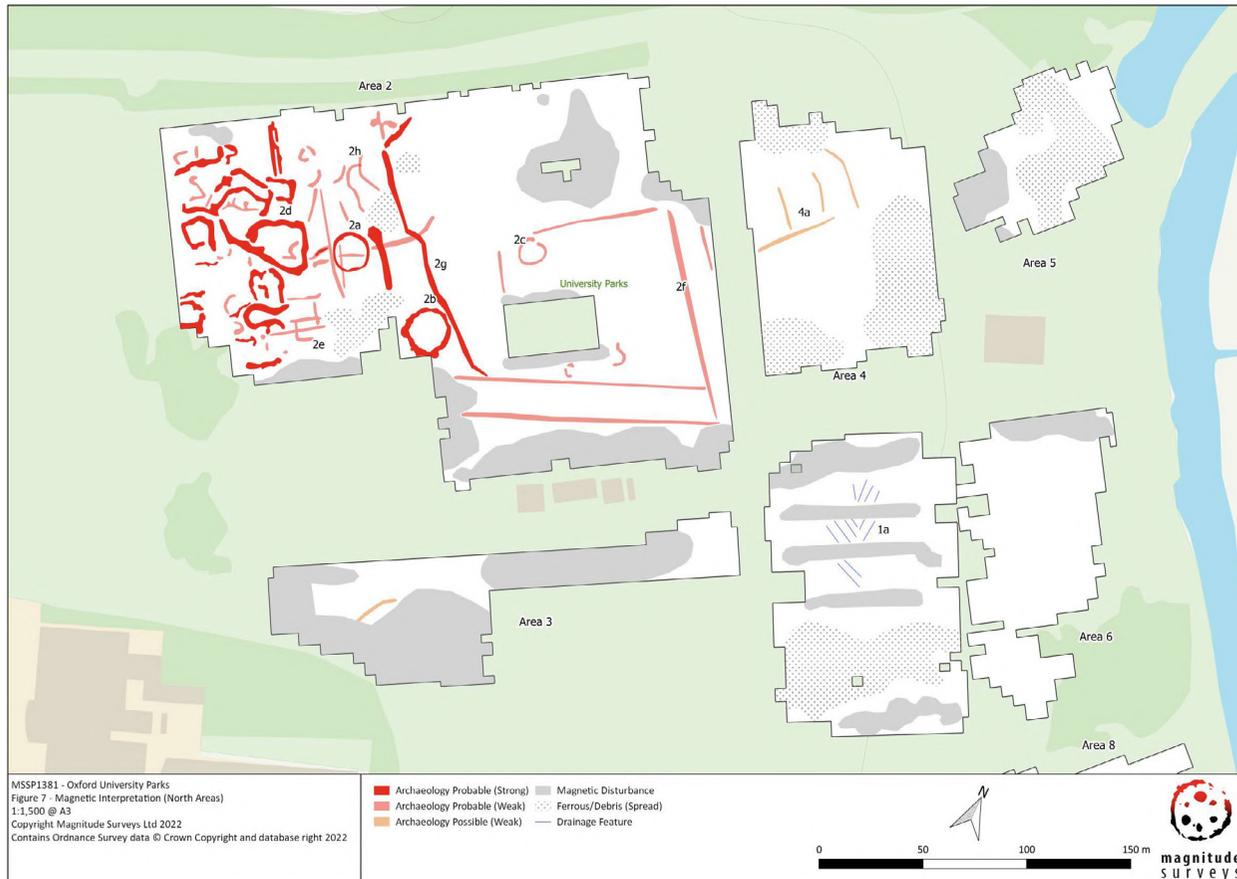


Previous geophysical survey findings, as identified by TVAS in the appended archaeological desk-based assessment.

### Summary of Findings by Area

Location	Findings
A	Ridge and furrow, likely evidencing medieval agricultural practices along the banks of the River Cherwell.
B	At least four ring ditches forming part of the linear barrow cemetery. Multiple ditches and pits, indicating different phases of land enclosure and other activity – likely prehistoric to Roman.
C	Iron Age and medieval linear features, as well as a number of pits, identified as tree-throw holes following excavation in preparation of the rainwater attenuation scheme.
	NB: Excavation has been carried out across the footprint of the attenuation tank in this location, meaning some archaeology has been recorded and removed.
D	Linear features, ditches and pits.

# RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES



The northern portion of additional geophysical survey findings, as identified in 2022 by Magnitude Surveys (see detailed report appended).

