



University Of Oxford | Estates Services

Design and Access Statement and Heritage Assessment

**(RETROSPECTIVE) Planning Application For Temporary Car Park At The
Radcliffe Observatory Quarter, Oxford**

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1.0 DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

1.1. Location

The application site is the Central Plot located at the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter (ROQ) in Oxford City Centre. The application area limits to the north with the Radcliffe Observatory; to the west with the New Radcliffe House and Harkness building; to the south with the new Blavatnik School of Government, and to the east with the Mathematical Institute.

1.2. Introduction

The application site is the ROQ Central Plot; which was temporarily established as a site compound during the construction of the Blavatnik School of Government. The Central Plot is part of the ROQ expansion plan, which will be developed into new academic research, teaching and administrative buildings.

The site compound was removed from the Central Plot when the Blavatnik School of Government was completed in 2015, and a new planning application was submitted to convert the land into a temporary green area. Planning permission was granted on April 2016 for a wildflower landscape built on locally-sourced recycled ballast. 15/03198/FUL.

The aim of application 15/03198/FUL was to create a temporary green area, while funding and planning was sought for a new Humanities building. In 2019, the Central Plot was designated for the new Stephen A. Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities, which is currently at early design and planning stages.

Following the announcement of the first national lockdown in March 2020, the University began drafting a new set of temporary measures for safe on-site working for university staff. These measures included safe arrangements for travelling into Oxford and temporary parking.

The University has selected the ROQ Central Plot to provide temporary parking facilities and to support its on-site working strategy. The site is fully accessible and undeveloped, thus providing safe conditions for temporary parking during the pandemic; similarly, its location offers a lower impact on vehicular traffic, as it is situated 0.4 miles from the nearest vehicular restricted zone in Magdalen street. The temporary car park will allow staff, who cannot work from home, to commute to Oxford safely, reducing the spread of the virus and protecting university staff, students, residents and the NHS. The University consulted the City Council in June 2020 and it was advised that a full planning application would be required.

1.3. Vehicular Access

The site is accessible from Walton Street and Woodstock Road; which form the east and west boundaries of the ROQ. In accordance with the requirements of previous applications, the only vehicular access is through an entrance off Woodstock Road referred to as Gate 7. Gate 7 is also used by pedestrians and cyclists. The route continues in order to connect with the 'pedestrians and cyclists only' entrance off Walton Street. This route provides direct access to the Central Plot. The proposed works will have no effect upon this access way.

1.4. Pedestrian Access

There is pedestrian access to the Central Plot. However the perimeter fence around the Central Plot limits access for authorised University card holder users only. The proposed works will have no effect upon pedestrian access.

1.5. Description of the Proposed Works

The proposal consists of:

- 1.5.1. New temporary power supply for a security booth located outside the Central Plot. The power feed is an armoured cable attached to the perimeter fence, providing a safe surface-run connection into the security booth.
- 1.5.2. Re-spreading existing ballast evenly across the site to form adequate levels for vehicular and pedestrian circulation.
- 1.5.3. Forming an earth bund around the perimeter of the car park, to limit the space for circulation away from areas that could pose a Health & Safety risk to car park users. i.e. to block access to the electrical substation on the south boundary, steep earth bank on the west boundary and the university's Early Alert Service unit, located on the north boundary.
- 1.5.4. Restricted parking hours monitored by University Security Services to maintain the area secure at all times. This restriction will also help reduce noise pollution on the neighbouring college buildings.

1.6. Suggested Planning Consent Duration

The University seeks permission for a limited period **until 31 December 2021**. After this date the security booth shall be removed and the Central Plot will no longer be available for parking to university staff.

1.7. Justification

Principal reasons for setting a temporary car park in the ROQ site:

- 1.6.1 To minimise the spread of COVID-19 to the local Oxford community and University staff and students.
- 1.6.2 To provide university staff a safe and accessible alternative for commuting to Oxford, when working from home is not possible.

1.9. Supporting Documentation

The planning application and the Design and Access Statement and Heritage Assessment are accompanied by the following plans:

Location map

Site plan

Photos

The application does not include a Daylight or Sunlight Assessment, Landscape Details nor a Noise Impact Assessment. The temporary car park will have no adverse impact by way of noise or reducing daylight. It is a temporary measure, so no landscaping is proposed. As a result it is considered that these three assessments are not required.

