



## CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

### CHARACTER AREA 9: HEADINGTON CENTRE



### GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA

This area comprises the busy A420 London Road from its start at Headley Way eastwards to just beyond St Andrew's School. It includes the non-residential buildings on adjoining roads near its junctions, as well as the whole of Stephen Road, Horwood Close, Blackburn Close and that part of Osler Road outside the Old Headington Conservation Area. To the North East, it is bounded by Bury Knowle Park; Old Headington Conservation Area lies to the North and there are residential estates to the West and South.

It is today the heart of Headington, and includes over 150 businesses (*see appendix to Businesses and Retail section*), most of them comprising the Headington District Shopping Centre. The area includes a state primary school, a private junior school and a private hospital. London Road is the main route from London to Oxford; as well as many local buses serving employment sites and hospitals, many coaches from the major UK airports and Thornhill Park and Ride make stops in London Road.

The centre is a crossroads: London Road runs west/east, and Windmill Road runs north/south enabling a busy traffic corridor between the John Radcliffe Hospital in Headley Way through to Cowley and South East Oxford via the B5995.

The local planning authority's policy RC4 applies specifically to this area. It states that 65% or more of frontages in the District Centre should be for A1 use, i.e. purchase of goods to take away.

## HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

This busy area used to be part of the farmland of Old Headington, and two sixth- century Anglo-Saxon burials were discovered on two sites in Stephen Road, suggesting a dispersed burial site.

The London Road was laid out as a wide new turnpike road to Stokenchurch through these fields in the late eighteenth century, and private and public coaches between Oxford and London no longer had to climb over Shotover via Cheney Lane and Old Road. Initially the only buildings on this section of the road were the Toll House at the crossroads and a coaching inn (the Britannia). Two more early pubs were the White Horse public house on the Oxford/Headington boundary (1841) and the Royal Standard (1861), both now rebuilt.

St Andrew's School opened as Headington's first National School in 1848, and the present buildings dates from 1894 and 1928. Headington School took over the house called Brookside (built 1886) in 1916, and it is still used by its junior section. In 1920 it took over the adjacent mansion later known as Dorset House (built 1878), and kept it as a boarding house until 1964, when it became the first school of occupational therapy in the UK. Dorset House was demolished in 2009 to provide student flats.

There were very few shops here until the 1920s. The Co-op opened on the site of the old toll house in 1892 and and a bicycle shop (with Headington's only petrol pumps) next to Holyoake Road in 1908. The first bank, Barclays, opened in 1925 and Headington Cinema (now replaced by flats) opened at the top of New High Street in the 1920s. Since the 1930s there continued to be a steady transition from residential units to shops and offices in this area.



*Main crossroads, c.1930, with Barclays Bank.*

Headington (later Oxford) United and Headington Cricket Club used Headington House's field on the north side of the London Road, then the Britannia Inn's Field on the south side. In 1913 the Headington Recreation Ground Committee bought the Headington House field in 1913, until Stephen Road was built. In 1926 Headington Sports Ground Ltd secured a permanent site for cricket, football, and bowls at the Manor Ground and the first floodlights at a professional football ground in Britain were installed in 1950. The site is now occupied by the private Manor Hospital.

Oxford City Council purchased Bury Knowle House and its extensive grounds in 1930. The Park was opened to the public in 1932 and is approximately 7 hectares.

In the mid-1960s, fine old houses with large grounds were demolished to make way for Horwood Close, the petrol station, and a telephone exchange, and for the large blocks at the top of Kennett Road that include Iceland and Sainsbury. In 1975 Macfisheries built what was then the largest supermarket in Oxford in Old High Street (now Waitrose). In the 1990s many old traditional shops closed, and were replaced by other retail businesses including coffee shops, estate agents and charity shops.



The land of Headington House that lay to the south of Cuckoo Lane was sold in the 1920s and became the site of Stephen Road, the south-east end of Osler Road, and a row of shops on the north side of the London Road.

In the 1930s, houses on both sides were gradually converted into shops. Nearby levels vary because their front gardens were higher than the pavement.

A terrace on the south side was demolished in 1938–9 to make way for Holyoake Hall, a dance hall and subsequently snooker hall (now flats), with a row of purpose-built shops underneath.



*The shops between Old High Street and Bury Knowle Park were originally houses*

## KEY POSITIVE CHARACTER FEATURES

### The shopping centre is thriving

- There are few vacant shops as Headington is an area of high economic growth.
- There is a wide range of establishments including large supermarkets, independent shops, banks, and cafes/restaurants.
- Car parks in Old High Street and St. Leonard's Road are well-used. Some Windmill Road residents with permits are allowed to park in St Leonard's Road car park.



