

Wallingford Conservation Area Appraisal

5.3 Activity and prevailing or former uses

Shops, commercial businesses, and important civic buildings are mostly located at the main roads, High Street and Market Place. The High Street, although being the busiest vehicular route through the old town, is surprisingly less active than the north to south route because it has a high proportion of residential properties. This trend reverses at the point nearest the Market Place junction where commercial activities intensify. Residential buildings are less prevalent in this busy central core.

Commercial activity is similarly less prevalent in Castle Street although there are some businesses located near the crossroads. Market Place, St Marys Street and St Martins Street is the towns commercial centre. This activity peters out south of St Leonards Square but it is clear in the surviving shopfronts and signs that this was not always the case and that there was a much wider distribution of commercial activity throughout the town.

Wallingford was an important trade centre for agricultural goods. The Corn Exchange was a busy centre for the sale of arable crops and the corn mills of the town are evidence of the conversion of these crops to

saleable goods. In the Market Place, Wilder's agricultural machinery was displayed and sold for the benefit of visiting farmers drawn from the surrounding area. The sale of livestock took place at the cattle market off Wood Street. Although these uses have now disappeared, evidence of the buildings and spaces that facilitated them remain important reminders.

Industrial uses were generally located in the southern portion of the town away from the Market Place. The south western quarter was occupied by Wilders Ironworks, Hunts Mill and Wallingford Brewery. It is assumed that the medieval town's mint was located in this quarter and informed the name 'Goldsmiths Lane'.

Evidence of industrial and trade related uses were also carried out in the south eastern quarter. There are barns, former warehouses, malt houses and a large enclosed area which formed the cattle market. Both quarters are now predominantly quieter residential areas with many buildings having been converted for housing.

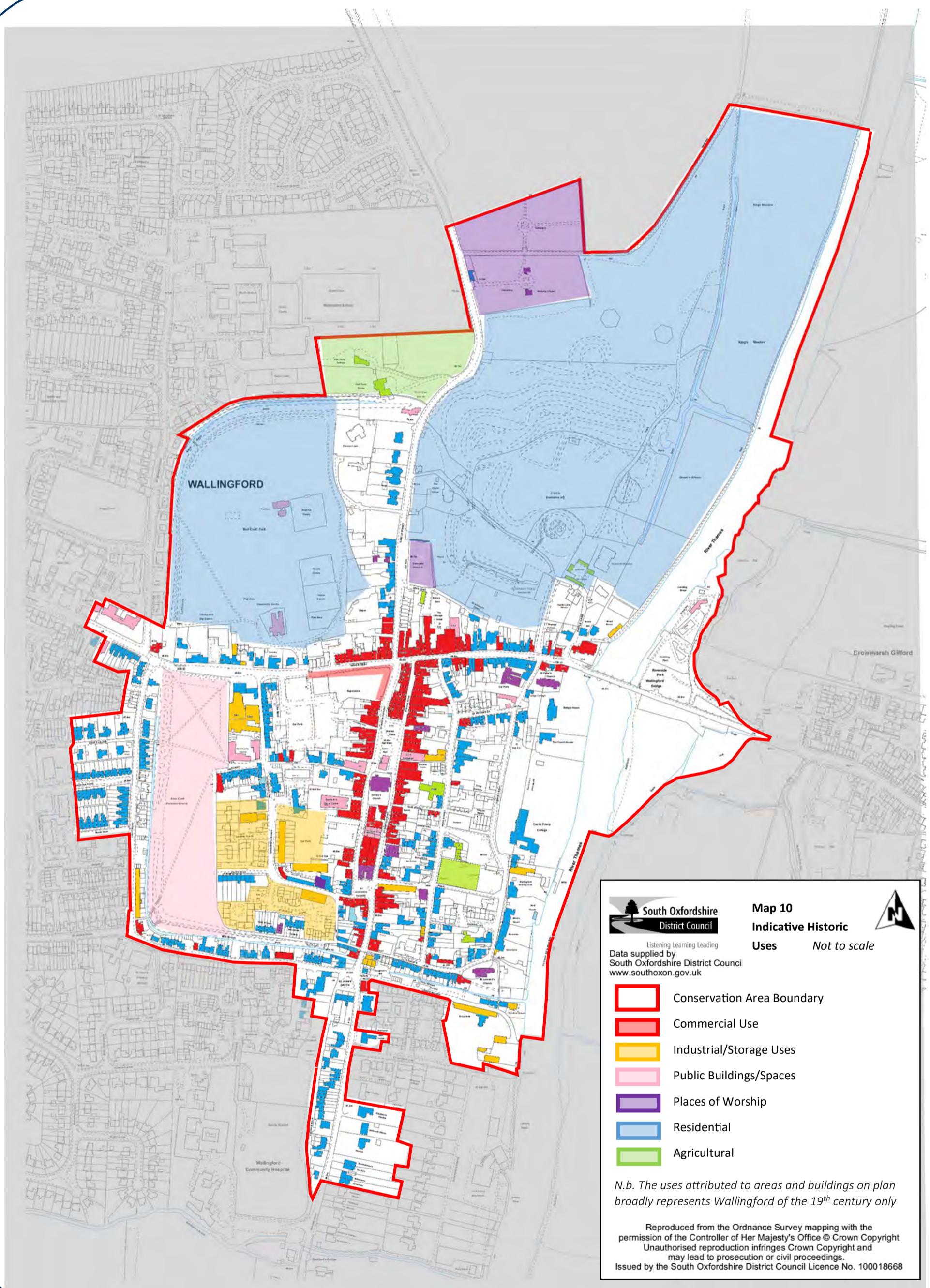
The areas outside the Saxon walls remained predominantly agricultural until the 20th century although some of the less

