

4. Historic Development

4.1 The origins and historic development of Wallingford

Prehistoric/Roman

Wallingford's early history is continuously emerging as a result of archaeological investigations. The southern boundary between Wallingford and the neighbouring parish of Cholsey was marked by an ancient stream flowing east into the Thames (now known as Bradford's Brook, which lay well south of the town defences. This suburban area included the early pagan Saxon cemetery and also the now lost church of St Lucian. The area was almost certainly part of the original pre-burh Saxon settlement.

Neolithic flints have been found just north of the town defences, and numerous Bronze Age artefacts have been dredged from the river. A high status Bronze Age island settlement was discovered during the building of the modern Winterbrook Bridge and Iron Age settlements are being revealed by modern development to the south and west of the town. Though no structural remains have linked Wallingford to the Roman period, 19th century records of large numbers of Roman coins and pottery found to the west of the town make it likely that some form of Roman activity took place.

Saxon (410-1066)

Whilst Wallingford today contains one of the best examples of a late Saxon town plan in England, an early Saxon cemetery outside the defensive earthworks to the south west of Kinecroft contains burials from the 5th-7th centuries, suggesting that there was a settlement beside the river for at least four hundred years before the creation of the 9th century burh.

Wallingford was clearly already an important settlement by the time it was first mentioned in a Saxon document of c. 919 AD as one of the largest fortified towns built by King Alfred to defend Wessex against Danish attack. (Winchester, his capital, was the same size as Wallingford) . The town was located at the boundary of Wessex and was strategically important.

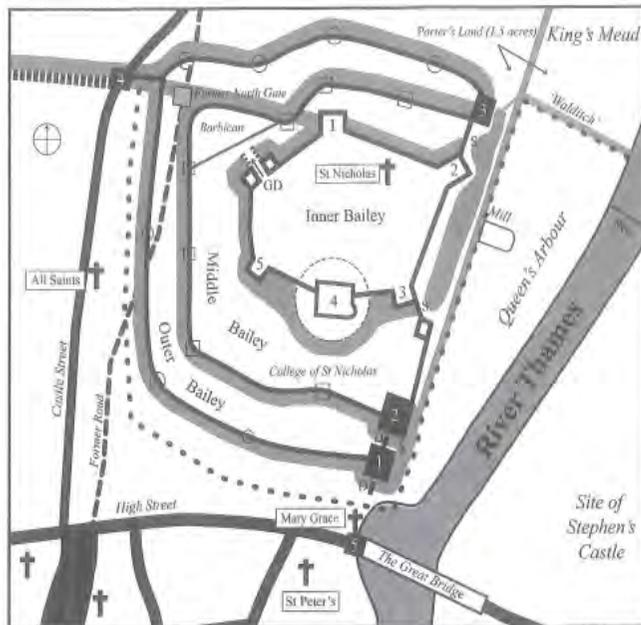
The town's Saxon defences eventually comprised large earthworks constructed on three sides, probably topped by timber fortifications, and surrounded by a water-filled ditch. The defences formed a rectangular enclosure against the river, with bridgehead on the east bank of the river to guard the river crossing. Bridges were required to cross the ditches into the town watched over by gatehouses that controlled traffic into and out of the town.

The earthworks even now maintain a formal boundary between the historic town and its more recent suburbs. Only minor alterations have occurred to the essential street layout in the past 500 years and the streets inside the Saxon defences are remarkably well preserved. Some additional lanes and passageways were made for convenience but the principle routes remain very much the same as in the early 10th century.

By the 11th century 276 properties in the town were held by the king and a royal garrison of 'housecarls' was maintained, probably in the north east quarter of the town. Wallingford had a mint from the 10th to 13th century, where a moneyer struck coins bearing the town's name - a royal privilege. It was possibly located in the vicinity of Goldsmiths Lane.

Post Norman Conquest (c.1066-1485)

The second major phase of Wallingford's development began after the Norman Conquest, when Robert d'Oyley carried out William I's orders, building a sizeable motte and bailey castle (mound and enclosed area) in the north-east quadrant of the town, adjacent to the Thames, making good use of the northern Saxon rampart and moat.