1.10. Planning Policy

1.10.1. NPPF

- 1.10.1.1. 171 Health and Wellbeing – The temporary car park is a response to the impact of Coronavirus on the local community and University operations. The proposal will aim to improve the health and wellbeing of the University and local community by providing a safe travel and parking arrangement to university staff.

1.10.2. Oxford Local Plan 2036

- 1.10.2.1. Policy DH5 requires the consideration of local heritage assets.
- 1.10.2.2. Policy SP54 allows for 'other complementary uses to be considered on their merits.

1.10 Conclusions

The application seeks planning permission for the use of an underused part of the ROQ for a car park for a temporary period. The site utilises existing access points and minimal change is required to land itself. Given the temporary nature of the proposal, there is considered to be no material harm to the character or appearance of the area and no impediment to future development aspirations for the site.

2.0 HERITAGE ASSESSMENT

2.1 Description of the Site

2.1.1 Location

The application site is the Central Plot between the Andrew Wiles Building and the Blavatnik School of Government; located at the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter (ROQ) in Woodstock Road, OX2 6GG

2.1.2 Identification of the Heritage Asset



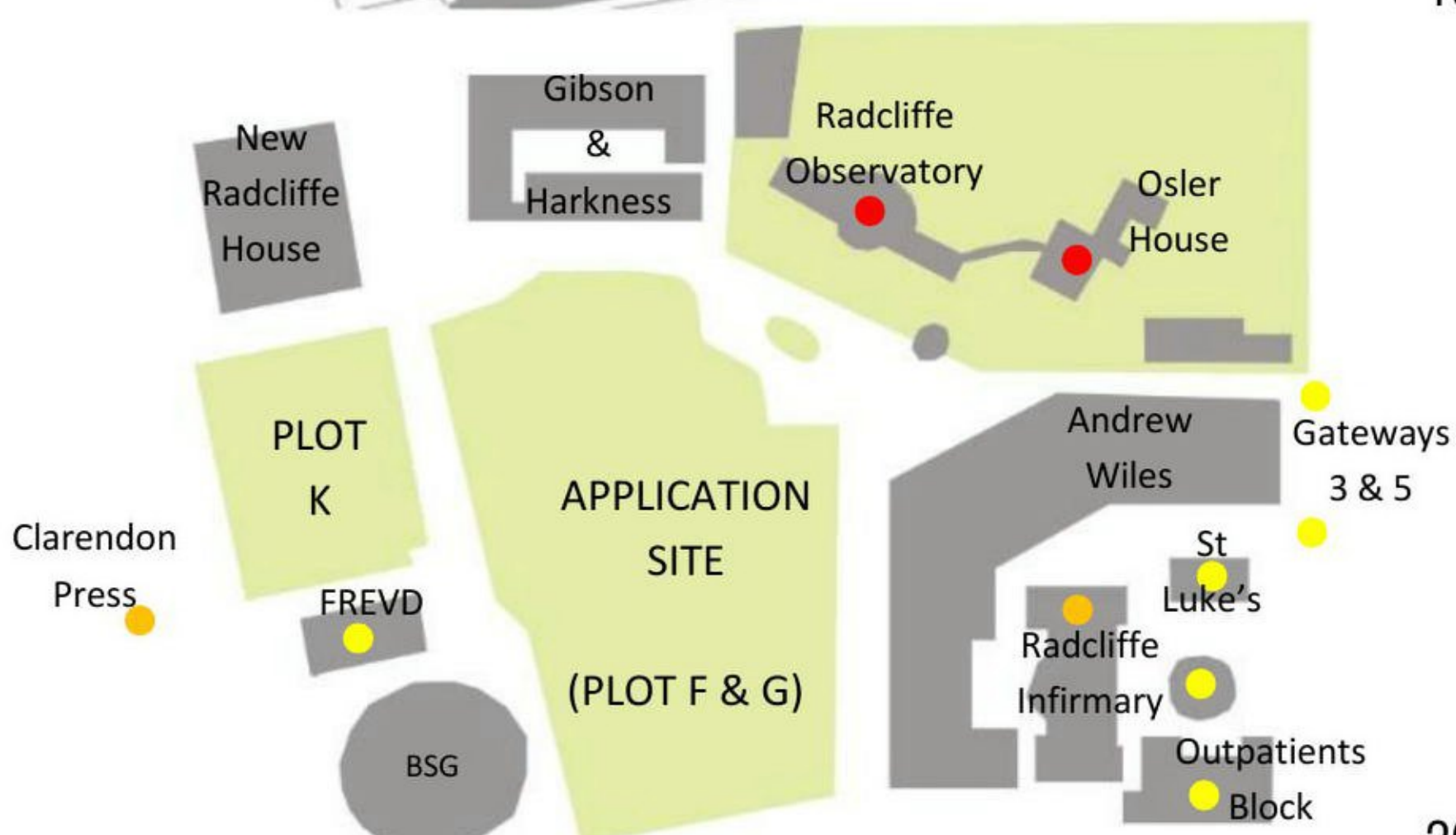
1775



1875



1970



2020

The existing ROQ, began as the site for the Radcliffe Infirmary and observatory, built in the late C18. The Radcliffe Infirmary was built in 1770 with a west-facing landscaped garden and a court by the entrance from Woodstock Road. Similarly, the Radcliffe Observatory was built in 1773 and was originally surrounded by a landscaped park. By 1875, the Infirmary site had expanded with new medical and small religious buildings. The landscaped