

INSTITUTE OF DIGITAL HEALTH, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
HERITAGE STATEMENT
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INSTITUTE OF DIGITAL HEALTH, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD: HERITAGE STATEMENT

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SECTION 1.0

INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

This Heritage Statement has been prepared as part of the proposals for the refurbishment of the Gibson and Harkness Buildings to establish a base for the University of Oxford's Institute of Digital Health (hereafter 'the site'). Earlier iterations of the report were previously issued to inform the development of the design proposals.

As per the National Planning Policy Framework, it is a requirement to understand the significance of the heritage assets in and around the application site in advance of development. The level of detail required should be proportionate, and no more than is necessary, in order to identify the impact of the proposals on this significance.

1.2 SCOPE OF STUDY

The proposals concern the existing Gibson and Harkness Buildings on the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter, as well as their immediate landscape curtilage. Due to the proximity of neighbouring heritage assets, the scope of the heritage statement extends beyond the defined site boundary. The scope of study does not extend to archaeological considerations, although initial advice regarding future requirements has been raised.

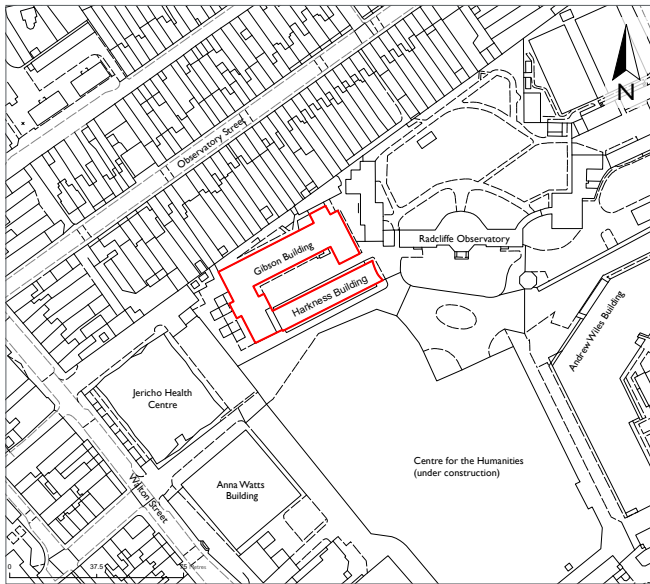
1.3 EXISTING INFORMATION

The Radcliffe Observatory Quarter has been subject to extensive assessment following the site's acquisition by the University of Oxford from the NHS. This includes a conservation plan and gazetteer which assessed and recorded the significance of the component buildings on the site prior to its extensive clearance. Subsequent masterplans and capital projects have thereafter informed the re-development of the site, most recently the consented proposal for the new Centre for the Humanities (under construction). These earlier assessments and records have been consulted in order to understand recent decision making.

SECTION 2.0

SITE DESCRIPTION

The site is located at the northern end of the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter, between the Jericho Health Centre and Green Templeton College. It comprises two three-storey buildings positioned around an internal courtyard and linked via a bridge at the south corner. The Gibson Building comprises a main range with end returns of different lengths and a hipped copper roof. The Harkness Building faces onto the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter and is a regular rectangular range with a flat roof and protruding stair core at its north end. Internally are various offices, teaching spaces and meeting rooms.



 Oxford Institute of Digital Health



North elevation of the Gibson Building



Looking north-east across the courtyard

SITE DESCRIPTION



East elevation of the Harkness Building and south elevation of the Gibson Building



South elevation of the Gibson Building



Open space behind the Gibson Building



View towards the site from the ROQ entrance to the Andrew Wiles Building



View towards the site from the ROQ entrance off Walton Street

SECTION 3.0

SITE HISTORY

The Gibson and Harkness Buildings are remnants of the substantial hospital development which occupied what is now the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter. The earliest building on the site was the 1770 infirmary (now Radcliffe Humanities), with the foundation stone for the Radcliffe Observatory laid in June 1772. Both buildings were deliberately established beyond the activity of the city centre (as a means of infection control for the hospital and, in the case of the observatory, gain clear views of the night sky).

The stone wall extending across the back of the site is presumed to be contemporary with the Radcliffe Observatory. There is a clear indication of a structure along the back of the gardens of the houses on Observatory Street in the 1:500 Ordnance Survey published in the mid-1870s.

The Radcliffe Observatory maintained a largely undeveloped plot, despite the city growing up around it, until 1931 when the site was acquired by the neighbouring infirmary, which quickly spilled over into the Observatory grounds.

