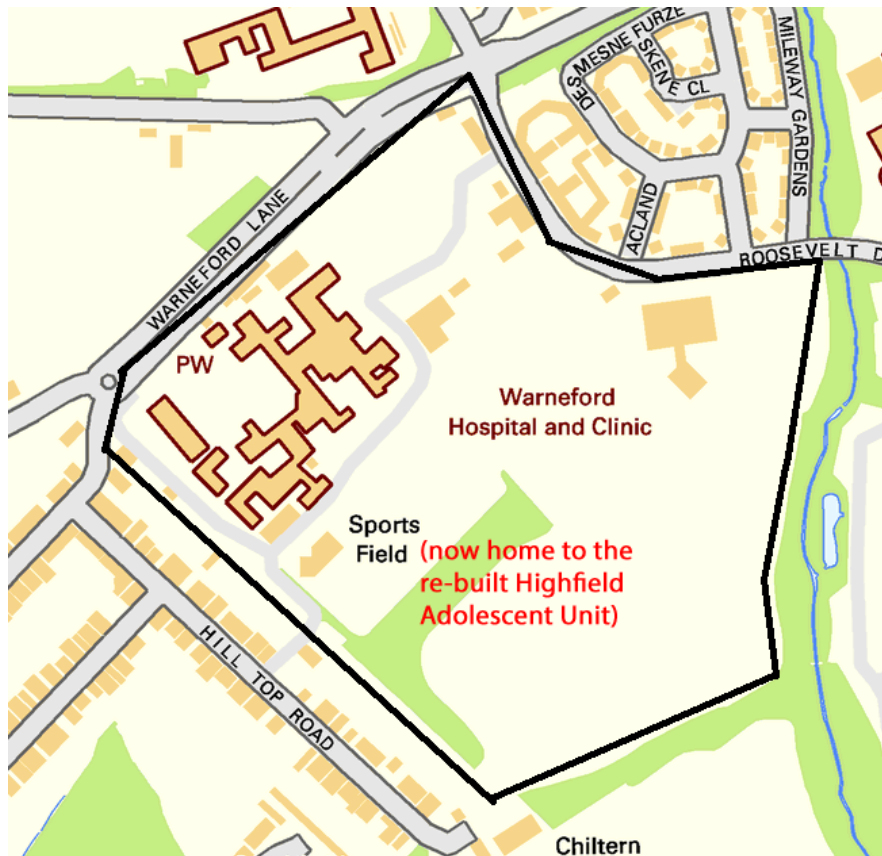




## CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

### CHARACTER AREA 15: Warneford



### GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA

#### ***The Warneford Hospital***

The Warneford Hospital is owned by Oxford Health NHS Trust. Not including Warneford Meadow (see below), the site extends to approximately 8.8 ha (21.7 acres). This includes the historic core of the site which comprises the original grade II listed 1826 buildings and many newer buildings constructed at various times since then. Also included are gardens and open spaces and the recently acquired Warneford Meadow, which is registered as a town green (see below).

#### ***Warneford Meadow***

Warneford Meadow is an attractive expanse of maintained meadowland south-east of the main Warneford Hospital site. The Meadow is approximately 7.4 ha (18.3 acres) in area. It slopes gently from west to east down to a stream called Boundary Brook. In technical terms, the site is 'semi-

improved neutral grassland surrounded by dense scrub, semi-natural broadleaved woodland, with tall vegetation and scattered broadleaved trees on the peripheries of the grassland'. The Meadow is crossed by a number of footpaths, some being public footpaths and others informal paths. There is a small traditional orchard on the north-western side of the Meadow.

## HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

### ***The Warneford Hospital***

When the Radcliffe Infirmary opened in 1770, its five-acre site off the road to Woodstock was in a rural setting well outside the city boundary. But by 1812, when there was a proposal to build a sister institution, the Radcliffe Lunatic Asylum, the area around the Infirmary was already becoming too built up. So in 1813 a ten-acre site was bought in Southfield off Old Road, where land was cheaper as well as more plentiful, and the air was very much better. The Asylum opened in 1826, the first of a number of hospitals to move to Headington in search of fresh air and open countryside. It was later renamed after its principal founder, the Rev S. W. Warneford.

