

## *Historic Environment Character Zone*

### **PTBP          Pang-Thames Basildon Park**

#### **Historic Character**

This zone is composed of the extensive landscape park of Basildon Park. The park has been owned by the National Trust since 1977 and is open as a visitor attraction. The informal landscape park was laid out in the later 18<sup>th</sup> century around a Palladian mansion. Basildon Park house has been cited as one of the best buildings of the period in Berkshire. The majority of parkland is lawns with ornamental scattered trees and plantations. A large area of ancient woodland was incorporated into the western edge of the park. There has been some small-scale alteration to the park with areas on the northern fringe sold-off for housing. This includes some lodge buildings and estate cottages.

#### **Historic Environment**

HER records are very dense in this zone and most records are of medieval earthworks and post-medieval parkland buildings and features. Although the zone was covered by the Middle Thames Valley Survey, Berkshire Downs Survey and the National Mapping Programme these located few features. Some minor watching briefs proved negative, although a geophysical survey did detect some undated ditches and pits. The only other archaeological work has focussed on the park itself. Finds and cropmarks are very uncommon; this is unsurprising as the zone has been covered in mature pasture and woodland for several centuries and these are land-uses unfavourable to artefact and cropmark discovery.

No definite prehistoric material has been located in the zone, although a probable Roman buckle was found in the park, and fragments of Roman pottery were recovered when building a pond in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Earthworks thought to be part of a later prehistoric/Romano-British field-system have been recorded in Park Wood, but have not been investigated in any detail. The zone lies in an area of prehistoric and Romano-British activity and it is possible that unrecognised features of these dates exist.

Some remains of medieval ridge and furrow and lynchets exist on the park's lawns. This suggests that much of the park was laid out over open fields. It has been suggested that the medieval manor house of Basildon lay to the west of the mansion, although no physical evidence has yet been found to support this.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century landscape park remains largely unaltered and is designated as a Registered Park. Basildon Park mansion and several park buildings such as lodges are listed buildings.

During the Second World War the park was requisitioned and served as a US army base and prisoner of war camp. Whilst officers were accommodated in the house, servicemen lived in Nissen huts constructed on the fringes of Park Wood. A concrete hut, known as Ivy Cottage, is thought to be the only surviving hut from the WWII camp. Practice firing trenches were also constructed in this area and are still visible.

#### **Historic Environment Potential**

The zone as a whole has a high archaeological potential. The pre-medieval character of the zone is very poorly understood and Romano-British deposits may exist. It is not possible to be more specific about the nature and quality of any deposits on present evidence. The medieval and later character is fairly well-understood, but significant gaps in knowledge, such as the location of Basildon Manor, still exist. The park and features and structures of medieval and

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post-medieval date can still yield further important information. Remains of the WWII military camp exist in the Park Wood area, but the precise extent of the camp is undefined.

### **Historic Environment Action Plan**

#### Conservation Issues

- The management of this zone by the National Trust implies that most conservation issues related to the historic and environment will be well cared for.
- There are issues around the fringes of the parkland with small properties sold off to private owners; development within these needs to be carefully monitored to ensure that they do not have a negative impact on the historic character.
- Ancient woodland has not been well managed in recent years and this poses a threat to its survival.

#### Research Priorities

- Does the later use of the zone as a landscape park mask archaeological features of earlier prehistoric or Romano-British date?
- Are the features in Park Wood part of a late prehistoric or Romano-British field system? If so does related settlement activity exist nearby?
- Can the medieval agricultural system be understood from the ridge and furrow and other features present? Does the current house stand near the site of an earlier medieval manor and related settlement?
- What is the significance of the WWII features in the park?