The Gibson Building was built in 1945 and extended upwards in the 1950s. It contained hospital laboratories and originally continued across what is now the access road from Walton Street, forming a long wing with an archway through route. The Harkness Building was constructed in the 1970s and contained the clinical trial service unit.⁰¹

The former Radcliffe Infirmary site was largely cleared following its acquisition by the University of Oxford in 2008. This included much of the range extending off the side of the Gibson Building, leaving an abruptly cut off truncated return.



An aerial photograph of the Radcliffe Infirmary shows how densely packed the site was when occupied by the NHS (1999).



Former hospital signage in the courtyard

⁰¹ Information from 'Radcliffe Infirmary Site – Gazetteer', (Purcell, April 2006).

SITE HISTORY



Ordnance Survey 1873-76



An oblique aerial photograph from the 1950s shows the east side of the Gibson and Harkness Buildings, where they face the end of the Radcliffe Observatory. The lower height development at the north-east corner of the Gibson Building, shown here with flat roofs, has been rebuilt since the image was taken.

SECTION 4.0

BUILT HERITAGE DESIGNATIONS

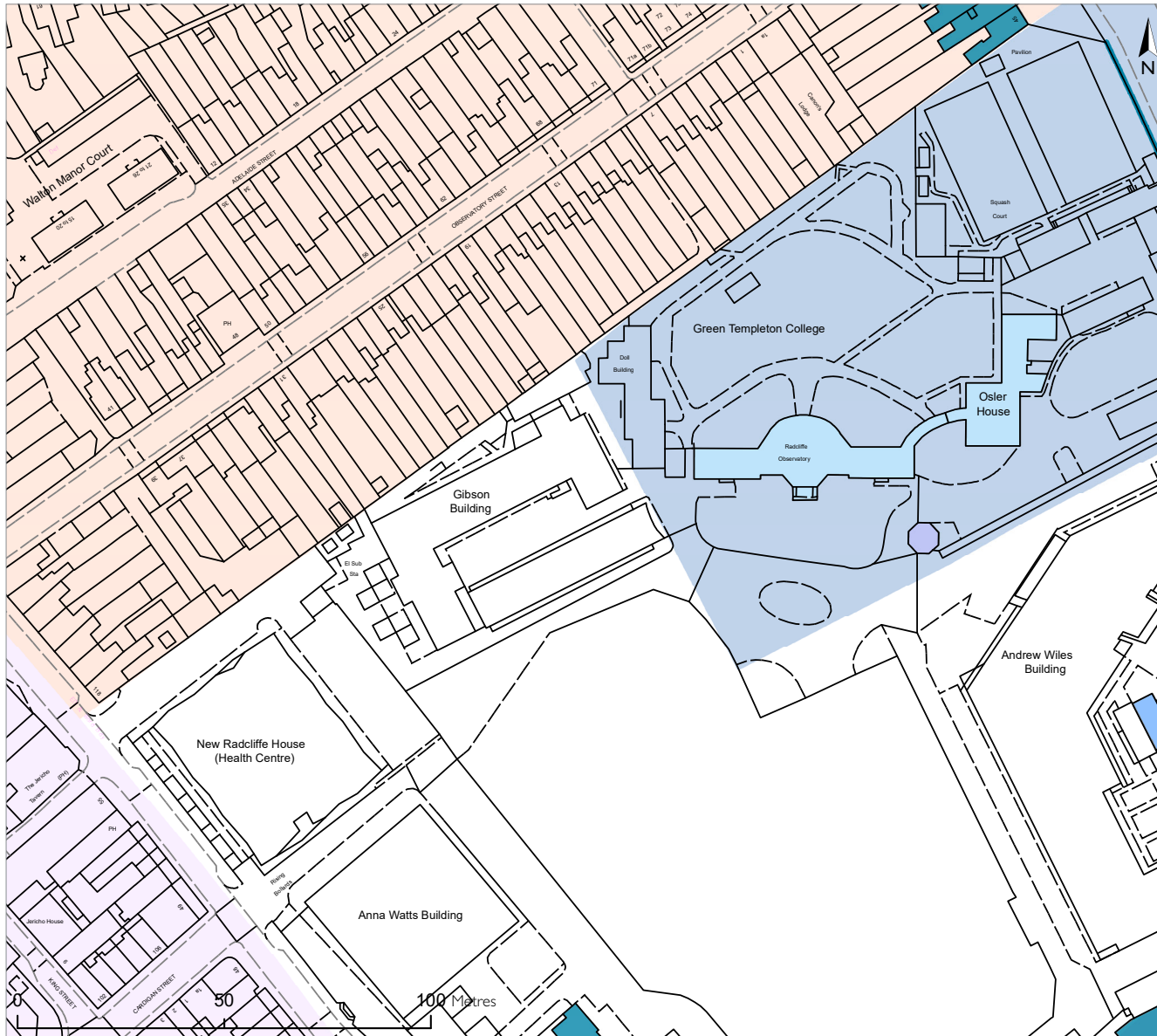
The Gibson and Harkness Buildings are not directly subject to any heritage designations but are directly located adjacent to several designation boundaries. This includes:

- The Walton Manor Conservation Area immediately to the north. Its defining characteristics are:
 - Narrow streets and tight urban grain
 - Modest terraced houses, typically two storeys in height
 - Regular roofscape of shallow pitched roofs and chimneystacks
 - Simple classical architectural detailing
- The North Oxford Victorian Suburb Conservation Area immediately to the east. Its defining characteristics are:
 - Larger terraces and standalone villas
 - Gothic, Arts & Crafts, and vernacular influences
 - High proportion of greenery
 - Wide streets
 - Gaps and glimpsed views between buildings
- The Jericho Conservation Area a short distance to the west. Its defining characteristics are:
 - Regular urban grain organised in blocks
 - Relationship with the canal and railway
 - Combination of residential and industrial history
 - Domestic terraces interspersed with landmark buildings
 - Framed views
- The Central (City and University) Conservation Area at the far south end of the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter. Its defining characteristics are:
 - A variety of different character areas
 - Architectural landmarks, including civic buildings, University departments and colleges
 - City skyline of towers, spires and domes
 - Medieval walled city with later expansion along principal thoroughfares
- The setting of the Grade I listed Radcliffe Observatory, including the separately Grade I listed Observer's House and curtilage listed rotunda/heliometer.

The perimeter wall running along the north side of Green Templeton College and the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter is presumed to be an extension of the Grade II listed, 18th-century boundary wall fronting onto Woodstock Road (list UID 1047068).

Conservation areas and listed buildings are protected under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. National and local planning policies recognise that changes to other buildings or sites within the vicinity (setting) of a heritage asset can affect the special interest of that asset. The National Planning Policy Framework defines setting as 'the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced' and stipulates that there is no metric by which to set out a definitive boundary for this.

BUILT HERITAGE DESIGNATIONS



HERITAGE DESIGNATIONS

- Grade I Listed Building
- Grade II* Listed Building
- Grade II Listed Building
- Curtilage Listed

CONSERVATION AREAS

- Jericho
- North Oxford Victorian Suburb
- Walton Manor

This plan is not to scale

SECTION 5.0

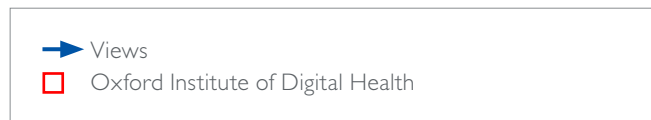
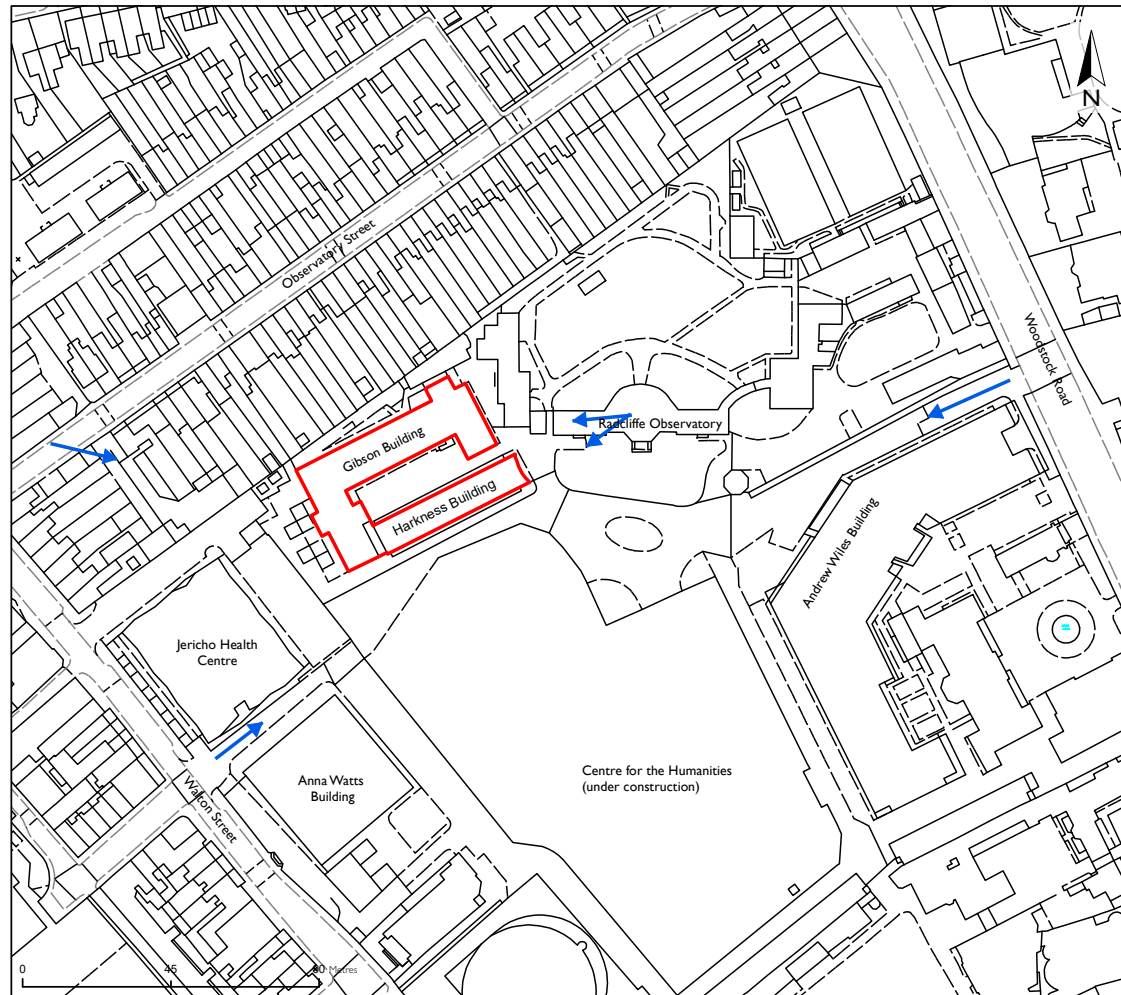
VIEWS

