

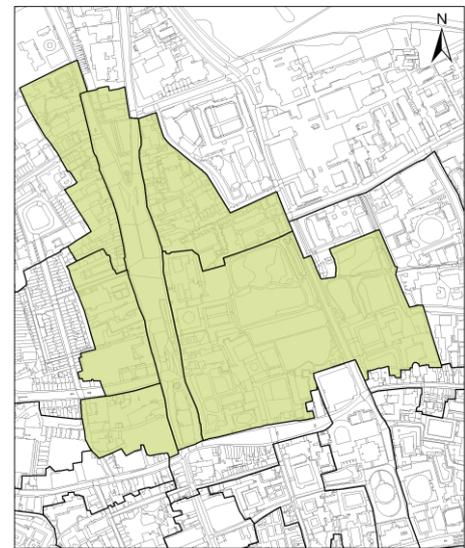
**HISTORIC URBAN CHARACTER AREA 29:  
ST GILES AND THE NORTHERN SUBURB - TOWNHOUSES**

**The HUCA is located within broad character zone G: St Giles and the northern suburb.**

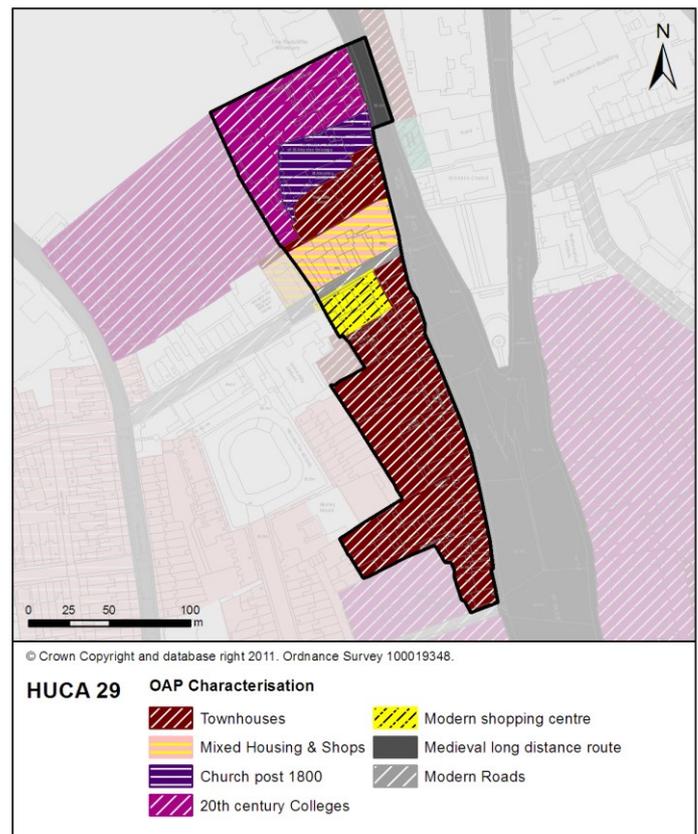
*The broad character zone comprises of the expansive northern approach to Oxford, the northern medieval suburb and subsequent modern expansion within the former line of the Civil War defences.*

**Summary characteristics**

- Dominant period: mixed 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century.
- Designations: Three Grade II\* and nineteen Grade II listings. Central Conservation Area.
- Archaeological Interest: The limited previous archaeological investigations have noted good survival of medieval features.
- Character: mixed post-medieval tenements, Georgian and Victorian townhouses.
- Spaces: A number of properties have well proportioned gardens that provide private green space.
- Road morphology: medieval long distance route with several 19th century streets dividing the medieval plots.
- Plot morphology: Narrow medieval plots with some truncation. Good survival of medieval tenement boundaries.
- The character area is located on the central ridge of the Summertown-Radley Second Terrace at a height of around 65m OD.
- Survival of townscape elements:
  - Medieval tenement plot morphology.
  - Post medieval tenement plots.
  - Street network.
  - Large number of Post medieval to 19<sup>th</sup> century listed buildings, including Eagle and Child Pub which has strong literary associations.



