

An important 'rural' area, which was once the industrial hub of the city.

Coe Fen and Sheep's Green formed part of the industrial area of the town during the Middle Ages and up to the C19 due to the three watermills that stood alongside the River Cam. The spaces between the river channels have been used both as pasture and drying grounds for the city's laundresses and retain a special interest as green open space with a rural character that provides the immediate setting to the colleges and institutions of

the city's historic core. The semi-natural space dotted with tall trees provides views through an Arcadian setting to tall buildings in the historic city centre. The opportunity to step from the busy heart of the city at Trumpington Street to this rural area just a short walk to the west is an important part of the experience of the historic city centre that forms part of the romantic identity of Cambridge as the university city in the fens.



Rural character

SIGNIFICANCE - VERY HIGH

General Overview

Construction of mills evidently required considerable management of the river including the raising of man made banks to create the elevation or 'head'. As recorded on the historic Ordnance Survey Maps these were Newnham Mill, in the west, and the King's Mill and Bishop's Mill, both located near the end of Mill Street. The land between the artificially raised banks of the mill leats was prone to flooding and was therefore only really suitable for grazing - sheep on Sheep's Green (west of the River Cam) and cows on Coe (cow) Fen (east of river). A secondary use of the area was as a drying ground for the city's laundresses, recorded in the name of Laundress Green. By the C19, the Fen was a mire and it was partly drained to avoid diseases including Malaria (also known as Fen Ague). Due to the position of the mills, the area would have limited navigation for boats on the river from the south.



The River Cam



Contrast to city streets

The area's high level of significance is partly due to the well-preserved rural character as farmland on the edge of the medieval town, preserving a centuries old experience of Cambridge in its rural setting. Cows are still grazed on the Fen, adding to the historic rural character of views, whilst the semi-natural spaces are important ecologically and, away from the busier areas, the river is fished. The space serves a wider role in the central townscape by providing a contrast to the bustle of the nearby city streets.

The attractive character of the landscape, meadowland with winding stream and the sedately flowing mill streams and dramatically churning mill sluices, provides changing experiences that makes this an interesting public space for exercise and recreation both on land and water. Punting stations are located in the mill pit (or pond) below the former site of the King's Mill and Bishop's Mill, as well as above them at Robinson Crusoe Island, which is reached by a Victorian cast iron footbridge. The activity is closely associated with Cambridge's historic identity, including the Scudamore's company who were one of the



Punting stations



Victorian cast iron bridge



Long boundary wall to Peterhouse College

first to hire out punts in the C19.

The long boundary wall of Peterhouse College provides a formal edge to the east of Coe Fen, and provides some illustration of the role of the medieval monastic institutions in expanding Cambridge outside the core of the earlier market town. Its simple stone and C16 origins (or earlier) complement the medieval character of the open pasture. Views north from Coe Fen include the spire of Emmanuel United Reformed Church as a focus.

Views over the mill to the north take in the Silver Street Bridge and the river frontages of buildings on Silver Street, including Queens' College and the Old Granary (now part of Darwin College), which was



