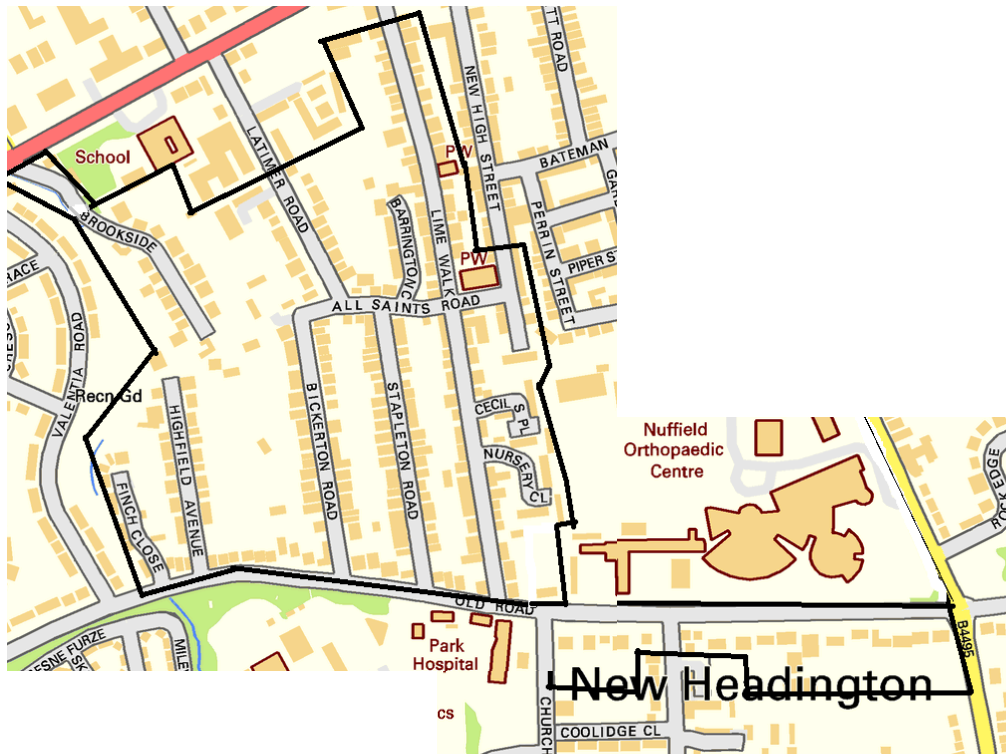


CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

AREA 10: HIGHFIELD and OLD ROAD



GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA

This area consists of two distinct geographic sub-areas. The main area is located between London Road to the north and Old Road Campus to the south, Valentia Road to the west and New High Street / Nuffield Hospital to the east. Within this area there are three distinct building periods: the majority around 1900, Brookside in c1930 and Finch Close in 1985.

The second area is the stretch of Old Road from Finch Close in the west to Windmill Road junction in the east.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Highfield

The High Field was one of the four great fields of Headington. Highfield Farm, stretched from what is now Lime Walk to Boundary Brook. Its farmhouse (c 1700) in Highfield Avenue is the only listed building in this area. Though 70 acres were sold for building in 1875 there was little development until plots were sold for houses at the south end of Lime Walk in 1884. Roads west of Lime Walk date from c1905. The new parish church of All Saints was built in 1910.

The Britannia Field, where the coaching inn kept all its horses, was not joined to the London Rd until c1919 and so developed later. In 1926 the Shirley Memorial Hall (taken over by the Exclusive Brethren in c.1980 and by St Ebbe's in 2007) became the central Headington meeting place, and by 1930 Headington Telephone Exchange opened. Lime Walk Methodist Church moved from New High Street to Lime Walk in 1932, and the new Headington Sorting Office (closed 2005) had moved in beside the telephone exchange by 1938.

The shop on the corner of Lime Walk and All Saints' Road was the post office and hub of the community from 1890 to 1947.

Brookside

Plot No. 20 in the Headington Enclosure Award of 1805 was attached to Brookside mansion (now Headington Preparatory School). By 1911 it was the site of nurseries which moved c1930 for the development of **Brookside Avenue**.

Old Road

Until 1789, coaches travelling from Oxford to London had to turn right half-way up Headington Hill into **Cheney Lane**, which led to the Old London Road and then over Shotover Hill. During the 1770s the new London Road was cut. As a result, after 1789 Old Road became a quiet backwater leading to Quarry and Shotover, and even after the University abolished the one-and-a-half mile residence limit for dons in 1915, its development was leisurely.