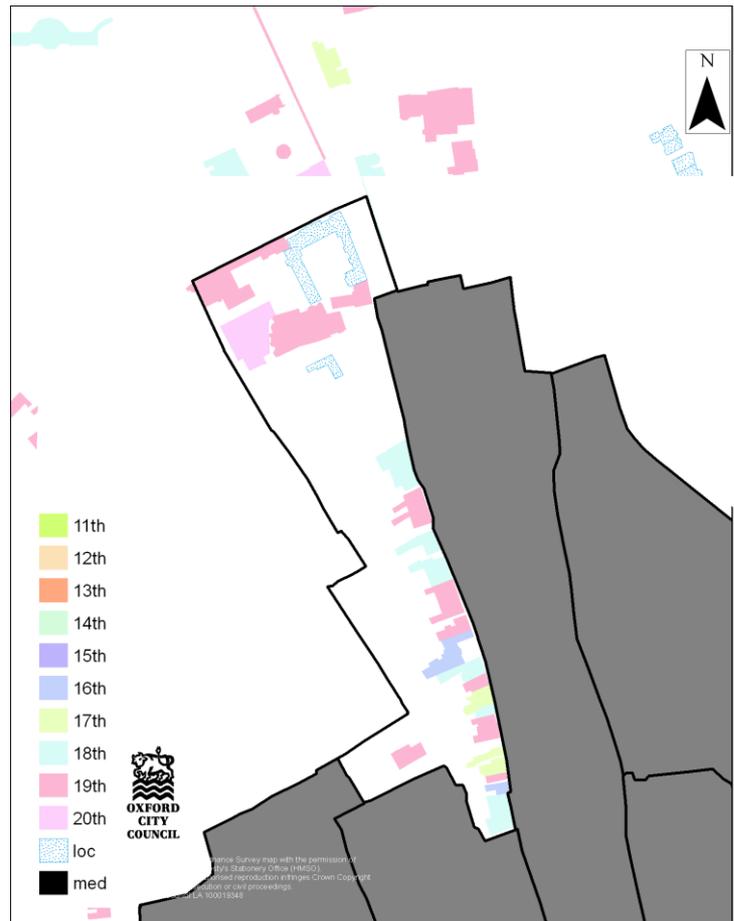
St Giles and the northern suburb (Zone G)  
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**Historic urban character area showing modern urban landscape character types.**

## Description

This character area comprises a group of medieval tenements along the western frontage of St Giles and Woodstock Road now occupied by three and four storey stone-fronted or rendered townhouses and modern infilling. Frontages are continuous with buildings opening onto the pavement. The townhouses have a mixture of uses including college and commercial office space, shops, cafes and Friends Meeting House. The northern part of the character area encompasses the Catholic Church of St Aloysius Gonzaga and part of Somerville College which is comprised of a 19<sup>th</sup> century villa with courtyard with modern extensions to the rear. The character area is strongly influenced by its medieval tenement layout and there is a good preservation of these boundaries. Green space is limited to a number of generous rear gardens and the grassed courtyard at Somerville. A number of notable mature and semi-mature trees are located to the rear of the street frontage.