areas decreased between the two clusters of buildings. The fountain of Triton (1858) and the courtyard was framed by a Fever Ward (1824), an outpatients' building and St Luke's Chapel (1865). The surrounding area included a mix of uses of residential, commercial, university and college properties. Directly to the north of the Central Plot lies the Radcliffe Observatory, part of Green Templeton College. Built in 1773, the Observatory building is dominated by the Tower of the Winds rising four storeys.

The Radcliffe Hospital occupied the entire ROQ site by the late C20. The Observatory Gardens were reduced to a smaller landscaped area in front of the Observatory and the garden at the back. Most of the gardens, including the application site, were occupied by medical buildings and narrow alleys connecting the different hospital areas. The development of the site stopped with the opening of the new John Radcliffe Hospital in Headington; The ROQ site was then sold to the University of Oxford in 2003 with a lease agreement to the hospital until 2007. A new redevelopment masterplan is submitted to Oxford City Council the year the site is officially handed over to the University, and demolition works began in 2008.

By 2010, the remaining inactive medical buildings on site were the Radcliffe Infirmary (Grade II*), the Outpatients block and St Luke's chapel (Grade II), and the mid C20 Gibson and Harkness block. These buildings went through extensive redevelopment to accommodate Humanities and other University departments. Three new buildings were also developed on site by 2016; The New Radcliffe House, The Andrew Wiles Building and the Blavatnik School of Government. The new architecture introduced in the ROQ created a contrast in materiality and style, yet it derived from a careful study of the site's historic context.