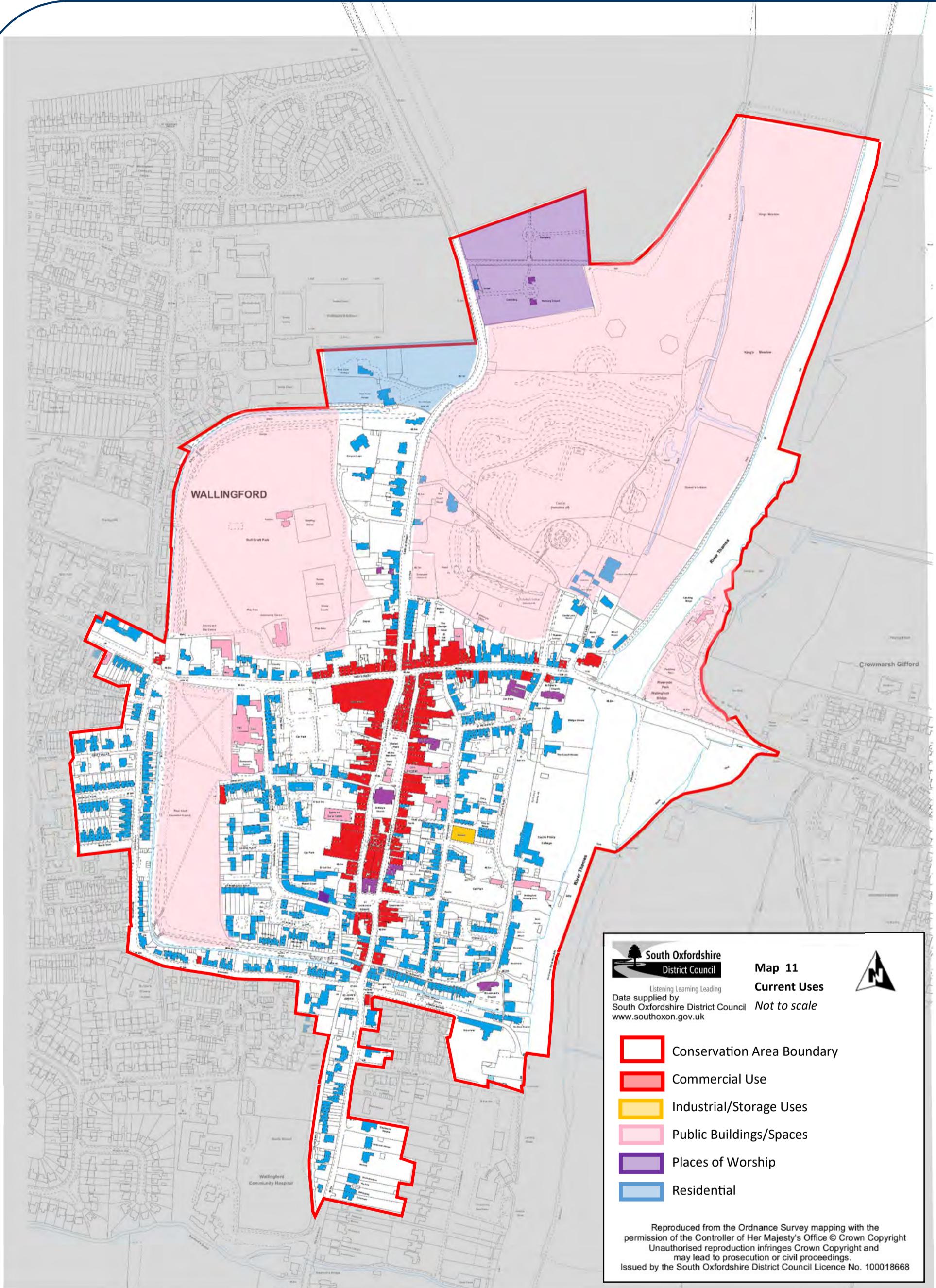
desirable uses were located here in relative isolation. To the west of the town was a thriving tannery, notoriously odorous. Beyond this to the north was the union workhouse.