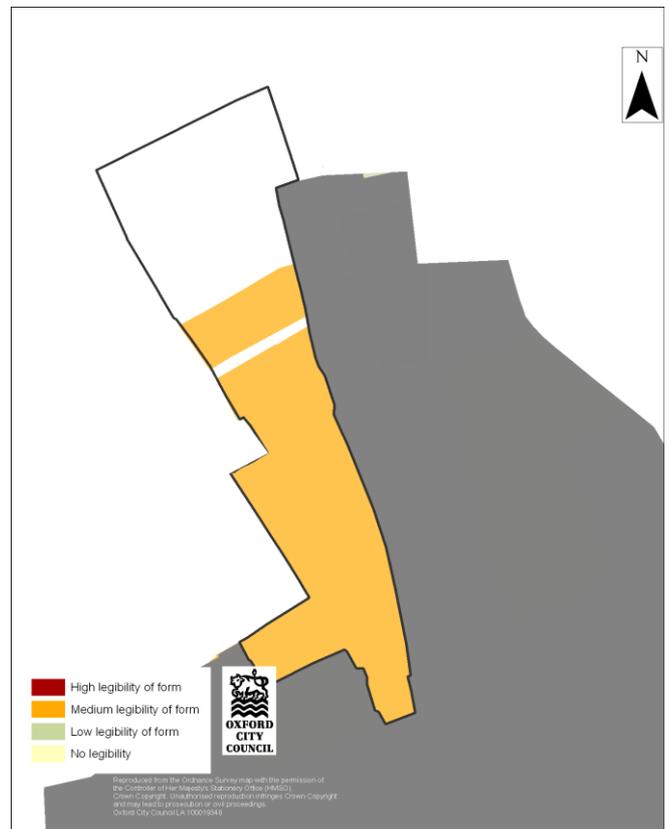


## Historical value- means of connecting with the past

St Giles lies on a central north-south axis that runs along the top of the Summertown Radley gravel terrace towards a crossing point over the Thames floodplain. The date of this north-south route is not known however there is good reason to believe that there was a Roman and perhaps prehistoric route along this alignment. In 2008 the remains of the late Neolithic henge monument were discovered under part of St John's College land located on the eastern side of St Giles, the shape of which may have influenced the alignment of trackways either side of it as it was evidently still a feature in the landscape until the late Saxon period. St Giles lies within an extensive Middle Neolithic-Early Bronze Age complex of ritual and funerary monuments. Excavations at the Radcliffe Infirmary site to the north of this character area have produced evidence for short-lived 6<sup>th</sup> century Saxon settlement close to earlier Bronze Age Barrows.

St Giles leads out from the northgate of the Late Saxon Burh at Oxford and it is possible that extra

## Listed buildings by date of earliest identified fabric (based on listing description)



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mural settlement developed from this time. Documentary evidence suggests that the suburban settlement in this area developed in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The foundation of St Giles Church by about 1130 suggests that the suburb expanded rapidly during the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The construction of the Royal Beaumont Palace outside the northgate by 1132 would have provided an additional stimulus to development. The uniformity of the plots and location of churches at the north and south ends may suggest that St Giles' Street was at least in part a planned suburb.

The character area is illustrative of the historic process of 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> suburban renewal and expansion with a number of medium to large town houses and urban mansions built at this time. In the late post-medieval period until the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the rear yards of these plots were occupied by narrow ranges of outbuildings and stables and also what appear to be rows of low status cottages. Remnants of old walls from this period survive to the rear of the frontage buildings. Somerville College, which lies partly in this character area, was established in 1879 and was briefly converted into a hospital during World War 1. The church of St Aloysius, built in 1873 in French Gothic style, can be seen as the first significant architectural statement by the Roman Catholic Church in Oxford since the Reformation.

#### **Evidential value- potential to yield primary evidence**

The character area has good archaeological potential for prehistoric, medieval and post-medieval remains. There have been thirteen archaeological events in the character area. Previous investigations have recorded residual 11<sup>th</sup> century pottery, a number of 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century and later rubbish pits, gravel extraction pits and remnants of Victorian yards.

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

The character has attractive continuous frontages of mixed design town houses fronting directly onto the pavement of the expansive street. The visual character is distinctive for its stone fronted and brick and rendered three and four story town houses which house a mixture of commercial, educational and retail concerns.