KEY

1 - Constable's Gate	1 - Queen's Tower	GD - The Great Drawbridge
2 - Bydongate	2 - Muggetour	D - Drawbridge
3 - Dernegate	3 - Water Tower	S - Possible sluice site
4 - Town North Gate	4 - The Great Tower	○ - Conjectural towers
5 - Town East Gate	5 - Benet's Tower	⊕ - Church

Left: An indicative layout of Wallingford Castle c. 1300

In 1086 the parish church of Holy Trinity, situated in the southern part of what is now the Bullcroft, was given to St Alban's Abbey, whose abbot endowed a Benedictine Priory there. It was a 'daughter house' of the Abbey and more than one Prior of Wallingford went on to become Abbot of St Alban's. The Priory and the castle occupied most of the northern half of the enclosed town, enhancing its already powerful status. From the 11th-15th centuries Wallingford castle was of national importance as the third great royal castle of the Thames Valley (alongside the Tower of London and Windsor). It played a major role in the Civil

War between Stephen and Henry I's daughter Matilda, a conflict that was resolved by the Treaty of Wallingford agreed in 1153. The castle was usually part of the estates of heirs to the throne, from at least the 13th century, becoming part of the newly created Duchy of Cornwall in 1337.

From about the end of the 13th century, the town of Wallingford experienced significant economic decline, partly caused by the growing importance of other towns such as Reading, Abingdon and Oxford, better placed than Wallingford for trade, and partly by the Black Death in 1349-50. The once prosperous medieval town with 11 Parish Churches and over 2000 occupants was reduced by the 15th century to just 4 Parish Churches and 44 households.

The town suffered again under King Henry VIII, first by the dissolution of Wallingford's priory in 1525 and then by the king's transfer of the castle's Honour (major land

holdings) to his manor of Ewelme. The town was further impoverished in the 17th century by the effects of its involvement as a royalist stronghold in the Civil War.

Archaeological test-pitting throughout the town has shown that the outer streets, such as Wood St, Thames St and Goldsmiths' Lane, became depopulated from the 14th century onwards, not beginning to recover until the late 17th-18th centuries. After the 17th century Civil War, efforts were made to improve aspects of the Market Place, with the rebuilding of St Mary's Church tower in 1653, using stone from the demolished castle, and the subsequent building of the new Town Hall in 1670.

Regular markets selling agricultural produce and animals in the town centre, which had



The stone base of St Mary's church tower which contains reclaimed stone from Wallingford Castle

been fundamental to the town's economy throughout the medieval period, continued to well into the 19th century, by which time more industrial activities had developed.

The 18th century

Developing industries particularly malting and brewing, were able to make use of the quick Thames route to London to bring a new phase of prosperity to the town. The trade was served by the development of new wharfs along Thames Street. The money this brought in, combined with the fashionable influences of the capital, had a significant impact upon many of the buildings in Wallingford.

Many of the older, mostly timber framed, properties were re-fronted or modernised



5-7 Thames Street: 18th Century former malthouse range and cottages

using brick, whilst others had their roofs raised or parapets introduced to hide old-fashioned pitched roofs. Some properties were newly built in the classical Georgian style whilst others were given a radical facelift, sometimes using render to hide the original timber frame or local stonework.

19th and 20th centuries

It was not until the 19th century that the town needed to expand beyond the Saxon footprint. Most new housing was sited along existing routes and paths around the defensive ditches such as St Johns Road and Croft Road. A small run of cul-de-sac terrace streets were constructed off Croft Road at this time, forming Croft Villas, Egerton Road, South View and Springdale.