### Customers are attracted into Headington

- Some shops, cafes, and financial institutions attract customers into Headington from outside the area, e.g. Waitrose, Jacobs & Field, and the Sipton Building Society, contributing to its general economic success







# Headington neighbourhood plan

## Local attractions

- The popular Headington Farmers' Market is held in Kennett Road and London Road on two Fridays a month and provides a meeting place for local residents.



- Some long-standing independent traders attract loyal followers due in part to their specific retail offer, e.g. Headington Homewares.



## Headington Centre is well-connected

- Excellent public transport services operate to London, Oxford, and Heathrow and Gatwick Airports, with stops along London Road within walking distance of many homes in the area.
- The width and central location of London Road facilitates local bus travel to and from its shops, workplaces and hospitals
- Cycle racks are well used and an Oxonbikes self-service bike hire scheme hub is situated outside St Andrew's CE Primary School.



## Distinctive features of buildings and street scene in the area

- The properties to the west of the crossroads are generally three storeys high, but the properties to the north-east of the crossroads, which are former terraced houses, are two storeys high
- The earliest buildings are a mixture of late Victorian/Edwardian style made from brick and are sometimes rendered. The flats above, and the split-level pavements resulting from earlier residential use, give the feel of a suburban town.
- Modern retail developments in the shopping centre have plate glass windows on the ground floor in keeping with a busy town environment
- The flats above the shops in London Road have a positive impact as they add to the busy feel of the centre in the evenings as well as daytime; they make the area more welcoming at night, and provide much-needed, central, car-free, affordable private rented accommodation.

- Flatted housing is spreading to other adjacent residential streets e.g. Stephen Road and New High Street.
- In Stephen Road, facing brick and rendered walls are most commonly used materials in the houses built in the 1920s with slate tiles dominating the roof-scape, although there are numerous instances of plain tiling. There is a wide variety of property types and styles to each side of this road, including modern flatted developments which retain the gabled roof design.
- Dorset House accommodates 310 students in blocks formed from prefabricated modules and stands on a junction with a residential road.
- Horwood Close consists largely of houses in multiple occupation, many of which are rented by students and young professionals.

- The Britannia Inn, dating from the late eighteenth century, provides a handsome welcome to the start of the shopping centre, and is the only listed building in this area



- Restaurants and cafes provide an experience beyond shopping and some have outside tables. The relatively large number of places to eat and drink identifies the area as a vibrant location
- Local residents often meet each other while shopping.



- Street furniture in terms of seating, litter bins, and noticeboards is of uniform style which reinforces the centre's identity. Community noticeboards are located prominently both sides of London Road and promote local events.



## Good green settings along London Road

- The bed and breakfast establishments set back from the western end of London Road provide greenery in the form of hedges and trees that enhance the street scene.
- The hanging baskets at the Royal Standard Public House and the trees in Stephen Road are welcome examples of street planting in the centre and enhance the street scene.
- Local businesses sponsor hanging baskets as part of the Oxford In Bloom event, and these make a positive contribution to the visual environment.
- Views on the approach to Cuckoo Lane are enhanced by the tree-lined wide pavements in Stephen Road.
- The lawns and borders of Headington Bowls Club and the grass verges and front garden hedges in Osler Road anticipate a more rural setting on the approach to Old Headington village.
- The proximity of Bury Knowle Park and library makes Headington an attractive place for shoppers and families to visit. The Park provides views of open space and is an outdoor social gathering place.
- Bury Knowle Park is home to a number of sculptures including an art sculpture in the park known as “The Wheel of Hope” and “The Story Book Tree”, based on stories by C.S. Lewis and J.R.R Tolkien. It also contains a sensory garden, as well as sports and play areas.
- Exciting new equipment was installed in the children’s play area in 2011 and is very popular