The arrival of the railway in this area increased the desirability for land for commercial and trade purposes and an agricultural machinery factory was constructed in the 19th Century.

Although it is usually preferable that buildings continue to perform their original function, sensitive conversion can enable the ongoing conservation of a building and offer an opportunity to restore the vitality of an area. Conversions of this type include Hunts Mill and Wilders Ironworks in Goldsmiths Lane that have been converted to mixed residential uses. Also worthy of mention is the conversion of the Cornmarket to a theatre and cinema.

The distribution of uses throughout the town have been identified on Maps 10 and 11.





5.4 Views and vistas

There are four distinct types of views that have been identified as having high significance and which add positively to the variety of ways in which the conservation area is experienced and understood:

1. planned views from one location to or through another
2. panoramic views offered across open spaces
3. key views towards specific landmarks,
4. dynamic and changing views as you move around the conservation area (particularly through the historic streets)

Notable planned views include those from the castle ruins and embankments. These high vantage points had a specific function of surveillance of the opposite side of the river during the Saxon and Post-Norman Conquest occupation of the town. Currently, these views enable an enhanced experience of the conservation area and town centre because of the higher position and provide a tangible link to the historic development of the town. Also noteworthy are the views from the town's embankments and out of the town from the former town 'gates' which fulfill similar defensive function.

Panoramic views are usually gained from one fixed location and will offer wider views of places and their surroundings. These include the planned views from the castle grounds and also include those views which look across open spaces within and out of the conservation area.