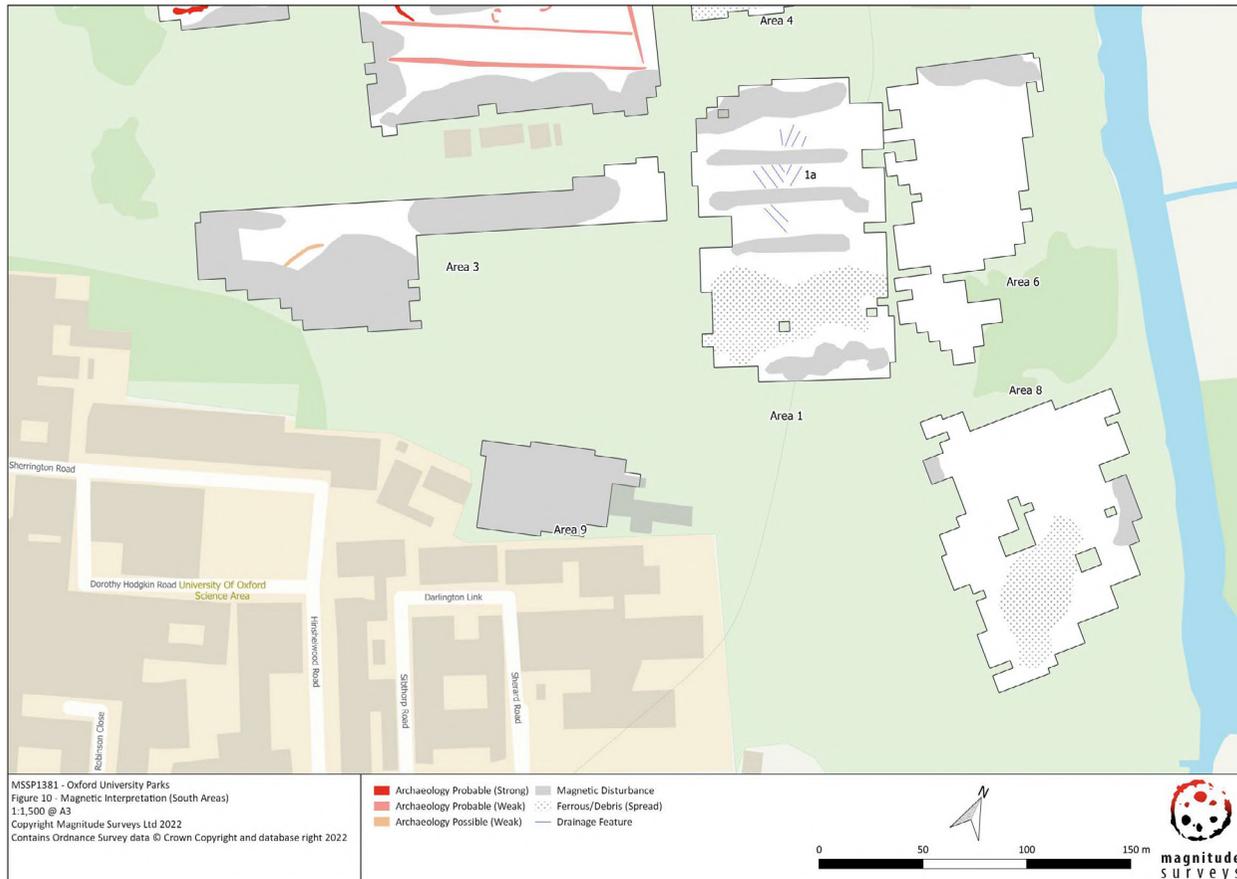
## Summary of Findings by Area

Location	Findings
1	Evidence of modern drains with extensive ferrous spread and magnetic disturbance indicating made ground/levelling works.
2	Strong indications of two ring ditches (2a/2b) and a weaker indication of another ring ditch (2c). Also strong indications of enclosures (2d) and indications of various strengths showing rectangular, linear and curvilinear features (2e/2f/2g) – suggesting different phases of archaeological activity. Other weak indicators of possible archaeology (2h). These findings link with those recorded in Area B – i.e. likely prehistoric to Roman.
3	Extensive magnetic disturbance – likely linked to the excavation associated with the rainwater attenuation works. A weak indication of possible curvilinear feature.
4	Weak indication of curvilinear feature.
5	Magnetic disturbance and ferrous spread, indicating made ground/levelling works.
6	Small area of magnetic disturbance but otherwise no findings.



NB: No area 7 has been identified by Magnitude, presumably in error.

# RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES



The southern portion of additional geophysical survey findings, as identified in 2022 by Magnitude Surveys (see detailed report appended).

## Summary of Findings by Area

Location	Findings
8	Small area of magnetic disturbance and some ferrous spread, indicating made ground/levelling work, and a large area of no finds.
9	Extensive magnetic disturbance.

NB: No area 7 has been identified by Magnitude, presumably in error.

## RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES



Very high archaeological sensitivity

This is the easternmost section of the late Neolithic/early Bronze Age linear barrow cemetery which runs in a distinct east-west line across the northern edge of the city centre and is particularly significant.



High archaeological sensitivity

This is a multi-phased landscape with evidence of late Neolithic/early Bronze Age activity, as well as Iron Age and Roman field systems, droveways and enclosures which are especially concentrated, coherent and well-preserved.



Moderate archaeological sensitivity

This area has evidence of isolated undated features and remnants of ridge and furrow. Modern disturbances also mask the result of geophysical survey.

PLEASE NOTE: These boundaries are drawn very approximately from the available geophysical survey reporting and are only intended to give an illustrative overview of the University Parks's archaeological sensitivity.

*This plan is not to scale*



## RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

### 4.1.3 Building Uses

There are relatively few buildings within the Parks and most have established, viable uses. However, the South Lodge is currently occupied by Reuben College on a temporary basis whilst its permanent home is being readied in the former Radcliffe Science Library. The use of South Lodge after the College re-locate is unconfirmed. The building is not listed but does contribute to the character of the Parks and should be considered as a non-designated heritage asset.