The original elegant 'large and airy' house with two wings, built 'in a healthy situation... commanding pleasant views of the surrounding countryside' can still be made out at the centre of the site. A substantial extension, completed in 1877, now forms the entrance to Warneford Hospital, the date inscribed over the main entrance. A further extension was added in 1887.

Since then, there has been piecemeal development of the site, including some notable buildings. The Prince of Wales International Centre for SANE Research, by Demetri Porphyrios, was opened by HRH The Prince of Wales in February 2003. The Highfield Unit, providing specialist inpatient services for young people with acute mental health needs, opened to patients in February 2013.

### ***Warneford Meadow***

The Meadow was bought by Warneford Hospital in 1918 to protect it from development and provide food and therapeutic outdoor recreation for patients. The hospital farm closed in the 1960s, but the Meadow was grazed or a hay crop taken until the 1980s, when management largely ceased and the grassland was left unmanaged.

In 2006 planning applications were submitted by the NHS, who wanted to sell the Meadow to developers. Local residents set up Friends of Warneford Meadow (FoWM) to resist the proposals and protect its recreational, aesthetic and ecological value. Supported by FoWM, an application was made to have the Meadow registered as a Town Green. Following a lengthy legal process – including a judicial review - the Meadow was finally registered as a Town Green in April 2010. Registration as a Town Green means that local residents' rights to use the Meadow for recreation are protected, and almost all development is prohibited.

In February 2013 the Oxford NHS Trust expressed an interest in acquiring the site and ownership was transferred to the Trust towards the end of 2014. At the time, the Trust has declared that 'we can now look at further developing our ecological management plan with patients and partners including the Friends of Warneford Meadow, to manage Warneford Meadow and Orchard for therapeutic interventions for our patients and to benefit our community.'

## KEY POSITIVE CHARACTER FEATURES

### *Warneford Hospital*

- The site is of great historical and architectural interest. The Hospital contains five Grade II listed buildings, dating from 1821 to 1914, which are still in use.
- As well as Warneford Meadow (covered separately below), there are a number of other open spaces on the site: these include the lawns in front of the main entrance and the 'gardens of contemplation' which form part of the plot on which the Centre for SANE Research is built.



### *Warneford Meadow*

- The quasi-rural atmosphere of Warneford Meadow makes it a green oasis for calm recreation within the surrounding urban environment. The site offers a range of settings: as well as the meadow itself, there are woodland walks alongside Boundary Brook and the relatively cultivated pastoral of the orchard. Local people have long used the Meadow for recreation – walking, blackberry picking, children's games.
- The site has been identified by the NHS Trust as a valuable resource for psychiatric therapies including gardening. It can also be a setting for health walks and other green therapies. The site is overlooked by the Warneford Hospital and Churchill Hospitals and the Oxford Maggie's Centre; patients from all these institutions benefit from their proximity to the site.







## Headington neighbourhood plan

- Despite the neglect of recent years, the Meadow has nevertheless developed an interesting ecology that makes the site a primary resource for nature study. The grass is home to voles and invertebrates. Besides the willows that already grew by the brook, other trees, mainly oak, have grown and there are other plants typical of this kind of terrain. Many birds have been recorded: kestrels, hawks, skylarks, owls and finches of many kinds. Insects are numerous and butterflies can proliferate in good years.



The neglect has now been halted by the Meadow's new owners who have invested time and resource in developing and implementing a comprehensive Ecological Management Plan. The Trust has ring fenced appropriate resources to protect the Meadow for the benefit of its patients, staff and local residents.

- The orchard is ready for regeneration as a source of locally grown fruit. There are some unusual apple varieties and room to cultivate other soft fruit, such as quince, pear, plum, damson and greengage.



## ISSUES

### *Warneford Hospital*

- The Warneford Hospital is of clinical, strategic, architectural, historical, cultural and therapeutic importance. The site currently serves a wide range of purposes. It is home to a number of organisations as well as Oxford Health NHS Trust, including the University of Oxford. The site represents one of the Trust's most important healthcare assets. It is vital for the delivery of adult and children's mental health in-patient and out-patient services; pioneering research and development; and supporting the activities of the Trust and its clinical partners. The site is also home to the Trust's HQ together with associated corporate functions. A number of the buildings on the site are no longer meeting the



demands placed on them by 21st century mental health care. In turn, the site no longer has the capacity to accommodate the increasing pressure for more clinical and office space placed on it. To meet the evolving needs of its services, the Trust will need to invest in its healthcare infrastructure with priority given to those sites that are able to deliver continuing excellent care. The Trust is at a very early stage in terms of developing a masterplan for the site. It will be a challenge to reconcile the responsibility for maintaining historic listed buildings with the urgent need to provide world class healthcare.