To the east of Lime Walk, north side, was all the grounds of the Wingfield Convalescent Home (demolished in 2007). All Saints' Vicarage (present No. 85) was built into the west corner.



Old Road, circa 1905-10, showing the old stone wall and entrance pillars to the former Highfield Park/Park Hospital (now Boundary Brook House)

KEY POSITIVE CHARACTER FEATURES

- Trees: wide variety of maturity, both in gardens and flanking roads, adds interest to the streetscape both immediate and in the distance.



Bickerton Road, JR Hospital in the background

- Terrain: undulating terrain provides vistas and focal points.



Finch Close, brick boundary walls and soft planting

- Verges and hedges: well-maintained hedges of considerable height, and grass verges lead the eye and frame the view.



Old Road, winding up towards Shotover

- Boundary hedges dividing properties, well-tended mature front gardens pertaining to period housing, and open plan and communal lawns of more recent developments.



Nursery Close: open-plan gardens with mown grass, shrubs and trees



Latimer Road: tall clipped hedges frame incline to London Road

- Mature unpaved front gardens are the norm in this area. Plots with wide road frontages (including post 1930 housing and later cul-de-sacs) include garages. Many properties have large gardens, some with ponds, encouraging wildlife. Others have mature fruit trees, reflecting the nursery and orchard legacy of the neighbourhood.
- Generous pavement widths and their trees create an atmosphere of openness and space, whilst old stone or brick walls and pillars serve as a reminder of the past and enhance the street scene.
- Old stone walls and pillars, and old brick walls serve as a reminder of Highfield's past and enhance the street scene.



View from Stapleton Road of C19 stone pillars and boundary wall of the former Highfield Park (now Boundary Brook House), Old Road

- Period dwellings ranging from modest late C19 single-fronted terraced cottages and double-fronted artisans' houses to spacious family homes of the earlier part of the C20, and interspersed are late C20 cul-de-sacs and C21 redevelopments, each road having its own distinctive range of features. No two roads are alike.
- Brick is the predominant building material, with polychrome brick decoration for the modest late C19 houses; tile hanging and box-bay windows for the larger early C20 houses; and extensive use of render in the 1920s and '30s. The brick of many houses has since been painted over.
- Front-facing roof lines retain their original pitched shape with few instances of later installed (often intrusive) dormer windows.



Bickerton Road, Edwardian-style family houses, rendered, with decorative tile hanging and



Lime Walk, late C19 double-fronted houses with decorative red-brick string courses, including on many of the chimneys



casement windows
Highfield Avenue, 1930s detached and semi-detached houses, rendered



Stapleton Road, early C20 houses with box-bay windows



Brookside, individually designed houses from the 1930s



Cecil Sharp Place, Oxford Housing Trust flats, 1974

- Spacious red-brick detached corner houses c. 1900 leading off Old Road into the residential roads of Highfield



Corner of Bickerton Road, tile-hung, stone surrounds on principal windows



Corner of Lime Walk, buff-brick string courses and quoins, including on the chimney stacks

- Infill and improvements to existing dwellings increasingly sympathetic to the vicinity, emulating the features and materials of neighbouring properties reflecting increased awareness and enhanced range of materials available, e.g. modern windows and replacement windows made to traditional designs.



Lime Walk, 2013 side extension in harmony with the character of the c. 1900 house



Samuel House flats, Bickerton Road, 2006, an extension of the former Highfield Cottage, 1878

- Some brown infill sites have been developed successfully in modern style.



Lime Tree Mews, 2009, Douglas Riach, developed on the site of the old GPO sorting office in Lime Walk

- Some properties enjoy ample off-street parking, eg Brookside, parts of Old Road/Bickerton Road and Latimer Road. The whole of Highfield is within a Controlled Parking Zone.
- A blue plaque on Jolliffe House, Old Road, commemorates Professor Gathorne Robert Girdlestone, pioneering surgeon and founder of the Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre, who lived in the now demolished Red House on this site from 1919 to 1948.



Street Garden Party, All Saints' Road, 2011

ISSUES

- As the introduction to these character assessments records, even the most prestigious developments have their downsides and Highfield is surrounded by large institutional developments with consequent impact on its character.
- The overall area's general concern with increased traffic and parking problems is felt to be particularly acute here. The nuisance associated with demolition and construction



Demolition and construction on Old Road Campus,

processes has had an adverse effect on Highfield's tranquillity. Instances of soil contamination and sewage malfunctions have raised anxieties about local wildlife and the health of water-courses such as Boundary Brook.