The town's widespread use of brick continued into the 19th century, although the relative prosperity it had represented was much reduced. The coming of the railway in 1866 led to a station being constructed to the west of the town centre. A number of good quality terraced workers cottages, some larger semi-detached villas, and an imposing school building were all constructed in the latter half of the 19th century. The railway did not bring any great prosperity to Wallingford, but this has meant

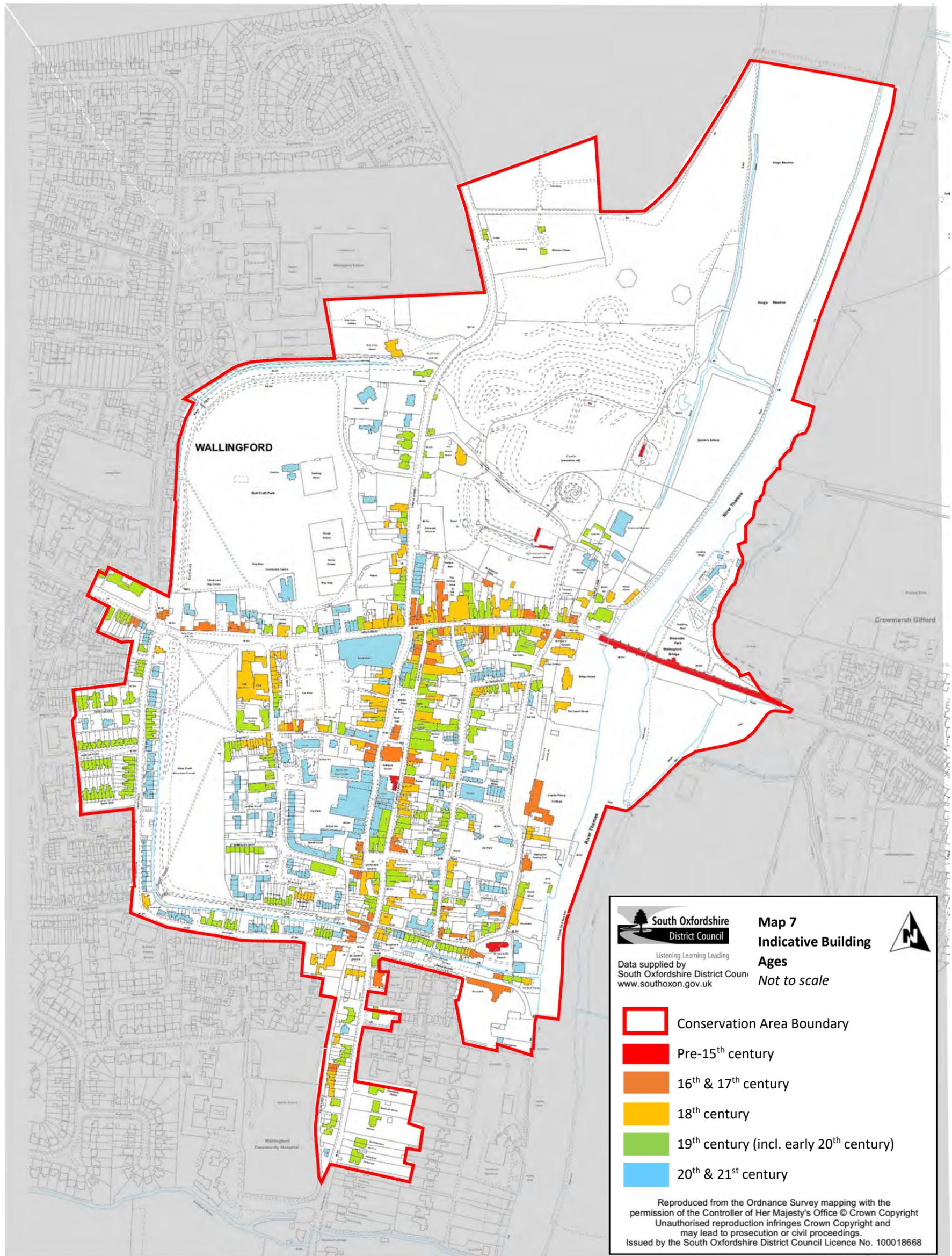
that the settlement has not been radically extended or altered and today retains its character as a small, but busy, 'market' town.

