

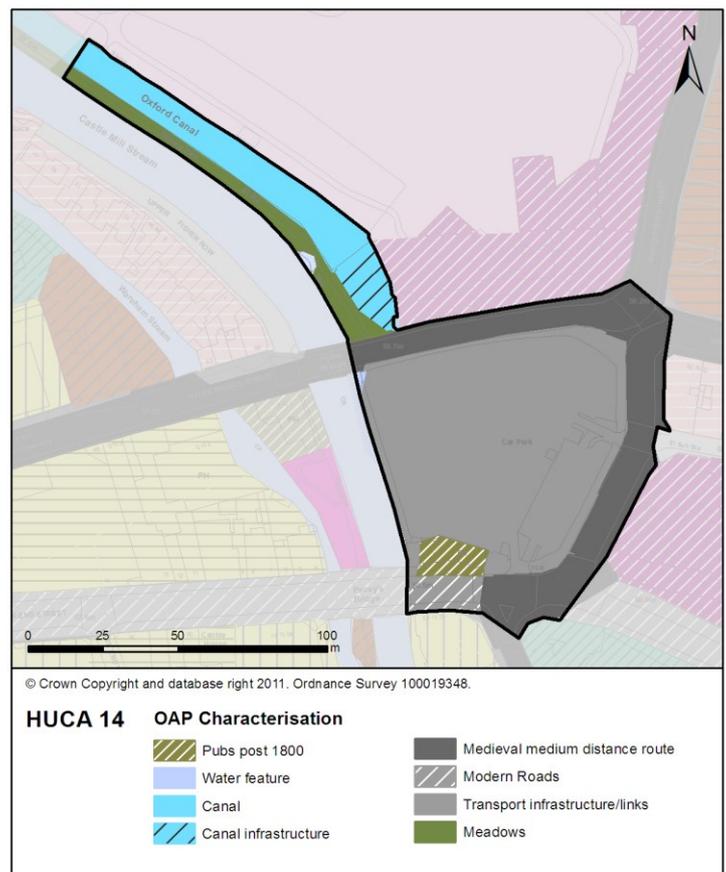
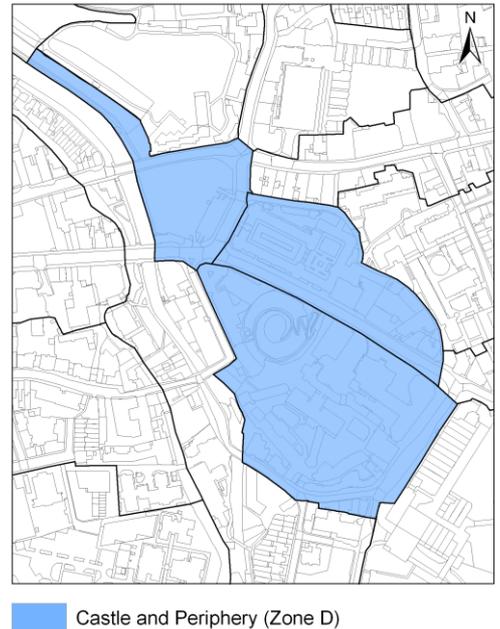
**HISTORIC URBAN CHARACTER AREA 14:  
CASTLE AND PERIPHERY- FORMER CANAL BASIN**

**The HUCA is located within broad character Zone D: Castle and periphery.**

*The broad character zone is defined by the extent of the Norman castle defences and includes part of the former canal basin located to the north.*

**Summary characteristics**

- Dominant period: 20<sup>th</sup> century car park and 18<sup>th</sup> century canal arm.
- Designations: None.
- Archaeological Potential: Despite the significant impact caused by the construction of the canal the area has potential to preserve evidence for Late Saxon, medieval and post-medieval activity including a medieval ‘Hythe’ or landing place, the edge of the castle defences, related siege works and domestic settlement. There is also potential for canal infrastructure to survive below the modern car park.
- Character: Predominantly modern transport infrastructure comprised of a surface car park with low retaining walls, elevated road, canal and towpath.
- Spaces: The canal towpath provides a tranquil space alongside the canal, now largely used for leisure. The open car park preserves views of St Georges Tower, the Castle motte and Nuffield College.
- Road morphology: Mixture of short sections of straight and sinuous routes; the medieval Hythe Bridge Street and Stockwell (Worcester Street) and later modern road Park End Street. The route of Stockwell (Worcester Street) was altered when Nuffield College was built.
- Plot morphology: Large irregular plot.
- The natural topography of the area is low lying on the Northmoor First Terrace adjacent to the Castle Mill Stream at a height of around 58m OD.
- Survival of townscape elements:
  - Part of 18<sup>th</sup> century canal.
  - The Dukes Cut, a 19<sup>th</sup> century pub.
  - Brick walls from canal structures survive around the edge of the



