

TV Thames Valley

Topography, Geology and Soils

This area is in two discontinuous parts, but is composed of the West Berkshire side of the Thames valley from the Oxfordshire border to the outskirts of Reading. The valley floor forms most of the area, but a section of the valley side around Streatley with a dry valley leading to the high downs is also included. The geology is chalk which is overlain by gravels on the valley floor. A mix of soil types is found in the area. Most of the valley floor has loamy argillic gley soils with a small area of heavier stagnogley soil on the floodplain by Streatley. Brown calcareous earths exist on the valley side with rendzinas at the head of the dry valley toward the Oxfordshire border.

Historic Landscape

This was an area of nucleated settlement. Villages such as Streatley and Basildon were located at the edge of the valley floor with open fields on the valley floor and common meadow grazing next to the river on the floodplain. Small areas of open field existed on the valley sides above Streatley, but most of this area was covered by common downland grazing. Some areas of open field and meadow land had been enclosed into fields by the 18th century, and farms established amongst these fields. Early enclosures at Streatley Farm and Basildon Farm were of regularly-shaped fields; this suggests that they may be planned enclosures resulting from agreement between local land-holders and farmers to rationalise holdings in the common fields. Early enclosures at Westbury Farm and Scrace's Farm were irregularly-shaped suggesting that they were created on a more piecemeal basis. The remaining areas of open field, meadow and most downland were enclosed into fields by Act of Parliament in the early 19th century.

Few other landscape elements existed in this area. An extensive area of several ancient and other old woods lay on the valley side above Streatley. A small area of fields existed within the southern part of this woodland and was probably created through clearance of woodland prior to the 18th century. A minor parkland existed around 'The Grotto', an 18th century mansion next to the Thames north of Basildon.

Extensive settlement growth took place around Streatley in the late 19th and early 20th century and was spurred on by the construction of the railway through the area. The provision of a station serving both Streatley and Goring made working in Reading or further afield yet living in a pleasant riverside location achievable to the affluent. The housing of this period is typified by large detached villa properties.

Modern Landscape

There has been significant modification to the area with large-scale changes to fieldscapes. Most historic enclosures have been reorganised but, since much of the area was historically covered in regularly-shaped fields, this has not had as drastic an effect on character as in other parts of the district.

The development of leisure facilities has introduced a significant element to the landscape that was not previously present. A large golf course has been established on the downs above Streatley on land that was Parliamentary fields created from downland.

Historic Environment Character Area

Beale Park, a wildlife visitor attraction, has been created on land that was Parliamentary fields created from open field.

Housing growth has continued at Streatley and it is has nearly trebled in size from its historic extent; some growth has also occurred at Basildon. Recent housing follows the pattern of early 20th century development and consists mostly of large, individually constructed detached houses.

Although substantial change has occurred, much of it has taken place within the existing grain of the landscape and the overall character of the area has not yet been substantially changed.