The river, aside from its trade potential, began to be recognised for its picturesque qualities and leisure opportunities. Large villas were constructed along the west bank of the Thames, turning the once busy wharf area of Thames Street into a quiet residential lane.

In the mid and late 20th century the town expanded with new housing being provided on the outskirts as well as a the Hithercroft Estate, the town's major employment area. In 1992, a bypass was built to the south and west of the town which advantageously removed most of the traffic through the narrow streets in the town centre.



19th century terraced housing on Croft Road



4.2 Archaeology

The town of Wallingford is justly renowned for its surviving late Saxon burh and medieval rampart-ditch defences, and for the complex and extensive earthworks of a Norman castle imposed into the north east quarter of the urban space. The main known archaeological sites are the burh defences, Bullcroft, Kinecroft and the site of the castle. These are designated as Scheduled Monuments but there are many sites of known archaeological significance in the town that are not scheduled.

Wallingford was highlighted as follows in the 1975 Historic Towns in Oxfordshire survey:

“The importance of Wallingford’s archaeology... is only heightened by comparison with the other towns, for (apart from Oxford) it is the only late Saxon walled town in the region.... Late Saxon and early medieval layers are unlikely to be stratified deep beneath or destroyed by later archaeological deposits as they frequently are in Oxford... Some [unpublished] archaeological work has already taken place on the castle and the defences, but many components of the early town, like the domestic and industrial buildings, the churches, the street plan and the waterfront remain unstudied. Because there is still so

much to be learnt about this period, large scale work on any of these aspects is likely to produce results of national importance”.

From 2008-11, The Wallingford Burh to Borough Project, funded by a substantial grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, made a major study of the town’s development from 800-1400AD, also initiating an on-going garden test-pitting programme for 100 investigations throughout the town.

Alongside this, a study of the documentary evidence for the Castle and Priory has been made by The Wallingford Historical and Archaeological Society. The three resultant publications so far have revealed the archaeological sensitivity and potential of the majority of the area covered by the Wallingford Conservation Area. It reflects the complexity and multi layered nature of the character of the settlement seen above ground today.



A view across Bullcroft; designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument for its archaeological interest

5.Spatial Analysis

Summary of key features:

- Well preserved Saxon street layout centred around a cross roads and enclosed by defensive ditches and embankments
- Surviving medieval burgage plots in town centre
- Wide range of building periods representing the the medieval period to the present day
- Large high quality open spaces with historic interest at the Kinecroft, Bullcroft and Castle Meadows
- Variety of built character and appearance forming a rich multi-layered urban environment

5.1 Street pattern and layout

Wallingford is a nucleated settlement contained by embankments within a roughly rectangular area to create four distinct quarters. The layout of roads are considered and planned unlike the organic and incidental nature in which many historic places have developed; a result of the

defensive nature of the settlement's origins.

Whilst the northern quarters are open spaces, the southern quarters of the town are developed and fragmented by a network of secondary routes. From the main cross roads, High Street crossing the main north to south route, are narrow lanes and alleyways which lead to the secondary streets within the two southern quarters respectively.

These smaller connecting routes are Hart Street, Mousey Lane and St Leonards Lane in the south eastern quarter which connect to Wood Street and Thames Street. Feathers Yard and Church Lane in the south western quarter connect to Goldsmiths Lane in the south western quarter. Additional smaller routes of this kind may have been lost and are the subject of ongoing research into the early layout of the town.