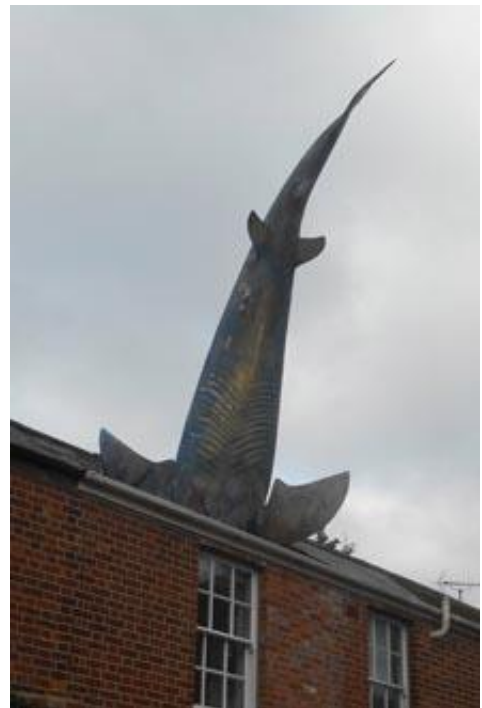


## ISSUES

This area forms the commercial and social centre of the neighbourhood. It is a residential area that takes much of Oxford's airport and London-bound traffic. Multiple functions make for multiple issues.

### **The district centre lacks noticeable identity.**

- In many ways it looks like a through route for North/South and East/West traffic.
- Shop fronts are unremarkable, and awnings can be drab
- Signage to amenities such as the Library and the Park is inadequate for visitors, and it is not clear to newcomers that they have arrived in Headington
- Street furniture is regimented and not all benches are well-used in their current locations
- The clock is not highly visible and is not in working order
- There are very few striking buildings and spaces, other than Bury Knowle Park
- The best-known landmark is the fibreglass Shark in an adjacent residential street. It stands out as an example of quirky innovative and imaginative design which is atypical of properties in central Headington.



### **Lack of community focus in the central area of Headington**

- There is no community meeting space in this central area. Headington community centre is located outside the centre, and one business has sought to address this shortfall by renting out meeting space.

### **There is a limited night-time economy**

- Amenities in streets adjacent to the designated district centre, e.g. the cinema in New High Street, have been replaced incrementally by residential accommodation.
- Most shops and businesses are closed by 19:00, but pubs, restaurants, and takeaways do remain open longer
- There are currently no theatres, cinemas, music





venues, galleries, or public buildings of any description in the centre.

### **The streets are cluttered**

- Rubbish bags, charity shop donations and A-boards add to street clutter and sometimes obstruct pedestrian access.



### **Repair and maintenance of properties in London Road**

- Flyposting can be seen on seldom-used private retail property
- Pigeon droppings on and outside private property up for sale
- Shabby condition of some private properties, awnings
- Gaps between frontages can be untidy and are not gated off



### **The retail offer is becoming less diverse**

- The number of specialist retail shops is decreasing in line with market changes, consumer needs, and comparatively high rental charges.

### **Lack of greenery in the shopping centre**

- Unlike many of its residential roads, the shopping centre has few trees and little green space, although there is a park close by. This detracts from a sense of destination or visual character



### **Highway surfaces**

- Confusion about right of way between vehicles and pedestrians at raised junctions with





# Headington neighbourhood plan

residential streets - maintaining clear sightlines is important at junctions of London Road with residential streets.

- Footways owned by the County Council are generally paved, but are interspersed with privately owned frontage footways made from tarmac which detract from the street scene.

## **Parking is difficult to regulate**

- Parking issues are apparent:
- Parking on pavements outside shops and businesses causes obstructions for shoppers
- Drivers use residential roads for short-stay or single-transaction parking. Short-stay parking is in short supply near the centre.
- Restrictions outside the central area add to parking pressure in the centre
- Drivers make U turns in New High Street and three point turns in residential roads, including Stephen Road, in order to change direction of travel or seek short-stay parking



## **Traffic impacts significantly on the area: (a) Pedestrians**

- There are issues of noise, pollution and visual distraction
- It takes pedestrians a long time to cross London Road because permeability of the centre is limited, and this creates a split between community and shops
- Cars are often still turning when the green man shows (right)
- There is a desire line for a pedestrian crossing point at the bus gate on the corner of London Road and Osler Road but crossing is hazardous in that location



## **(b) Buses**

- There is congestion in the centre for much of the day and especially at peak times
- Osler Road, a residential street, is used by some buses to the John Radcliffe Hospital



**(c) Cyclists**

- The traffic congestion and lack of segregated cycle lane at the crossroads means that some cyclists are tempted to cycle on pavements which impinges on pedestrian space
- Shared space between pedestrians and cyclists to the west of the centre is visually unattractive.