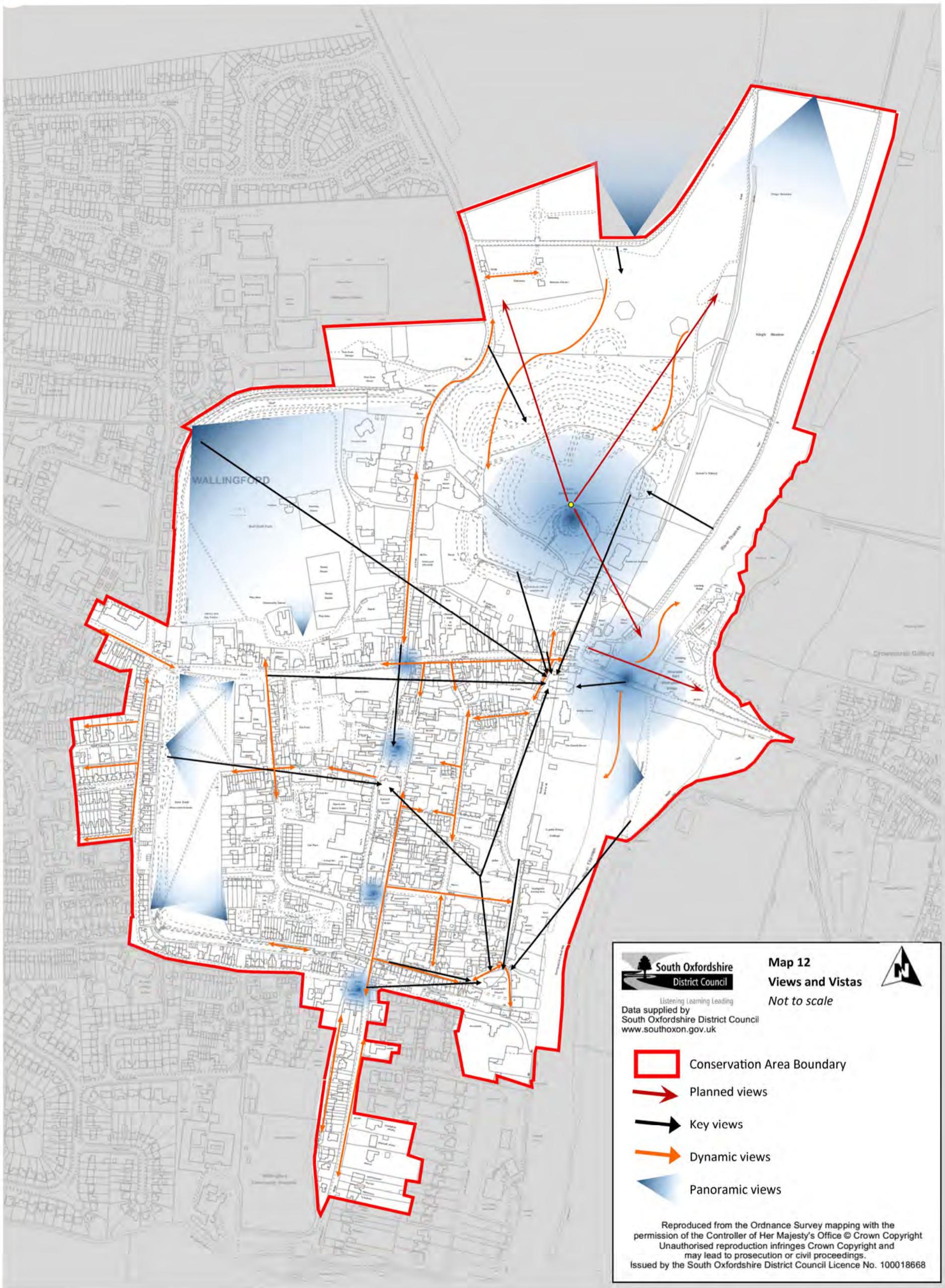
Key views are generally of landmark buildings which were placed in a way or built in a manner which intended them to be seen by all. Examples of these include views of the Town Hall in the centre of the Market Place and views of church towers or spires which can be seen from within town and outside of the town across the river.

Dynamic and changing views are more sensory and take account of the experience of the viewer moving through a space rather than a static view from one fixed location. Some of these are particularly diverse and give a special insight into the character of the area.