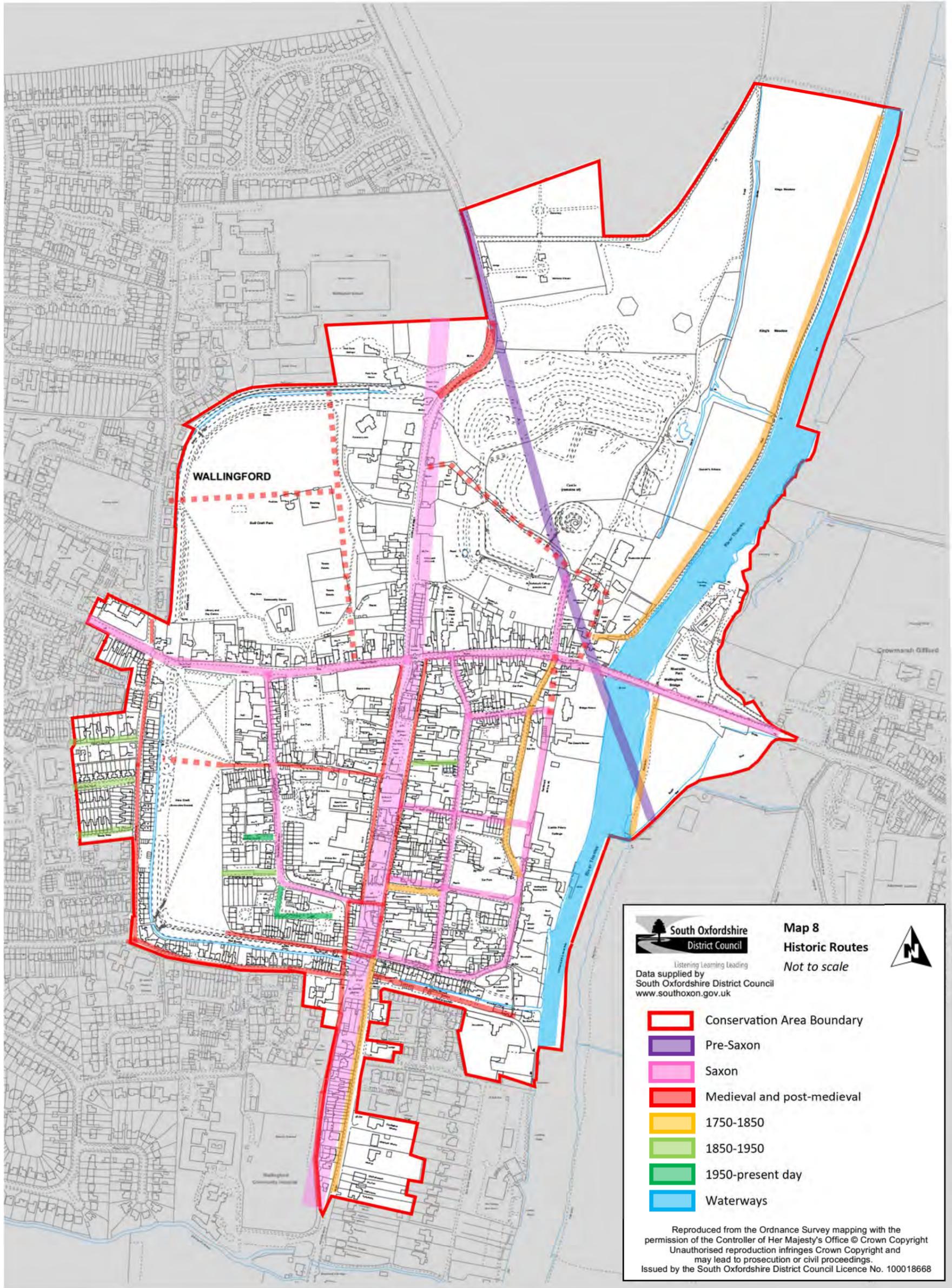
The main north-to-south route in the southern half of the town may have originally been a continuously wide street of the proportions that can be seen at Market Place and St Leonards Square, tapering only at its ends near the northern and southern gates. It is often presumed that the infilling of these areas in market towns may

have evolved from the occupation of these areas by permanent market stalls. In Wallingford, two narrower streets have been formed either end of the market place, St Marys and St Martins Street.

Beyond the confines of the Saxon town, the main crossroads extend radially away from the town towards other nearby settlements. The High Street would have formed the most significant transport route because it provided the main river crossing route over the Thames. Today, although this is a busy vehicular route, the Market Place forms the busy commercial centre of the town.