### 4.1.4 Climate Change

The effects of extreme weather and surface water run-off is increasing the flood risk potential along the eastern edge of the Parks where it directly borders the River Cherwell. The increasingly pronounced shifts from extreme rainfall to spells of drought and high temperatures also poses a risk to biodiversity, which is not a direct threat to heritage but has a potential knock-on impact if planted features which contribute to the aesthetic character of the landscape are lost without mitigation. Strengthening winds also pose a particular threat to the trees within the Parks, which are a key characteristic feature of the landscape and survive as some of its earliest landscape design features. These risks all impact the safe usability of the Parks (therefore also its high social and communal value) and has the potential to increase the occasions when the Parks have to be closed as a safety precaution.

### 4.1.5 Development Pressures

The Parks are unlikely to see major development pressures within its boundary; however, the continued evolution of the Science Area poses a risk to its setting, as well as any archaeological features which are associated with the known archaeology within the Parks. Recent finds on the site of the Centre for Gene Function are evidence of the link between the archaeological potential and interest of the Parks and Science Area.

The large buildings within the Science Area form the back drop to the south side of the Parks and are visually very prominent. Increases in building height or changes to the external treatments have the potential to impact the setting of the Parks.

### 4.1.6 Sports' Facilities

Sport preferences are evolving, with newer sports such as American Football increasing in popularity over traditional sports such as rugby and cricket. There is a corresponding pressure to provide new sports' pitches, which requires localised groundwork to install the associated posts.

### 4.1.7 Statutory and University Processes

Listed buildings and conservation areas are protected under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Works to a listed building will require listed building consent (as well as planning permission where this is required). Consents specifically for conservation area works are no longer applicable under the current English planning system. However, planning permission may be required as a result of conservation area designation, including but not limited to: demolitions and changes to external features or landscaping. The protection of the special historic and architectural interest of the conservation area will be a material consideration in determining any planning application where such designation is in place. National and local planning policies recognise that changes to other buildings or sites within the vicinity of a heritage asset can affect the special interest of that asset, and that this impact will also be a material consideration in determining any application. To mitigate any risk of misinterpreting statutory processes, advice should be requested from the local authority to establish what consents are required and the extent of the information needed in support of such applications. There is a permit to dig protocol internally by the University.

There is a permit to dig protocol internally by the University.

The guidance refers to scheduled monuments and the need to obtain the relevant consent where such designation is in place; however, this does not apply to the University Parks or any other site where archaeology is known/suspected to be present. Non-designated archaeology is not currently afforded any protection under this process.

This CMP will provide a starting point for the gathering of relevant and proportionate baseline information which will be necessary to understand the significance potentially impacted by any proposed works.

### 4.1.8 Sustainability

The University Environmental Sustainability Strategy sets a target of achieving Net Zero carbon by 2035 and is looking for opportunities to decarbonise its heat. As part of this, a feasibility study looking at the potential for a ground source heat pump in the University Parks was carried out in 2011. The potential harm to the suspected archaeology in this area prompted the City Archaeologist to consider the possibility of the Parks becoming a scheduled monument. The conservation management plan process has highlighted the sensitivities of the Parks unique historic environment and rich archaeological landscape but also the crucial role the area can play in meeting future sustainability challenges.

### 4.1.9 Temporary Events & Commercial Pressures

Commercial pressures present a relatively low risk to the University Parks as the curators closely monitor requests and prioritise the use of the Parks for quiet public enjoyment. Previous events which have been held in the Parks were observed to have caused damage that had not been anticipated and consequently will not be permitted again. Additional signage or pop-up structures have the potential to impact the landscape and aesthetic value of the Parks if unmanaged but will likely be subject to planning permission requirements.

## RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

A marquee is erected during the summer months for the University community to book. In light of the increased awareness of the Parks' archaeological features, this marquee is now weighted down rather than staked. However, this presents an alternative risk of compacting the soil.

### 4.1.10 Tree Management

The Parks maintain a tree inventory; however, the south-east corner and riverbank trees are missing, making the inventory incomplete. It is recognised that the majority of the trees within the Parks are early mature or mature, meaning a proactive succession planting strategy is needed. Trees are a key character-defining feature of the landscape design and are a tangible link to the historical decisions made by previous Parks management.

Risk to the Parks' trees are also posed by:

- Grounds and pitch maintenance
- Pests and disease
- Temporary events causing soil compaction, crushing roots, or impact with trunks and branches
- Inadequate management of old trees
- Vandalism

In instances where archaeological evaluation (i.e. physical excavation) is permitted, this also has the potential to impact roots if features are found to extend close to trees. This cannot always be anticipated through geophysical survey as root growth can impact the accuracy of the surveying technology.

### 4.1.11 User Expectations

The University Parks is a public amenity and leisure resource. Such places play an increasingly prominent role in public health and wellbeing. However, the Parks have limited interpretation material or engagement opportunities to enrich this experience.

Restrictions on playing music, lighting barbecues, climbing trees and hosting informal games in specific areas are enforced and generally accepted as a means of facilitating quiet enjoyment for everyone. Public WCs are available within the Parks but the facilities are limited and basic. There is increasing societal expectation for WCs that are of a good standard and accessible.

The Parks also host various organised runs, including the Town and Gown and Oxford Half Marathon, and is one of a number of landmark features along the route. The paths through and around the Parks have become increasingly popular with casual runners. The thoroughfares are sufficiently generous in width to accommodate both runners and walkers but there is potential for these users' expectations to differ; e.g. for one to feel the other gets in the way of their enjoyment.