Views have been identified on Map 12.



Key view: St Peters Church Spire viewed from High Street at junction to Thames Street



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5.5 Trees, landscape and open spaces

The Kinecroft, Bullcroft and Castle Meadows site form four large areas of open green space providing relief and contrast to the built form of the town. They provide space for informal and organised outdoor activities which are much valued by the town's occupants. They provide essential room for trees and greenery.

Of particular note are the tree topped ramparts which form a strong visual divide between the old Saxon town and the town's extension beyond. The quality and openness of these inner town spaces provides visual connection to the setting of the conservation area beyond.

The open space on the opposite bank of the river Thames consists of open flood meadows that are particularly unspoilt. These can be appreciated from the bridge and from the castle grounds and towpaths. Although originally the sides of the towpath would have been kept clear, those within the northern portion of the town are well treed with willows and other native trees and planting. From the town, the wooded escarpment of the Chilterns forms a green backdrop and makes an important contribution in views within the Conservation Area.



The riverside is an important public space with high biodiversity value.

Some private gardens have also been identified as important open spaces for their contribution to the character of a specific area. The garden areas of the riverside properties provide wide open spaces which provide the river frontage with a green rather than hard built edge. At 16 Castle Street, a wide side garden provides an important visual break between the edge of the old town and later buildings beyond.

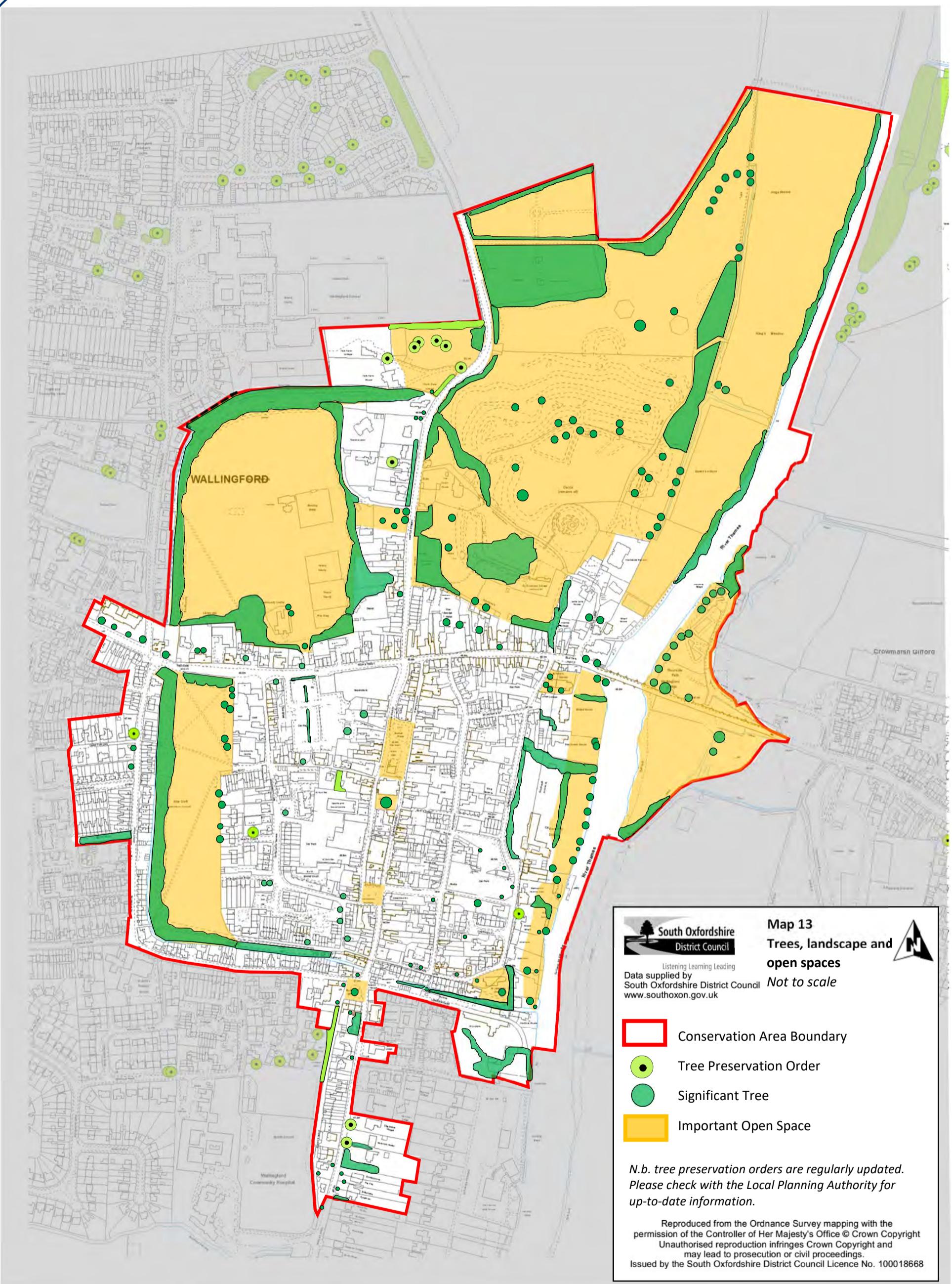
Important open spaces, trees, greenery and landscapes have been identified on Map 13