Very little alteration has occurred to the established layout within the Saxon enclosed town other than the creation of New Street and the possible rerouting of traffic nearer to Broughton Mill east of the early south gate.

Secondary routes were laid out between the outer roads in the 19th and 20th centuries to accommodate new housing. These infilled the areas of land between the radial roads particularly to the west of the town. Little alteration was otherwise made to the original town layout with the exception of the addition of New Street and the rerouting of Thames Street in the southeast quarter.



5.2 Building plots

The division of plots largely determines the urban grain of a place. The Saxon system of dividing land to form crofts or smallholdings is understood to have been overwritten by the medieval burgage system that re-allocated and divided these parcels of land into long narrow strips with a road frontage. It is unclear whether any boundaries pre dating this survive.

Plots with a frontage on the busy main cross routes came at a premium and the urban form in these areas is particularly dense with narrow buildings positioned directly onto the street with long narrow plots to the rear. The effect is that buildings are positioned cheek by jowl, usually forming two to three storeys in height. To the rear, extensions and outbuildings diminish in size.

In Wallingford burgage plots are best preserved in the eastern half of the town on the High Street and St Mary's Street. The rear of the plots are accessed by 'service' roads such as St Peters Street and Wood Street. The rear workings of the frontage buildings can be appreciated from these service roads. In many stretches on Wood Street a building has been added within the rear of the burgage plot creating a more active frontage to these back roads.

Within the southern portion away from the burgage plots, development is much sparser. The basic grid of secondary roads is preserved but there is much less regularity in the setting out of building plots which are inconsistent in size and shape, some running the full depth of the parcel of land similar to the burgage plot system and others allocated much shallower areas.

Generally but not exclusively, buildings are sited towards the road frontages. The main exception is Thames Street where historic buildings and rear gardens form the road frontage to a large part of this area. This in part can be attributed to the rerouting of the street in the 19th century and the loss of buildings that may have existed here. Overall, land division in these areas is more generous.

The definition of burgage plots in the south western quarter has almost completely been lost by truncating the plots that extended back from St Martins Street to create large open backland areas. The edges of these parcels of land are lined with shallow building plots of later date that face Goldsmiths Lane. The remainder of this quarter consists of larger parcels of land occupied by former industrial sites. These have been subdivided to provide housing from the 19th century to the present day,