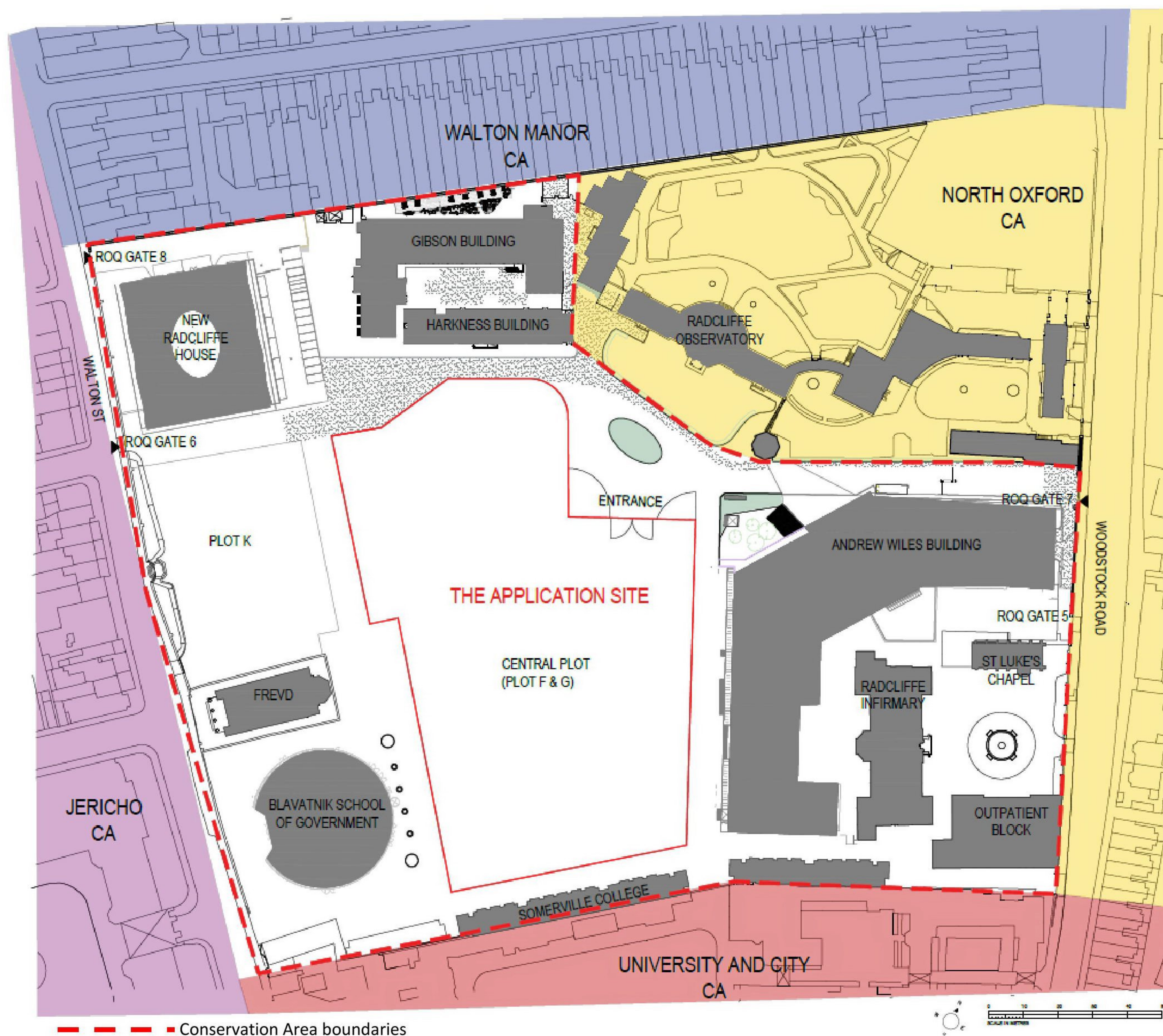
To date, the remaining undeveloped land is known as Plot K and Plot F & G. Following the decommissioning of the Tinbergen building, the Department of Experimental Psychology was relocated to a temporary modular structure built on Plot K and known as the Anna Watts building.

Plot F&G, known as the Central Plot, is the largest undeveloped area in the ROQ site; partially occupied by the University's Early Alert Service unit. The Central Plot was selected for temporary staff parking in 2020 to provide safe on-site working arrangements during the coronavirus outbreak. This application seeks planning permission for the temporary car park in the Central Plot.

2.2 Description of the Heritage Assets

2.2.1 Listing Details:

The ROQ site is not listed and does not lie within a registered park or conservation area. However, due to its proximity to listed assets and four conservation areas in Oxford, the site is considered to be of high significance within its immediate urban context.



2.2.2 Historic Parks, Gardens and Surrounding Listed Buildings:

The application site limits to the north with the Grade-I listed Radcliffe Observatory; however the ROQ east-west thoroughfare and the Observatory's front garden separate the application site from the listed asset. To the southwest the site limits with Frevd's rear elevation, a C19 ecclesiastical building now run as a commercial venue.

The Andrew Wiles Building lies between the application site and the Infirmary's listed buildings to the east. i.e. St Luke's Chapel and the Outpatients building (Grade II Listed) and the Radcliffe Infirmary (Grade II* Listed). In the middle of this group of Listed buildings, is the Infirmary's Grade-II listed triton fountain; however it was replaced with an exact replica during the site refurbishment in 2012.