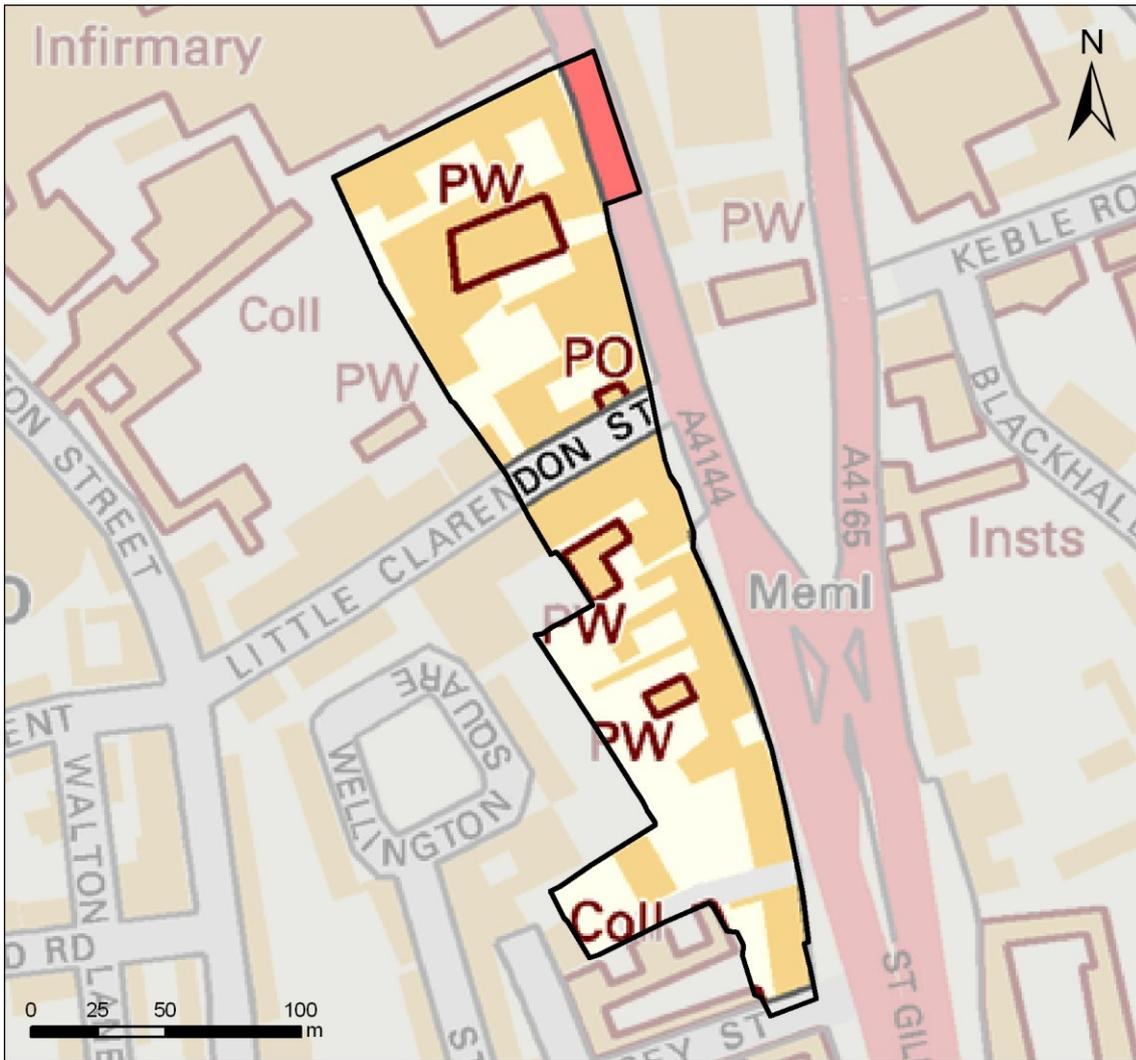


**Rank of shops and Eagle and Child Pub (with the round sign)**

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

The character area has strong communal value with popular associations with notable literary figures and the regular St Giles fair. Notable facilities including the Friends Meeting House, the Catholic Church of St Aloysius Gonzaga, (The Oxford Oratory) and the Eagle and Child Pub associated with the 'Inklings' literary group.

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### HUCA 29 Orientation map