## 4.2 OPPORTUNITIES

### 4.2.1 Accessibility

The opportunity to address accessibility concerns has already been partly taken with the recent access audit. Further opportunities to improve the accessibility of the University Parks will be highlighted in this targeted assessment.

### 4.2.2 Biodiversity and Climate Change Resilience

Biodiversity and climate change resilience are specialist disciplines which link to and often overlap with heritage considerations. However, at a general level there are a number of opportunities which will continue the long-established role of the Parks as an enclave for the natural environment within a city centre. In particular, addressing the need to succession plan tree planting with specimens that are resilient to extreme weather so that the distinctive leafiness of the landscape is continued. The historic plant selection is an interesting narrative within the Parks development. There is opportunity to study this further, particularly where this can inform future planting schemes or support a divergence from

previous schemes where there is precedent for responding to different contexts (e.g. availability, funding) throughout history. The goal of achieving net zero carbon and biodiversity net gain by 2035 could mean that the Parks would host biodiversity and climate related projects in the future. There is opportunity to engage with a variety of stakeholders to help inform works relating to biodiversity, ranging from the Environment Agency to the Oxfordshire Gardens Trust.

A separate Preliminary Ecological Appraisal will identify specific biodiversity and other opportunities associated with the natural environment in and around the Parks, including the neighbouring Site of Special Scientific Interest.

### 4.2.3 Protecting and Enhancing Significance

The archaeological landscape that has been recorded across the Parks should be treated as a non-designated heritage asset as a means of ensuring its protection. An early opportunity to facilitate this has already been recognised in the commissioning of this CMP. Additional control could be sought through the University's permit to dig protocol, with authorising persons being trained to recognise where works have the potential to impact the archaeological resource within the Parks and redirect the project team to the City Archaeologist to confirm how to proceed. Next steps are likely to include targeted desk-based assessment, followed potentially by trial trenching, a watching brief and excavation of preservation in situ as appropriate. It is imperative to remember each proposal needs to be considered on a case by case basis and that archaeological considerations should be discussed as early as possible during the feasibility stage.

There are opportunities to continue protecting the significance of the listed buildings within the Parks by updating existing conservation management plans to reflect current policy and needs, and to engage suitably-experienced consultant teams

## RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

whenever change is proposed to ensure sensitive proposals are developed. There is also an opportunity to improve the setting of the listed cricket pavilion by refurbishing and improving the neighbouring Rhodes Pavilion.

The character and significance of the conservation area and registered park will be monitored through the planning permission process. A heritage assessment will usually be required as part of an application, which is an opportunity to identify what element of significance has the potential to be impacted by proposed works and how any adverse impact could be mitigated through design revision. The same process could be used informally and internally by the University to understand the impact of new planting proposals, which are not typically subject to planning requirements.<sup>02</sup>

### 4.2.4 Public Engagement

There are numerous opportunities to enrich users' experience of the University Parks through public engagement. An over-arching opportunity is to put together an interpretation and engagement strategy which sets out the key narratives which will underpin this material and which highlight the history and significance of the Parks. This could include traditional interpretation material such as panels; however, the visual impact of such features on the character of the landscape, as well as the impact of any required post holes, will need to be understood before confirming the suitability of these features. Active engagement through mobile-based self-guided walking trails or guided tours offer greater flexibility and can be responsive to emerging themes and interests.

Themes which have the potential to enhance users' appreciation of the Parks' history and significance include:

- The story of Parson's Pleasure and the role of the River Cherwell in Oxford's leisure past times
- Historic trees and planting schemes
- The archaeological landscape

There is also potential to incorporate interpretation content within interactive mapping.

### 4.2.5 Training, Awareness and Collaboration

To ensure the team responsible for the upkeep of the Parks are aware of the rich archaeological landscape underneath the surface, some basic awareness training could become part of the new starter induction process. New finds should also be shared with the team to maintain their engagement with and appreciation for the Parks' archaeology.

All contractors should be made aware of requirements for the protection of both the trees and archaeology.

Information relating to the heritage significance of the Parks, including archaeology could be incorporated into general asset management protocols and resources so that the full context of the Parks and its management can be understood. This could potentially be through a GIS database or similar (i.e. data driven mapping).

More broadly, there are opportunities for the Parks and Estates Services teams to collaborate across departments and disciplines, including but by no means limited to:

- The teams at Harcourt Arboretum and Wytham Woods
- The University Museum
- School of Archaeology
- School of Geography and the Environment

This has the potential to facilitate sharing lesson learnt and successes.

### 4.2.6 Tree Management

There is a clear opportunity to complete the tree inventory to understand exactly what exists within the Parks and in what condition. This should be kept up to date with regular reviews and could be maintained as an interactive database that can be updated in real time (e.g. GIS map). Once the tree stock is understood, a strategy can be developed to address the succession planning that is identified as a key risk. This can also take into consideration other pressures which are not directly related to heritage significance but which have the potential impact on this, such as introducing different species that are more tolerant to the 21<sup>st</sup>-century climate but diverge from the historic collection.

<sup>02</sup> Historic England provide guidance on how to prepare a statement of heritage significance here: <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/statements-heritage-significance-advice-note-12/>

## RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

### 4.2.7 Understanding the Site's Archaeology

An opportunity to better understand the Parks' archaeology has already be recognised and actioned with the completion of the geophysical survey to cover as much of the site as possible. This has highlighted the relative archaeological sensitivity across the Parks. As improved technology becomes available in the future, there will be further opportunities to enhance this resource and potentially understand the below-ground archaeology even further.