**Historic urban character area showing modern urban landscape character types.**

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- o car park.
  - o A canal era gate-pier survives in south east corner of car park.

### Description

This character area comprises the filled in 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century canal basin, now Worcester Street car park, and a section of the canal to the north beyond Hythe Bridge (the extent of canal included is truncated by the extent of the study area). The stretch of canal includes a section of lightly wooded tow path with grass verge and a grassed area with mature tree cover that includes a re-consolidated turning wheel/capstain. The surface car park is a large irregular open plot of tarmac with security gates and miscellaneous street furniture. Brick walls and mature trees separate the car park from the Castle Mill Stream to the west. A brick and stone wall defines the northern extent of the car park which retains the raised causeway of the Hythe Bridge Crossing. The southern end of the Car Park retains an entrance pier from the Canal Basin. A squat 19<sup>th</sup> century Pub, the Dukes Cut, fronts onto Worcester Street. Restricted views to the south of the car park extend down Tidmarsh Lane towards St Georges Tower. The car park also preserves strong views up New Road towards the Castle mound and east towards the entrance of Nuffield College.

### Historical value- means of connecting with the past

The site lies to the west of the Saxon town and subsequent Norman castle and precinct ditch. It lies adjacent to the Castle Mill Stream and a medieval crossing over the stream at Hythe Bridge. The name 'hythe' suggests the earlier presence of a landing wharf for goods and livestock. The area is crossed by historic routes west to Rewley Abbey (established 1281) and north along Stockwell Street/Worcester Street to the Beaumont Palace (12<sup>th</sup> century), Carmelite Friars (1256), and subsequently the Benedictine Gloucester College (1283) and secular Worcester College (1714). The character and extent of medieval and post-medieval settlement in this area is poorly understood.

The Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 16<sup>th</sup> century led to the removal of the powerful and economically significant religious institutions from the west end of the town and therefore to a significant reduction of its economic importance. Despite the post-medieval growth of Oxford Loggan's 1675 map shows the Worcester Street car park area as largely cultivated open land.

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> the New Road turnpike route was cut through the castle precinct from Queen Street to the Castle Mill Stream and on westward to Botley, bypassing St Thomas' suburb. The Oxford Canal arrived at Oxford in the 1780s, entering the city from the northwest, parallel to the Castle Mill Stream, before turning east over the former open space towards the now levelled siege mounds next to Bulwarks Lane. The canal basin at Worcester Street was in-filled in the 1950s.

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### Evidential value- potential to yield primary evidence

This character area has an uncertain potential due to the likely extent of disturbance from the canal basin and the limited amount of modern investigation that has taken place. There is potential for evidence to be preserved relating to a possible late Saxon or Norman wharf and subsequent extra-mural domestic settlement, also the remains of the outer Castle defences, related 12<sup>th</sup> century siege works and industrial remains relating to Canal basin, wharves and warehouses.



**Worcester Street Car Park looking south-east with the Castle Mound in the background.**

The Urban Archaeological Database records five archaeological events recorded within the character area. Previous archaeological work has recorded evidence for medieval land reclamation, late medieval structures, the castle moat and the medieval Worcester Street and has suggested the presence of a direct causeway from the castle precinct to the Royal Beaumont Palace located further along Worcester Street to the north.

#### **Aesthetic value- sensory and intellectual stimulation**

The car park area currently has limited aesthetic value although it provides open views to a number of historic sites. The open space allows important long views towards the castle motte and glimpsed view down Tidmarsh Lane of St Georges Tower. Views between the car park and the canal are broken by the retaining wall for Hythe Bridge. The wooded canal tow path is a pleasant space close to a busy road junction.

#### **Communal value- meaning for collective experience and memory**

The canal towpath has communal value as a pleasant walking and recreation area where visitors and residents can experience the canal.

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