5.6 Biodiversity value

The Castle Meadows site is a managed nature conservation site, which does much to enhance the biodiversity of the town by providing suitable native habitats. This site is adjacent to the River Thames, which is an important wildlife corridor. Notable for Wallingford are the significant populations of swifts.

Worthy of mention is the biodiversity value of garden areas within the town which cumulatively provide an important habitat within the built environment. The long gardens of burgage plots provide important green habitats within central areas.

N.B. South Oxfordshire District Council and Earth Trust jointly manage Castle Meadows and Riverside Meadows. Management Plans are produced and reviewed regularly and can be read at www.southoxon.gov.uk



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5.7 Public Realm

Wallingford conservation area is predominantly urban in nature and as such, the treatment of the public realm is consistent with the size of the town. The items and facilities needed can have a significant impact upon the character of a place and the experience of the visitor.

Street furniture typically consists of benches, street lighting, bins, bollards, boundary fencing, barriers, information signage, bus stops, telephone kiosks, post boxes, cycle stands, pumps, markers, fountains and planters.

In Wallingford, the Market Place has a comprehensive scheme of public realm treatment dating from the 1979 Local Plan for Wallingford including traditional cast iron benches, Victorian style metal lanterns, traditionally profiled iron bollards, signposts and bins providing the necessary modern features fitting to their context. Street paving is generally good quality in the Market Place with stone pavers and granite sets. There are information signs throughout the town, these are generally well placed and provide valuable historic interpretation for visitors to the town.

Away from the Market Place, surfaces are generally tarmac with concrete sets and street lighting generally consists of standard modern overlights. In the narrower streets, these are fixed to buildings. Some areas are not lit however the absence of street lighting is an inherent part of its less urbanised character.

Within the castle meadows site and areas that are less urban in nature, benches, fencing and surfaces are less formal with simple timber benches, post and rail fencing and simple light gravel trackways.

Planting within the conservation area enhances its appearance and create attractive focal points. Of particular mention is the flower planting around the war memorial in front of the Town Hall, the planting on St Martins Street opposite Waitrose and the flower planting on the small roundabout in St Leonards Square. Elsewhere, hanging baskets with flowers hung from the sides of buildings and lampposts enliven street scenes. Those lining the bridge are particularly well placed and add to the sense of arrival into the town.



Timber bench with painted cast iron ends on the Thames towpath with carved memorial dedication



Metal bench with decorative ends in Market Place. Pedestrian and vehicular routes are differentiated with high quality stone slabs and granite sets.