- The area shares with Headington in general concerns about inappropriate small-scale developments, such as unsympathetic replacement windows and obtrusive extensions. The conversion of family homes to HMOs contributes to increased traffic and parking issues, and puts additional pressure on the infrastructure generally. Loss of gardens jeopardises natural resources.
- Increased traffic volume has resulted in previously quiet residential roads in the area being used to reach major routes. Though traffic-calming measures (including build-outs at the junction of Lime Walk and All Saints' Road, and gateway entrances to all roads off Old Road and London Road) were introduced in 2011, the 20mph limit is not always observed, whilst faulty installation and infrequent street cleaning has led to blocked drains and flooding which deters walking and cycling. The close density of the late C19 and most of the early C20 housing (Lime Walk, much of Stapleton Road, part of Latimer Road) means most residents park on the road.
- Loss or contraction over the years of community assets: of small shops and businesses in Lime Walk; the squash club (now Finch Close); ready access to open land (now Little Oxford); and the cricket pitch at the Warneford Hospital.

2015



Light pollution, ORC, 2014



Old Rd Campus/Churchill Hospital site, Feb 2015. Pumps aerating balancing pond water affected by contaminants from ground source heat pumps. Contaminated water had to be pumped into the sewage system.



Old Road traffic bumper to bumper



On-road parking in Stapleton Road



Composted leaves at the Highfield Avenue gateway entrance



Blocked drains and flooding at the Latimer Road gateway entrance



Last remaining shop front in Lime Walk

GUIDANCE FOR DESIGN OF NEW DEVELOPMENT

- Both the population density and the visual aspect of the neighbourhood should be taken into consideration before introducing a higher proportion of HMOs and student accommodation to an area which needs housing for families and key workers.
- New builds, both domestic and institutional, should respect the character and scale of older buildings and avoid intrusion on the privacy and outlook of existing properties. Designers to consider the impact of new builds from all angles, not just from the frontage.
- Overflow problems with the culverts that run under All Saints' Road and Latimer Road to the Boundary Brook need careful attention.
- Incidents of sewage spillage and misconnection indicate that any future development must ensure that the system is adequate.
- Any development must avoid creating further pressure on traffic and on-street parking.
- Any paving-over of front gardens should be of permeable materials.
- When planting trees to maintain the leafy aspect of Highfield, varieties likely to cause root damage to the pavement should generally be avoided.

PROPOSED ASSETS

Historical Assets

- Boundary Brook House (formerly Highfield Park/Park Hospital) Old Road, 1886, described by Stephanie Jenkins as "by far the grandest house in Highfield".



- Late C19 high stone-built boundary wall and gate pillars to Boundary Brook House (formerly Highfield Park/Park Hospital), Old Road.
- 68 Old Road, early C20 detached house, a good example of Arts and Crafts architecture with its distinctively modern take on C17 manorial vernacular: rendered walls, casement windows, steep clay-tiled roof lines and deep front-facing gables. On the principle of function dictating form, the main rooms look onto the south-facing rear garden.



Community Assets

- Letter box in All Saints' Road attached to the wall of the former corner shop and post office, relocated to current site by popular demand.
- Community notice board fixed to the wall of the former corner shop in All Saints' Road.
- Sturdy wooden planters adding a focal point and colour to the intersection of Lime Walk and All Saints' Road.
- All Saints' Church, Lime Walk, 1910, landmark feature and venue for community events. The garden is an oasis of calm with its lime trees, well-tended bee-friendly flowerbeds, shrubs and lawns.
- Methodist Church, Lime Walk, 1932.
- St Ebbe's Church in Headington, Lime Walk, 2007.



Relocated letterbox in All Saints Road



All Saints' Church, 1910, Blomfield & Son

Ecological Assets

- Wide variety of trees inhibits the spread of tree disease. Lime trees on the boundary of All Saints' Church garden are the last remaining lime trees in Lime Walk, and the majestic horse chestnut trees flanking the Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre boundary on Old Road, form an attractive screen.
- Nearby open spaces, including Wild Life Corridor on the Old Road Campus, Warneford Meadow, Valentia Road Recreation Ground, Lye Valley SSSI and Rock Edge SSSI.