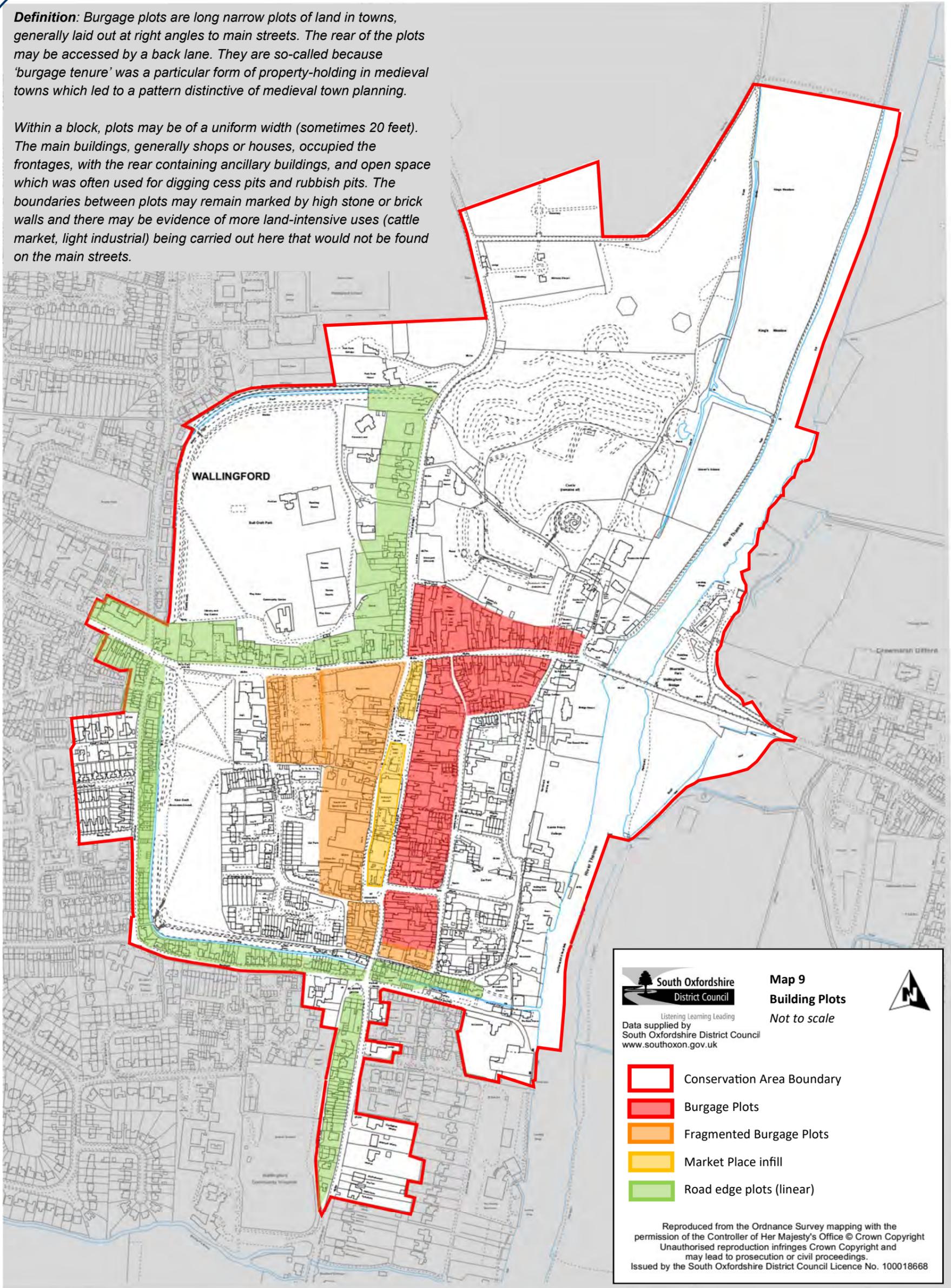
usually within cul-de-sacs accessed from Goldsmiths Lane.

Outside the Saxon defences, building plots occupy the shallow gap between the peripheral road (St Johns Road and Croft Road) and the Saxon Embankments. Beyond this the development of buildings into the surrounding open land is more considered with set plot widths and depths for the division of each parcel of land. The size of the plots here generally correspond to the nature and status of the building it was to accommodate with detached villas occupying wider plots than the terraced workers housing. Elsewhere beyond the confines of the Saxon town development followed a linear pattern along the main radial roads.

On the 'island' formed between Priors Walk and Reading Road the development pattern is fairly dense possibly as a result of the dominant ownership of land at adjacent St Johns Hospital to the north and St Lucians to the south. Building plots consist of shallow strips at right angles to the road. The division of Chalmore Gardens to the west of Reading Road generally followed the line of the former allotment plots they occupied. They remain generous plots with detached houses centrally located within them.

Definition: Burgage plots are long narrow plots of land in towns, generally laid out at right angles to main streets. The rear of the plots may be accessed by a back lane. They are so-called because 'burgage tenure' was a particular form of property-holding in medieval towns which led to a pattern distinctive of medieval town planning.

Within a block, plots may be of a uniform width (sometimes 20 feet). The main buildings, generally shops or houses, occupied the frontages, with the rear containing ancillary buildings, and open space which was often used for digging cess pits and rubbish pits. The boundaries between plots may remain marked by high stone or brick walls and there may be evidence of more land-intensive uses (cattle market, light industrial) being carried out here that would not be found on the main streets.




Map 9
Building Plots
Not to scale


Listening Learning Leading
 Data supplied by
 South Oxfordshire District Council
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-  Conservation Area Boundary
-  Burgage Plots
-  Fragmented Burgage Plots
-  Market Place infill
-  Road edge plots (linear)

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