The parch marks which have long been identified within the Parks during long hot and dry spells recently became visible again in the summer of 2022. Historic England recognised this as an opportunity to document the parch marks using drone photography. In future instances where weather conditions cause the parch marks to re-appear, the University should take or commission further drone photography. This will assist in documenting and detecting any changes to the features below the ground which would otherwise remain concealed.

Where any development is proposed that has the potential to require ground excavation (on any scale), the City Archaeologist should be consulted to agree suitable means of excavation or mitigations as required on a case by case basis before work commences. The permit to dig protocol is an opportunity for this need to be identified as soon as possible and the University's regular SLA meetings offer a forum to facilitate early dialogue. The locational sensitivities highlighted in section 4.1.2 can be taken as a starting point for understanding and mitigating risks associated with archaeological potential.

Alongside development-driven archaeological opportunities, there is potential for collaboration with the University's Institute of Archaeology and other departments or societies, particularly with regards to trialling new technologies, research projects and publications.

## SECTION 5.0

### MANAGEMENT POLICIES

This section of the CMP responds to the risks and opportunities identified in Section 4 and sets out a series of corresponding actions to address these in a manner that preserves and enhances the identified heritage significance. These apply to both the immediate future as well as the long-term conservation management of the Parks. It is not the intention to set out a prescriptive 'to-do list'; rather, create a sufficiently flexible framework to inform decision making and plan a course of action where potential conflict arises.

REF	POLICY	REASON	DEPARTMENT/TEAM RESPONSIBLE
<b>Accessibility</b>			
1	Accessibility audits will be undertaken at regular intervals.	To monitor changing or new challenges that may prevent inclusive enjoyment of the Parks.	Estates Services
2	The recommendations made in the access audit will be addressed.	To facilitate inclusive enjoyment of the Parks.	Estates Services
<b>Archaeology</b>			
3	The archaeology of the Parks will be recognised and treated as a non-designated heritage asset.	To protect irreplaceable archaeological resource.	All
4	Further archaeological investigation will be carried out where opportunities arise, such as the availability of new technology or in relation to permitted works. Findings will be documented in the Oxford Historic Environment Record.	To better understand the archaeological sensitivities of the site.	Estates Services / Appointed Archaeological Consultant
5	The University will adopt a policy of preservation in situ, except in wholly exceptional circumstances and with the agreement of the City Archaeologist.	To protect irreplaceable archaeological resource.	Estates Services / Parks Team
6	The viability of any proposed ground penetration will be informed by the archaeological sensitivity map in this CMP and supplemented with additional research as requested by the City Archaeologist.	To protect areas of high archaeological sensitivity from harm, both as a result of major works and incremental smaller impacts.	Estates Services / Parks Team

## MANAGEMENT POLICIES

REF	POLICY	REASON	DEPARTMENT/TEAM RESPONSIBLE
7	Those authorised to approve works under the permit to dig protocol will be briefed on the additional requirements and archaeological conditions within the University Parks. This will include directives to consult the City Archaeologist, as required.	To incorporate the protection of irreplaceable archaeological resource with an existing protocol.	Estates Services
8	Any proposals to extend planting beyond established beds or clumps will be informed by the archaeological sensitivity of the Parks. Particular attention will be required where planting intervention has the potential to impact the linear barrow cemetery (as identified as a site of very high archaeological sensitivity).	To protect against harm to the archaeology as a result of excavation in the short term or root growth in the long term.	Parks Team
9	The City Archaeologist will be consulted where trees within or in close proximity to areas of high archaeological sensitivity are at risk of uprooting, or have uprooted as a result of unforeseen circumstances.	To ascertain the risk of harm to the irreplaceable archaeological resource.	Parks Team
10	Any measures implemented as a means of managing burrowing activity will be monitored and re-planned as required where the below-ground archaeology is deemed to be at risk.	To prevent unintentional referred impact to the irreplaceable archaeological resource.	Estates Services / Parks Team
11	Metal detecting will not be permitted within the Parks.	To protect against ad hoc and non-permitted digging.	Parks Team
12	Parks staff will be made aware of the site's archaeological sensitivities.	To ensure those responsible for the care and maintenance of the Parks recognise its archaeological importance.	Parks Team
<b>Asset Management</b>			
13	The possibility of incorporating the management of the Parks's heritage significance within a broader asset management system such as interactive mapping will be explored.	To provide a comprehensive record of the many asset types, management requirements, protocols and constraints, and help identify areas of potential conflict.	Estates Services