5.1 LOCAL VIEWS

The substantial clearing of the former hospital buildings in 2008 opened up a thoroughfare across the ROQ site, linking Woodstock Road and Walton Street. The Radcliffe Observatory is the focal point in views moving along this route. The Harkness Building protrudes slightly forward across the lower level of the Observatory in views from Walton Street. From Woodstock Road, the site sits beyond and behind the heliometer on the lawn of the Observatory.

The site is not visible above the tight urban grain of the terraces on Observatory Street, except in limited glimpses where the building line breaks towards the west end of the street.

Semi-public views of the site are obtainable from the tower of the adjacent Observatory. From the lower level inside the tower (i.e. looking out the pedimented windows), views of the site are either oblique or heavily obscured by the protruding ground floor wing of the Observatory.



VIEWS



The view towards the site from the cyclist and pedestrian entrance to the ROQ off Walton Street.



The view towards the site from just inside the Woodstock Road entrance to the ROQ.



A glimpse of the site from Observatory Street.



Looking west from inside the lower level of the Observatory tower. The copper roof of the Gibson Building is visible behind and just above the balustraded parapet of the Observatory wing.



The oblique view of the site twisting to the east from the south-facing window in the Observatory tower.



Looking towards the site from the west-facing upper windows of the Observatory tower.

VIEWS

5.2 LONG RANGE VIEWS

Accurate visual representations prepared for the neighbouring Centre for the Humanities (planning permission 21/03057/ FUL, currently under construction) confirm that the Gibson and Harkness Buildings, in their current form, are not visible in most longer range views. This includes looking across from Castle Mound, where the existing intervening development blocks the Gibson and Harkness roofscape from view. The site is not visible in long-range views from the hills surrounding the city.

From St George's Tower at Oxford Castle (a paid-for, semi-public view point), the roofline of the site is just visible – particularly the end towers against a backdrop of the greenery across Jericho and Summertown. The site is not prominent in the view, which is dominated by the terraces on Beaumont Street, Blavatnik School of Government and the Radcliffe Observatory (plus, in the near future, the Centre for the Humanities).



A zoomed in view of the site from St George's Tower (NB: this is not an accurate representation of what the eye sees unaided).

VIEWS



An extract of the accurate verified view prepared for the Centre for the Humanities planning application. Please note that what is included in this heritage statement is not an accurate depiction of what the unaided eye sees as the original scaled image has been substantially zoomed in and cropped.

SECTION 6.0

PROPOSALS

6.1 SUMMARY

The proposals seek to refurbish the Gibson and Harkness Buildings to provide a new home for the Institute of Digital Health, providing offices, meeting rooms and teaching spaces. Works will include internal reconfiguration, thermal and MEP upgrades, roofing over the central courtyard to create an atrium, and external landscaping works.