2.2.3 Conservation Areas:

Although the ROQ site is not within a conservation area, it directly limits to the north with Walton Manor CA, to the east with North Oxford CA, to the south with University and City (Central) CA, and to the west with Jericho CA.

2.3 Description of the Proposed Works

The University has selected the ROQ Central Plot to provide temporary parking facilities and to support its on-site working strategy during the Coronavirus pandemic.

The proposal consists of:


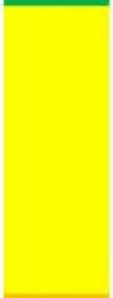


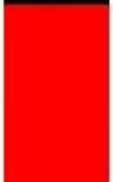
- 2.3.1 New temporary power supply for a security booth located outside the Central Plot. The power feed is an armoured cable attached to the perimeter fence, providing a safe surface-run connection into the security booth.
- 2.3.2 Re-spreading existing ballast evenly across the site to form adequate levels for vehicular and pedestrian circulation.
- 2.3.3 Forming an earth bund around the perimeter of the car park, to limit the space for circulation away from areas that could pose a Health & Safety risk to car park users. i.e. to block access to the electrical substation on the south boundary, steep earth bank on the west boundary and the Covid-19 Testing Unit, located on the north boundary.
- 2.3.4 Restricted parking hours monitored by University Security Services to maintain the area secure at all times. This restriction will also help reduce noise pollution on the neighbouring college buildings.

2.4 Suggested Planning Consent Duration

The University seeks permission for a limited period **until 31 December 2021**. After this date the security booth shall be removed and the Central Plot will no longer be available for parking to university staff.

2.5 Significance Levels Description

2.5.1 Significance

	Description
High	 A feature or space which is important at national or international level, such as highly graded listed buildings and landscapes. They will have high cultural value and form an essential piece of the history of the building or site, while greatly contributing towards its character and appearance.
Moderate	 Buildings or sites which are important at regional level or sometimes higher. Spaces or features will have some cultural importance and play an important role in defining the character and appearance of the building or site.
Low:	 Usually of local value only but possibly of regional significance for group or other value. Items have minor cultural importance and add something to the character or appearance of the buildings or site.
Neutral:	 These spaces or features have little or no cultural value but do not detract from the character or appearance of the building or site.
Intrusive:	 Features which actually detract from the values of the site and its character and appearance.

2.5.2 Overall Significance

Significance

The contribution that the Central Plot make to the significance of the adjacent conservation areas and listed assets is of high importance. The site is framed by important axial views of the Radcliffe Observatory, Somerville college and Walton St. Although the Radcliffe Observatory site is continually changing with new development of university buildings and infrastructure, the Central Plot remains an important anchor between Walton St and Woodstock road. This includes the listed assets within the Radcliffe Observatory site and neighbouring properties in the different Conservation Areas.

The specific contribution of the Central Plot to the Heritage Values (as defined in Historic England’s document “Conservation Principles”) is set out below.

It is considered that the contribution of the Central Plot to the overall significance heritage asset as a whole is **High**

2.5.3 Aesthetic

The ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place.

Currently, the Central Plot does not offer a positive contribution to the aesthetic value of the site and Conservation Areas. The application site is an empty plot outside the perimeter of the existing Conservation Areas; the plot was demarked by a perimeter mesh fence and soft landscape in 2016 as a temporary measures, while the space remained undeveloped. However, its central location provides an opportunity to improve the aesthetic value of its historic urban context.

It is considered that the contribution that the aesthetic value of the undeveloped Central Plot makes to the overall significance heritage asset as a whole is **neutral**.

2.5.4 Historic

Illustrative and associative, how a place connects the present to past people, events and aspects of life.








The Central Plot does not make any positive contribution to the historic value of the site or Conservation Areas. The land is undeveloped and does not hold architectural or historic significance to create a valuable connection between the present and past history of the site.

The Central Plot was the site for various mid C20 medical buildings, demolished when the University acquired the site in 2007. Any small historic value that these buildings contributed to the urban context, was lost during the demolition works. Nonetheless, the site provides an opportunity to reconnect its historic urban fabric by developing the land into an “architectural link” among the neighbouring conservation areas

It is considered that the contribution that the historic value of the site currently makes to the overall significance heritage asset as a whole is **neutral**.