## MANAGEMENT POLICIES

REF	POLICY	REASON	DEPARTMENT/TEAM RESPONSIBLE
<b>Building Conservation</b>			
14	Listed building consent will be obtained for any proposals affecting the Pavilion, North Lodge and bridge at Parson's Pleasure, including any works that has the potential to impact their setting.	To comply with statutory requirements.	Estates Services / Occupying Department
15	A regular cycle of condition survey will be carried out for all buildings and structural features, including gates and railings.	To identify maintenance requirements and repairs.	Estates Services
<b>Commercial Operations</b>			
16	Applications for events and other commercial ventures will be considered on a case by case basis.	To ensure public access to the Parks remains a priority and to mitigate potential conflicts (archaeological, arboricultural or operational).	Parks Curators
<b>Development</b>			
17	Development of the Science Area will be carefully managed and overseen by Parks Curators.	To protect the natural, landscape and heritage value of the Parks.	Estates Services
18	The finds of any watching briefs or archaeological evaluation within the Science Area will be added to the Historic Environment Record.	To increase knowledge of the potential type and significance of the archaeology nearby within the Parks.	Appointed Archaeological Consultant
<b>Enhancing Well-Being and Engagement</b>			
19	Opportunities for an interpretation and engagement strategy will be explored further.	To increase awareness of the different aspects which make the Parks important and unique, and to recognise its high social and communal value.	Parks Curators/Parks Team
20	Opportunities for cross-department/discipline collaboration in relation to the research, use and management of the Parks will be encouraged and supported.	To exchange knowledge, experience and new ideas that have the potential to further reveal the heritage significance of the Parks or the ability to appreciate its significance.	Estates Services Parks Curators Parks Team

## MANAGEMENT POLICIES

REF	POLICY	REASON	DEPARTMENT/TEAM RESPONSIBLE
<b>Natural Environment</b>			
21	The recommendations of the preliminary ecological appraisal and any other future studies concerning the natural environment will be cross-referenced with the heritage constraints set out in this CMP. This includes any future research into the evolution of the collections and new planting schemes.	To identify areas of potential conflict or opportunity, and plan an appropriate course of action to address this.	Parks Team
22	A tree management strategy will be prepared, including a plan for succession planting. Particular attention will be required concerning the management and/or replacement of existing trees over or near the linear barrow cemetery (area of very high archaeological sensitivity).	To maintain the defining character of the Parks as a richly planted space.	Parks Team
<b>Sustainability</b>			
23	The preservation of the Parks' archaeology will be a key factor in determining the feasibility of any sustainability improvement schemes requiring ground excavation.	To protect the significance and integrity of the known and potential archaeology within the Parks.	Estates Services

## APPENDIX A

### REGISTER OF HISTORIC PARKS AND GARDENS – UNIVERSITY PARKS ENTRY

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#### THE UNIVERSITY PARKS, OXFORD

Heritage Category: Park and Garden

Grade: II

List Entry Number: 1001651

Date first listed: 11-Nov-2002

National Grid Reference: SP 51919 07160

Details

Mid 1860s suburban park, with playing fields laid out in the 1870s, and an associated pleasure walk (1865) alongside the River Cherwell. The site was laid out by the University of Oxford for use principally by the staff and students but with access also for the residents of Oxford.

#### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1853 Oxford University started to negotiate with Merton College for the purchase of a parcel of land lying west of the River Cherwell, this area having formerly been part of the University Walks. Some 8ha was purchased in 1854, 2ha of which was used for the site of the University Museum, built from 1855 to 1860. A further 29ha were bought over the next five years, together with the 1.5ha spur of land leading south alongside the Cherwell towards King's Mill standing at the north end of Magdalen College's land (qv). In 1860 the Committee of Parks Delegates was formed to oversee the development of the University Parks, and it reported that the Parks should be set out as an arboretum and place of recreation for the University. James Bateman, who had laid out his own garden at Biddulph Grange, Staffordshire (qv) in the 1850s, was invited by the Committee to provide a design for the Parks (WPBeta/13/3; GA Oxon a 64). The elements of the plan were described in the First Report of the Parks Delegates (3 June 1863), who referred it to Sir William Hooker of Kew and other eminent authorities for their opinions. The Delegates proposed that Robert Marnock of the Botanical Gardens, Regent's Park

should provide professional supervision to oversee the execution of the plan, the cost of which was estimated to be £9475. This plan was rejected by Convocation, and in January 1864 the Delegates resigned en bloc.

The Parks was then laid out from 1864 in a simpler fashion for a new body, the Parks Curators, the work being supervised by William Baxter (1815-90) of the University Botanic Garden (qv). Baxter was subsequently appointed Superintendent in 1866, a position which he occupied until just before his death in 1890.

The area was fenced, paths and belts were laid out, and an arboretum of exotic species was planted. The Mesopotamia Walk, leading south-east from the Parks to King's Mill, was created in 1865 as part of this work. In February 1867 a report was received from a Mr Field of Merton Street, who had surveyed the open central part of the Parks with a view to siting sports pitches. An undated plan made by him at this time, showing the possible sites for the pitches, also shows the initial path layout and structure of the Parks, which bears little resemblance to that proposed by Bateman. Two lodges were also erected at this time, and the Cricket Pavilion, designed by the architect T G Jackson who also designed the University Examination Building, was erected at the centre of the Parks in 1880.

A section of the southern part of the Parks was lost during the mid to late C20 to the development of the University Science Area. The remainder of the Parks continues (2002) to be owned by the University and open to the public.

#### DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The University Parks lies at the northern edge of the centre of Oxford, c 750m north of Carfax. The c 30ha site is situated on largely level

land with a slight fall from west to east. It forms a buffer between that part of the city to the south where many of the medieval and later colleges are situated, including New College, and Wadham College (qqv), and the mid to late C19 largely residential development of North Oxford, including the Norham Manor development immediately to the north-west, and the Park Town development (qv) beyond this. The approximately triangular park is bounded to the north-east by the River Cherwell, and beyond this by water meadows leading to Marston. To the north-west the Parks are bounded partly by the substantial, individually designed houses of Norham Gardens (1860s and later), standing in their own spacious plots, together with, to the north-east of these, Lady Margaret Hall (1880s and later) standing within its own grounds at the north corner of the Parks. To the west it is bounded by Parks Road, leading south-east from the Banbury Road, with the polychrome brick Keble College (William Butterfield 1868-72) standing close to the south-west corner. The western section of the south boundary is formed by the University Science Area buildings, at the south-west corner of which stands the gothic University Museum (B Woodward 1855-60, listed grade I), which formerly stood at the south-west corner of the Parks and was the dominant building. The Science Area is bounded to the south by South Parks Road, lined with mature lime trees, which until the mid C20, when many of the Science Area buildings were constructed, marked this section of the south boundary. The east end of the south boundary is marked by college buildings and playing fields, divided from the Parks by the north-west end of Mesopotamia Walk leading from South Lodge to a bridge over the Cherwell. The Parks' boundary is marked largely by iron railings and gates, except to the east where the river forms the boundary. The setting is suburban and collegiate to north and south respectively, and rural to the east, with views in this direction across the water meadows towards Marston and Headington Hill.

## REGISTER OF HISTORIC PARKS AND GARDENS – UNIVERSITY PARKS ENTRY

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The main pedestrian approach from the town centre is at the west corner of the Parks via the north end of Parks Road close to where it joins Banbury Road, c 400m west-north-west of the central Cricket Pavilion. At this point the entrance from Parks Road is marked by a two-storey stone lodge (H W Moore 1866, listed grade II), built in Tudor style with a massive central chimney stack. A further entrance is marked by South Lodge (1890s), a brick and tile-hung house which stands on the south boundary, c 400m south-east of the Pavilion at the main vehicular entrance to the Parks. There are several further pedestrian entrances, including those from Norham Gardens, c 250m north of the Pavilion, from Parks Road at the south-west corner close to Keble College, 300m south-west of the Pavilion, and from Marston via a track from the east which crosses the Cherwell via the single-arched, concrete High Bridge (1923-4) and enters the park c 250m north-east of the Pavilion. The north-west end of Mesopotamia Walk extends east-north-east from South Lodge alongside the east section of the south boundary, including the south edge of Parson's Pleasure bathing place. The Walk leaves the Parks c 600m south-east of the Pavilion, carried across the Cherwell by a small, concrete single-span bridge (1949, listed grade II). Here the path splits in two, leading east to a track giving access across the water meadows to Marston, and south continuing as the Walk. The bridge is thought to be the first pre-stressed arched bridge of its kind. The Walk to the west of Parson's Pleasure formerly lay within the boundary of the Parks, but in the 1990s was separated by an iron fence although it remains included within the area here registered.

A further C19 lodge, West Lodge (now, 2002, gone), formerly stood c 350m south of the Pavilion, to the east of the Museum and marked another entrance to the Parks. This was removed in the C20 with the construction of the Science Area.

**PLEASURE GROUNDS** The University Parks is of a simple design, laid out with a network of largely gravel paths enclosed by an informal gravel perimeter path, which also encloses open lawns on which lie playing fields.

From the main, west entrance at North Lodge the perimeter path extends to the north-east and south-east. The north-west arm of the path is known as North Walk and the area between it and the north-west boundary is occupied by a belt planted with mature conifers and broadleaved trees, underplanted with evergreen shrubs including laurel and yew. At the north corner North Walk meets a 1920s pond (formerly circular, enlarged late C20) which is partly encircled by rockwork retaining walls. To the north and north-west lie the grounds of Lady Margaret Hall, at the west edge of which stand the college buildings. The perimeter path continues south-east from the pond as Riverside Walk, overlooking the river to the east and beyond this the meadows and Marston. At the south-east corner, known as Cox's Corner (named after Charlie Cox, a former keeper of Parson's Pleasure bathing place) and formerly the site of the Parks' rubbish dump, the path turns west to skirt the Science Area, at the north edge of which stands the Observatory (1874) and associated brick-built building, which when built stood isolated towards the middle of the southern half of the Parks. To the east of the Observatory lie two croquet lawns. To the west of the Observatory lies a further pedestrian entrance which gives onto the Genetic Garden, a mid C20 experimental garden established by Professor Cyril Darlington to demonstrate evolutionary processes. Some 300m south-west of the Pavilion at the south-west corner of the Parks the path turns north to follow the west boundary, here being known as West Walk. It is flanked by an avenue of holly bushes and ornamental borders before arriving at North Lodge.

Three main cross-paths traverse the Parks, two running parallel to the river, south-east to north-west, with the third at right angles to this connecting the entrance at the south-west corner close to Keble College with High Bridge to the north-east. Towards the centre of the park stands the University Cricket Club Pavilion (T G Jackson 1880, listed grade II), a substantial two-storey building in Picturesque style, with a five-bay verandah onto which open french windows, and a balustraded cupola. The Pavilion overlooks the cricket pitch to the north, and is placed at the centre of the ten winter sports pitches which occupy much of the Parks' open space. Apart from the perimeter belts of trees there are many clumps of trees and single specimens planted in the open areas between the sports pitches. A service area stands within a clump of trees 200m north-east of the Pavilion. A loosely planted group of seven Wellingtonias (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*, planted c 1888) stand at the west corner, close to North Lodge, and there are many other conifers throughout the Parks, including cedars and pines.