## ***Warneford Meadow***

- The Meadow is not a neat urban park, and its quasi-rural atmosphere should be cherished and maintained. The introduction of any intrusive features of urban life should be handled with sensitivity – for example, the proposed construction of cycle tracks and the introduction of lighting of any kind.



## GUIDANCE FOR DESIGN OF NEW DEVELOPMENT

### ***Warneford Hospital***

- In developing their master plan for the site, the NHS Trust should be encouraged, wherever possible, to retain the historic buildings around which the Hospital has grown and for new development to pay due attention to this heritage.
- Wherever possible, open space should be retained or replaced for the benefit of patients and staff.

### ***Warneford Meadow***

- Any attempts to remove the Meadow's status as a town green should be vigorously resisted.
- The quasi-rural atmosphere of the Meadow should be protected and the introduction of any intrusive features handled with sensitivity.
- The Meadow should be maintained and enhanced as a rich natural environment and an important health resource.
- Any proposed large scale development on nearby sites should avoid compromising the special atmosphere of the Meadow.

## PROPOSED ASSETS

### **Historical Assets**

#### ***Warneford Hospital***

- The site is a legacy of the development of enlightened mental health treatment in Victorian and Edwardian Britain and a testament to the philanthropy of that age.



*An early engraving of the Asylum c1838*

### **Warneford Meadow**

- Warneford Meadow can be defined as a historical asset in a very specific way: the land was originally bought in 1918 by the Governors of the Warneford Lunatic Asylum (as it then was) for the benefit of the patients – just as the current aim is to maintain the site as therapy for the present patients. Taken alongside sources such as the one quoted below, the Meadow is therefore an important ‘living document’ in the history of psychiatric treatment in Oxford.



*People gathered in fields along the boundary brook (late 19th/early 20th century).*

*The attention of the Committee has been largely occupied during the past year with the question of the enlargement of the hospital grounds. It has been felt that the ground available for patients was too circumscribed, that there was not sufficient scope for exercise, and that it was very desirable to have some more varied walks; in addition to these reasons the possibility of houses being built on vacant land so near to the hospital would greatly affect the amenity of the Asylum. Accordingly the Committee recommended to a special meeting of Governors that a portion of land amounting to 18 acres adjoining the existing asylum grounds be acquired, and to this the Governors agreed.*

(from the 1918 Annual Report of the Committee of Management of the Warneford Lunatic Asylum)

### **Community Assets**

#### **Warneford Hospital**

There are a number of facilities on site including a cafe serving hot and cold food, a small library and doctors' accommodation for priority workers. A number of car parks provide patient and staff parking and are complemented with secure cycle facilities.

The Trust is looking to champion a new cycle scheme in partnership with the city/county council that enables staff and visitors to use an approved bike to travel round a number of the city's institutional buildings. Such a facility is planned for the Warneford with the location of the bikes to be agreed.



### ***Warneford Meadow***

- Warneford Meadow is an important element in the provision of green sites across the Headington Neighbourhood Plan area. It offers an open space unlike any other in the area and – at 7.4 ha – contributes substantially to the overall provision in an area of Oxford that is underprovided.



Within the Warneford Hospital site as a whole, retention of the Meadow goes some way towards mitigating the loss of the Sports Field to the new Highfield Unit (see map), and possible further development within the curtilage of the hospital.

- The orchard, once it is returned to productive life, could become a food resource for the community.



### **Ecological Assets**

#### ***Warneford Hospital***

The main ecological asset at the Warneford Hospital is the Meadow with its adjoining orchard (See below and elsewhere).



*Warneford Meadow viewed from the Hospital site.*

#### ***Warneford Meadow***

- There are few endangered or rare species to be found on Warneford Meadow, but the site is home to many of the common species of plants, birds, mammals and invertebrates whose habitat is threatened by the loss of open spaces in so many urban areas.
- The Meadow exists in sensitive interrelation with the Lye Valley and its precious fen, as well as the Boundary Brook wildlife corridor.