## GUIDANCE FOR DESIGN OF NEW DEVELOPMENT

<p><b>A community statement must accompany planning applications in Headington District Centre</b></p>	<p>This statement will set out a commitment by the applicant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to keep the frontage and associated private highway tidy</li> <li>• to ensure that bins are not left out for collection except at stated collection times</li> <li>• to consult residents about timing of deliveries</li> </ul> <p>and to make a community contribution in one or both of the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to provide cycle racks for use by customers in the District Centre to the Council's specification</li> <li>• to enhance the district centre with a financial contribution towards tree or shrub planting.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Enhance character and identity</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Innovative development in the District Centre is welcomed, provided that it is of high quality design and enhances the character of the area</li> <li>• Works of public art in the District Centre should reinforce Headington's character, these should be multi-functional or be themed to celebrate Headington's identity and/or technological achievements</li> <li>• New themed signage in the District Centre will make the area more accessible and welcoming.</li> </ul> <p>CIL payments and developer contributions should be used in part to fund the above.</p>

<p><b>Enhance community and amenity</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The need for multi-functional community space has been evidenced above, and proposals for change of use to meet this need would be welcome.</li> <li>• The Telephone Exchange behind the Shell garage is a prime site for development if it were to become available. Due to its central location and excellent public transport links, this site is suitable for a new community centre or amenities space (Use Class D1 or D2) which would address key issues named above.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Preserve or enhance existing positive features</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All proposed development in this area should be sensitive to proposed and existing assets listed below</li> <li>• The height of proposed developments on the north-west side of the crossroads in London Road should be no greater than that of Barclays Bank and have fewer than three storeys to be in keeping with adjacent developments</li> <li>• Developments on the north-east side of London Road between the cross-roads and the Park should have a roof height and style in keeping with the original 1930s houses and have no more than two storeys</li> <li>• Developments on the south-west side should have a roof height no greater than Kennett House (above Iceland)</li> <li>• Materials used on the exterior of developments in Stephen Road should be brick or rendered brick</li> <li>• The building of flats above shops and businesses in the district centre ensures good use of otherwise under-occupied space and improves the vitality of the centre</li> <li>• An informative will be added to planning permission for A1/A3 and A3 use in Headington District Centre advising that outside seating to the front of the establishment on the owner's land is acceptable</li> </ul>
<p><b>Improve biodiversity and greenery</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A contribution towards urban planting will be required from applicants seeking permission for development outside the District Centre.</li> <li>• Evidence of landscaping or a contribution towards urban planting is required in planning applications for flats.</li> </ul>

<b>Enhance visual impact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permissions on District Centre properties will include an informative setting out the Code of Good Practice for Headington Businesses (when this has been agreed) re deliveries and parking, advertising boards, and presentation of rubbish.</li> <li>• Permissions on properties within Headington District Centre will include an informative setting out the Code of Good Practice for Headington District Centre land owners (when this has been established) re the gating off of side entrances and footpaths and the paving of private highway.</li> </ul>
<b>Addressing Highways issues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Please see Transport section of the Plan</i></li> </ul>

## PROPOSED ASSETS

### Historical Assets

*The Coach House at Dorset House, 42 London Road was proposed in 2014 and is about to be added to the Heritage Register*

*The Britannia Inn is already listed.*

*Bury Knowle Park is designated an Area of Public Open Space and Policy SR5 applies*

- **Holyoake Hall** – Art Deco features on exterior wall.



- **The Mount Pleasant Hotel** dates from the 1830s and forms an attractive group with the Britannia Inn







# Headington neighbourhood plan

- An 1892 **boundary stone** on the site of the Boundary Brook where the Headington and London Roads meet marks the boundary of Headington with Oxford 1889-1929



- **Headington Junior School** now occupies the mansion formerly called Brookside, built by Wilkinson & Moore in 1886



- **Barclays Bank** has stood in an important position at the central Headington crossroads since 1930 and is a good-looking brick building that should be preserved



- **Headington Post Office** has since 1942 occupied a pair of semi-detached houses built in 1926



- **St Andrew's Primary School**. The present buildings date from 1894 (west section) and 1928 (east section). As the picture on the right shows, they are an important part of Headington's heritage





# Headington

## neighbourhood plan

- **Child's Funeral Parlour.** This good-looking building on the corner of Osler Road provides an elegant stop when walking up New High Street.



### Assets of Community Value

- **Royal Standard public house** – This corner pub dates from 1930, and makes an attractive group with Mount Pleasant and the Britannia



- **White Horse public house** – This pub is a focal point, standing where the Headington Road becomes London Road