Until the mid C20 (OS 1938) the site of the Parks was approximately square, with the south corner being directly overlooked and dominated by the University Museum which stood in its own grounds. This relationship was largely severed when the Science Area was constructed from the mid C20 onwards.

At the south-east corner of the Parks the perimeter path gives access to the east to a bathing place known as Parson's Pleasure. The bathing place consists of a level lawn bounded to the north and east by the Cherwell, to the west by the Holywell Mill Stream, and to the south by Mesopotamia Walk. Parson's Pleasure, probably named after a local businessman (W Sawyer pers comm, March 2000), formerly contained changing rooms and associated buildings (OS 1938), these having been removed in the late C20. From the far side of the concrete bridge at the south-east corner of Parson's Pleasure the Walk continues south-east for 750m, raised on the narrow bank known as Mesopotamia, to the King's

## REGISTER OF HISTORIC PARKS AND GARDENS – UNIVERSITY PARKS ENTRY

Mill (late C18, listed grade II). The path is flanked to the south-west by the Cherwell, and beyond this by various college water meadows, including Music Meadow, Great Meadow, and Long Meadow, and to the north-east by the King's Mill mill stream and beyond this the water meadows leading to Marston. The bank is planted with various deciduous trees including many willows, and several bridges cross the mill stream giving access to paths across the meadows to the north-east. The two-storey, stone former mill stands to the north of Magdalen College Fellows' Garden (qv), 750m south-east of Parson's Pleasure, on the east side of the mill stream, across which it is reached via a bridge. From the mill a track leads east between college sports grounds to Marston Road. The path along Mesopotamia Walk was improved at approximately the same time as the Parks was being laid out in 1865. It was named after the strip of land between the Rivers Tigris and Euphrates in Iraq, the name deriving from the Greek for, 'between the rivers'. Views extend north-east across the meadows and sports grounds towards Marston and Headington Hill, and south-west across the college meadows to further sports grounds and college buildings, with the spires and towers of some of the central Oxford churches and colleges also visible.

### REFERENCES

Oxford University Gazette, 1 (1870) N Pevsner and J Sherwood, *The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire* (1974), pp 276-82 M Batey, *Oxford Gardens* (1982), pp 146, 168 *Oxfordshire Parks and Gardens Review Stage 1*, (Colvin and Moggridge 1997)

Maps J Bateman, Unexecuted plan for the University Parks, Oxford, 1863 (GA Oxon a 64), (Bodleian Library, Oxford) Mr Field, Plan of the University Parks, nd (c February 1867) (WPBeta/13/3), (University Archive, Oxford)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1887 2nd edition published 1900 3rd edition published 1922 1938 edition OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1876

Archival items Material covering the laying out and maintenance of the Parks including the Parks Delegates' Minute Book, the Parks Curators' Minute Books and a folder of miscellaneous papers including Field's plan of 1867 (University of Oxford Archive)

Additional information *The University Parks Oxford* (2000), at [www.parks.ox.ac.uk](http://www.parks.ox.ac.uk)

Description written: March 2000 Amended: November 2002  
Register Inspector: SR Edited: October 2003

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.

## APPENDIX B

### LISTED BUILDINGS ENTRIES

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#### OXFORD UNIVERSITY CRICKET CLUB PAVILION

Grade: II

List Entry Number: 1047099

Date first listed: 28-Jun-1972

National Grid Reference: SP 51590 07243

Details

UNIVERSITY PARKS I. 1485 Oxford University Cricket Club Pavilion SP 50 NW 24/855 II 2. 1880. By T G Jackson. Red brick with tile hung gable ends. 2 storeys. The ground floor has a 5 bay verandah with French windows. Above the front is gabled in 3 bays; the gables have surface timbering and a 2-light mullion and transom window. Red tile roof with balustraded cupola.

Listing NGR: SP5159007243

#### NORTH LODGE OF THE UNIVERSITY PARKS

Grade: II

List Entry Number: 1081509

Date first listed: 28-Jun-1972

National Grid Reference: SP 51185 07293

Details

PARKS ROAD I. 1485 (East Side) North Lodge of The University Parks SP 5107 SW 3/799 II 2. 1862. By H W Moore Ashlar. 2 storeys. One and 2-light windows, 2-light have stone mullions. Projecting porch with a 4 light diamond lattice mullioned window. Some windows have shaped heads. Red tile roof with massive central stack.

Listing NGR: SP5118507293

#### FOOTBRIDGE OVER RIVER CHERWELL AT PARSONS PLEASURE PUNT ROLLERS, SOUTH PARKS ROAD

Grade: II

List Entry Number: 1119763

Date first listed: 29-May-1998

Details

Footbridge over river, crossing the tail of the Parson's Pleasure weir and now part of the Marston cycle track, 1949. R Travers Morgan and Partners. Prestressed concrete with aluminium alloy parapets. Two post-tensioned portal frames with a clear span of 45ft, rigidly fixed to bases, with deck of prestressed precast planks, later replaced by in situ concrete. This is the first statically indeterminate prestressed concrete bridge in Britain, and may be the first prestressed fixed arch in the world. (Concrete and Constructional Engineering, October: Goldstein A: Design and Construction of Arch Footbridge at Oxford: 1950-)

Listing NGR: SP5213307084