6.2 PLANNING POLICY

The Oxford Local Plan 2036 was adopted on 8 June 2020 and contains the policies against which the proposals concerning the Gibson and Harkness Buildings will be measured. Policies DHI (design and placemaking), DH3 (designated heritage assets) and DH5 (local heritage assets) concern Oxford's built heritage, and policy SP54 concerns the development of the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter specifically.

The Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 directs that, in determining planning applications, 'special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or the appearance' of any affected conservation area (section 72(1)). Demolition within a conservation area will also require planning permission. Under paragraph 194 of the National Planning Policy Framework, due consideration should also be given to the setting of any heritage assets affected by proposals.

6.3 HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

An assessment of heritage impact measures the special interest of identified heritage assets against the degree of change proposed. The level to which the proposed development impacts the identified heritage is measured on a scale ranging from highly beneficial to highly adverse. Heritage impact must be measured against the status quo: that being the significance of the site and its setting at the present time.

6.4 IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Heritage asset affected	Analysis	Level of heritage impact
Radcliffe Observatory (inc. Osler House and Heliometer)	<p>In their present form (a result of the permitted site clearance), the Gibson and Harkness Buildings are of limited architectural quality and do not positively contribute to the setting of the Radcliffe Observatory; the proposals therefore present an opportunity for enhancement. The proposed cladding creates a more visually cohesive exterior, remedying the accidental and low-quality exterior of the buildings that survive as remnants of a much larger complex. The removal of the stair tower on the north side of the building also permits a small increase in the space between the site and the Observatory.</p> <p>The proposed landscaping around the building improves the quality of the public realm and setting of the Observatory with a more holistic scheme. This helps tie the IDH site to its wider setting, grounding the building and re-introducing some of the greenery which is characteristic of the original Observatory campus.</p> <p>In comparison to the status quo - this being a combination of low-quality architecture and basic/accidental public realm which detract from the setting and experience of the Observatory - the proposals offer an improvement.</p>	Minor positive: the proposals enhance to a minor extent the special interest of the heritage asset, and/or the ability to appreciate that special interest.
Wall to the north-west of the site	The proposals seek to upgrade the landscaping of the area between the Gibson Building and the wall but do not seek to make any physical interventions beyond repairs and works to improve its condition (such as re-pointing and vegetation management).	Minor positive: the proposals enhance to a minor extent the special interest of the heritage asset, and/or the ability to appreciate that special interest.

PROPOSALS

Heritage asset affected	Analysis	Level of heritage impact
Walton Manor Conservation Area	A very small portion of the site is visible in a glimpsed view from Observatory Street but is not a prominent feature. Proposals affecting the roof and elevational treatments may alter what is visible in this glimpsed view but it will not materially alter the character of the conservation area.	None
Jericho Conservation Area	The proposal to retain and upgrade the existing building preserves the existing setting of the Jericho Conservation Area, with the characteristic landmark buildings evident within its boundary spilling out into the neighbouring Radcliffe Observatory Quarter. The setting of the conservation area is further enhanced by improving the landscaping and placemaking at this nodal point different conservation areas, and also improving the quality of view from Walton Street towards the Observatory.	Minor positive: the proposals enhance to a minor extent the special interest of the heritage asset, and/or the ability to appreciate that special interest.
North Oxford Victorian Suburbs Conservation Area (NOVSCA)	The site is not readily appreciable within the same context as the defining characteristics of the NOVSCA, although the improved landscaping sequence across the north side of the ROQ will upgrade the quality of experience moving between the NOVSCA and Jericho Conservation Areas and thereby the ability to appreciate their significance.	None/Minor positive: the proposals enhance t to a very minor extent the special interest of the heritage asset, and/or the ability to appreciate that special interest.

PROPOSALS

Heritage asset affected	Analysis	Level of heritage impact
Central (City & University) Conservation Area	As with the NOVSCA, the site is not readily appreciable within the same context as the defining characteristics of the Central Conservation Area. The characteristic skyline of the city centre as viewed from the surrounding hills is highly unlikely to be impacted by proposals concerning the roof as this is not currently discernible in views of the wider skyline and current proposals indicate minimal change to the existing.	None

6.5 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Overall, the existing exteriors and landscaping of the site are poor in quality and create a comparative eyesore in the context of the Radcliffe Observatory and the higher quality new architecture that has developed around the wider Quarter. The proposals considerably improve the aesthetic value of the site and, by association, will enhance the ability to appreciate the significance of the Observatory, as well as the experience of passing through the ROQ between the different conservation areas which border the site.