2.6 Heritage Impact Assessment

This table provides a description of the levels of harm attributed by this proposal to the above identified significance.

Level of Impact		
High Beneficial:		The proposed changes will seriously improve the overall setting and character of heritage assets, revealing and/or enhancing important characteristics which were previously inaccessible. There would be a substantial improvement to important elements of the building. Any change resulting in a positive impact should be encouraged.
Moderate Beneficial:		The proposed changes will considerably improve the setting or overall character of the heritage asset. There may be an improvement in key uses and beneficial change (e.g. the creation of coherency) to the visual characteristics of the interior of the building. Any change resulting in a positive impact should be encouraged.
Minor Beneficial:		The proposed changes may cause minimal improvement to the setting or overall character of a heritage asset. Any change resulting in a positive impact should be encouraged.
Neutral:		The proposed changes will have no impact on the heritage asset.
Minor Adverse:		The proposed changes will have minimal impact on the setting or overall character of a heritage asset. Change of this magnitude may be acceptable if suitable mitigation is carried out.
Moderate Adverse:		The proposed changes will negatively alter the setting or overall character of the heritage asset. It will likely disturb key features and detract from the overall heritage significance. Change of this magnitude should be avoided where possible, but can be neutralised through positive mitigation.
High Adverse:		The proposed changes will seriously damage the overall setting and character of heritage assets. They will cause a notable disruption to or in some cases complete destruction of important features. Change of this magnitude should be avoided.

2.6.1 New temporary power supply to portable security booth

The temporary power supply is protected within an armoured cable, and clipped to the existing modern mesh fence around the perimeter of the Central Plot. The new cable provides a safe surface-run connection into the security booth. The temporary supply is fed from the existing Radcliffe Observatory site substation located to the south of the Central Plot. The power source is not visible from any of the main roads, i.e. Woodstock Rd and Walton St.

The booth is a temporary 1-man portable unit. It sits directly on the existing hardstanding by the Central Plot main gates. It does not have any connection to existing services apart from the temporary power feed aforementioned. The booth and power feed will be removed at the end of the permission period.

The impact resulting from the alterations on the modern mesh fence and temporary security booth are therefore considered to be neutral.

2.6.2 Re-spreading existing ballast evenly across the site to form adequate levels for vehicular and pedestrian circulation.

The existing ballast in the Central Plot was locally sourced from a development site in Oxford in 2016. Planning ref 15/03198/FUL. The Central Plot was seeded using hydroseeding technology, which allowed planting wildflowers and low-level vegetation in the southernmost parts of the Central Plot.

The ballast was re-spread to allow a levelled surface for temporary parking. The visual impact of the minor groundworks is negligible.

The impact resulting from re-spreading the existing ballast is therefore considered to be **neutral**. However, the benefit of a temporary car park in Central Oxford, during the pandemic, will outweigh any minor negative impact on its historic urban setting.

2.6.3 New earth bund

The perimeter of the proposed car park was restricted by an earth bund formed from the existing ballast on site. The intention was to limit access to areas that pose a H&S and security risk. i.e. the electrical substation on the south boundary, steep earth bank on the west boundary and the Covid-19 Testing Unit, located on the north boundary.

The bund is of low height, but sufficiently large to deter movement to certain areas within the Central Plot. The visual impact of the earth bund is negligible.

The impact resulting from re-spreading the existing ballast to form new earth bunds inside the Central Plot is therefore considered to be neutral.

2.7 Conclusions

The proposal, as set out above, is demonstrated to have a negligible adverse impact upon the significance of the identified Heritage Asset, whilst delivering a clear benefit as described in detail below:

The proposal consists of:

- Conservation of existing historic building components
- Fully reversible alterations with insignificant impact to the historic urban setting
- Temporary alterations to enable safer on-site working for university staff
- Minor alterations with negligible visual impact on the historic urban setting

Further, the proposed development is of a temporary and reversible nature; it is considered that the alterations will have no significant impact on the adjacent conservation areas or listed buildings. The proposal will be limited to the duration of the planning permission granted by the council, and will be reverted to its former condition by its expiration date.