The Anchor PH



Silver Street bridge



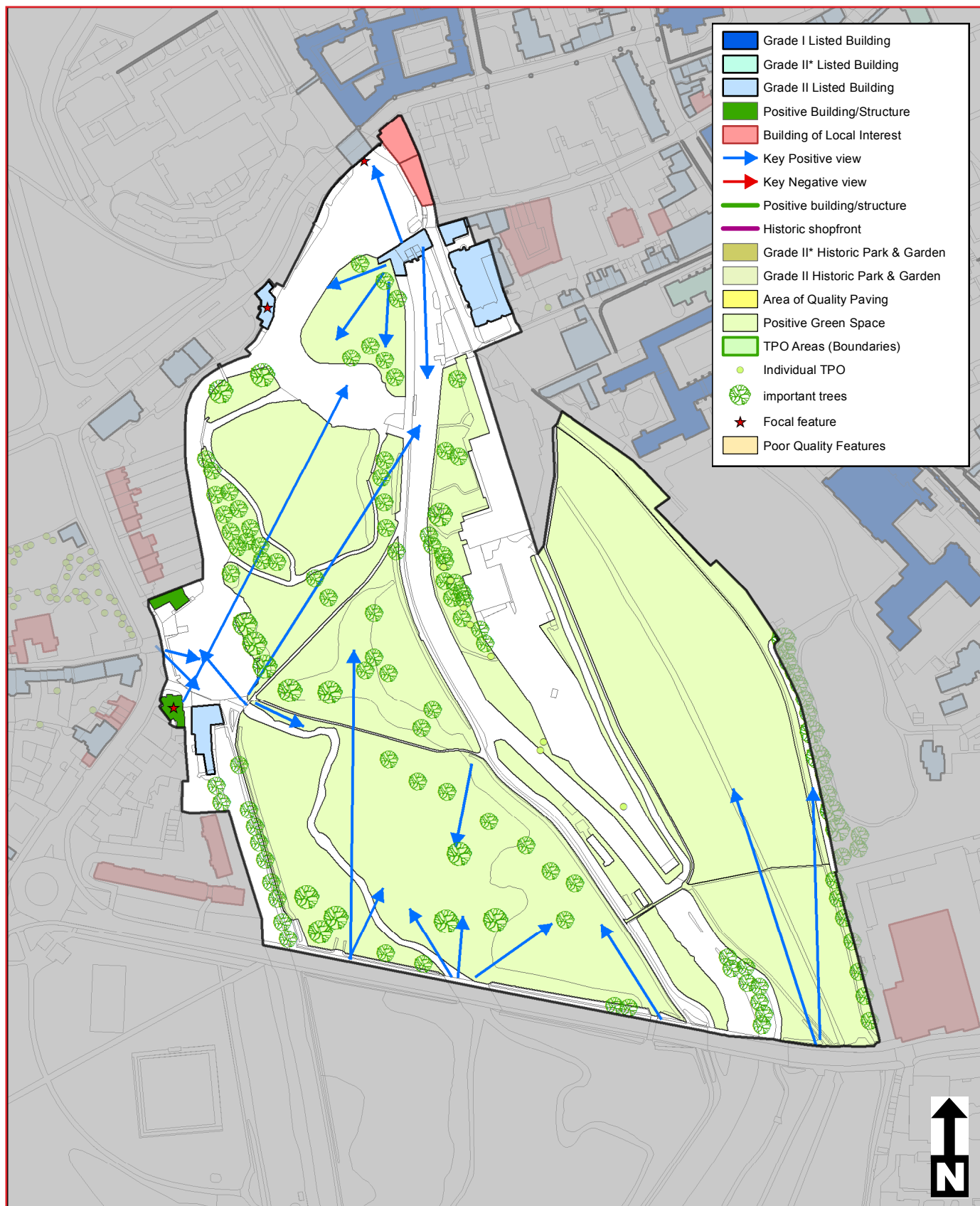
River frontages

rebuilt from one of the granaries of Newnham Grange in the late C19.

The Fen and Green are important thoroughfares for cyclists and pedestrians, particularly between the city centre and Newnham, and part of the pathway which runs along the river out towards Grantchester passes through the space. The space becomes a very important recreational area in warmer months with people relaxing on Laundress Green or punting on the river. The bustle around the Silver Street Bridge, punting stations and the public houses is a key feature of the space, particularly in the summer.

The path next to the mill leat to Newnham Mill and the views over the mill pit provide a more sedate area with overhanging trees that form a quintessentially English scene.

Views to Granta Place are less positive with the large modern hotel and office buildings providing a poor response to their surroundings. Some tree growth, notably on Robinson Crusoe Island has become dense and this has a negative impact by screening views across the green spaces.



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Landscape Elements

- Relatively open but studded with trees, many of which are in stately decline creating an Arcadian setting.
- Numerous view across the space to the city or other buildings in its setting are considered to be of high value, in particular those from Fen Causeway looking northward over Sheep's Green and Coe Fen, from Queen's Road to Newnham Mill pit and across the northern mill pit from Laundress Green towards Silver Street Bridge.
- Significant groups of trees stand along the boundaries of Sheep's Green and the River Cam.
- The embanked river channels mark the position of modified watercourses, which served the mills (one of which survives, whilst the second is preserved as the mill race and sluices).
- Cattle graze freely on land within yards of the busy city streets, adding rural character to the views and maintaining the grassland as grazed seasonal pasture.
- The high wall of Peterhouse with college buildings and Fitzwilliam Museum behind gives the impression of a walled town and is one of the best vistas of the city from its green setting.
- To the west and north the boundaries of the space are formed by buildings, which are glimpsed through trees. This leaves the edges of the area indistinct contributing to the sense of the large scale of open space.
- The river's main course has been canalised between Silver Street bridge and Crusoe Bridge, reflecting its use since the C19 as a recreational area, and this short stretch now has something of a municipal parkland feel. Southwards from Crusoe Bridge the banks are more natural and contribute to the rural character of the area.

Landscape Enhancement

The main opportunities would be to mitigate some of the less attractive features found particularly on the boundaries of the spaces, such as:

- Planting could soften the less attractive buildings and car parks found at Grant Place.
- The colour of bridges and the design and materials of paths, signs, bins and bollards should all be carefully considered.
- Increasing the amount of interpretation material could help more people appreciate the quality of the space and its history.
- Pollarding willows is a traditional element of the area's management, whilst a number of veteran trees are expected to be allowed to decline, contributing ecological benefits as well as being a part of the Arcadian setting. Ensuring public safety remains a priority, however, and it may be necessary to use simple post and rail fencing around such trees to mark out a zone in which access is discouraged.

NB. For further details on this area please refer to Cambridge City Council's 'Coe Fen and Sheep's Green Conservation Plan' (2001).

Feature / Structure	Age	Notes
Crusoe Bridge	1898-9	steel construction with timber deck, supported on 4 cast-iron columns
William Stone Building	1963-64	Grade II Listed residential building by Sir Leslie Martin & Colin St John Wilson. Buff brick, copper cladding, flat roof, 8 storeys
west boundary wall of The Grove (Peterhouse College)	C16 or earlier	Approximately 300yds long, stone & rubble built, later additions & patched with brickwork. Includes an old water gate
Engineering Laboratories' Old Boiler House & chimney	early C20	Building of Local Interest. Brick construction
gates of the Engineering Laboratories facing Coe Fen	early C20	Grade II Listed cast-iron gates. Red brick piers, stone caps, lead classical urns