

PTML Pang-Thames Modernised Landscape

Historic Character

This zone is mostly farmland and woodland and is split into northern and southern parts by the *PTSB* HECZ. Historically, the landscape was a mix of fields, woods and commons and small settlements, and farms were scattered throughout the zone. The combination of land-use and topography gave a very sinuous grain to the landscape. Fields were mostly small and irregularly-shaped and were probably created by medieval assarting. Woodland existed across the zone with the southwest densely wooded. Woods were a mix of ancient and other old woodland and had very irregular edges, probably as a result of the practise of assarting. Areas of common heath existed across the zone. Commons at Upper Basildon were enclosed into regularly-shaped fields by the late 18th century, probably by agreement between commoners, and Frilsham Common was enclosed by Act of Parliament in the early 19th century. Burnthill and Ashampstead Commons were not enclosed; however Ashampstead ceased to be a heath as it had become wooded-over by the 1880s. Most settlement was in common-edge settlements at Frilsham, Burnthill and Ashampstead Commons. It is unclear when these developed, but they existed by the 18th century and developed from squatter occupation on the common. Small parks existed at Bere Park and Frilsham House by the 18th century, and a large park was laid out over fields in the 1880s at Buckhold, a newly-built country house.

There has been significant change in this zone since the mid-20th century with most historic enclosures reorganised and very large areas of conifer plantations created. Plantations are mostly of commercial forestry and Christmas trees. Many are on areas that were fields, but large areas of ancient woodland have been cleared and replanted. Plantations have a totally different tree-cover and lack the biodiversity of ancient woodlands and clearance is also likely to have damaged or removed historic features such as woodbanks. Plantation and reduced grazing led to dense tree-cover developing on Burnthill Common by the mid-20th century. Most of the area has changed from a mix of open commons, fields and woods into an almost continuously wooded block. The huge increase in plantations has also created a very visually enclosed feel to the landscape that did not previously exist. North of Upper Basildon, fewer plantations have been created, but the landscape has been totally modified through field reorganisation. Settlement growth has not been extensive but some new housing has been constructed across the zone. Buckhold Park has experienced significant change. Much of the former parkland is now a stable and paddocks, the house is occupied by a school and ornamental woodland has been replaced by a mix of conifer plantation, housing and paddocks.

Historic Environment

HER records exist across the whole zone, but most are between Ashampstead Common, Buckhold Hill Farm, and Pyt House Farm. Records are dominated by findspots, earthworks, and buildings. The northern part of the zone was covered by the Middle Thames Valley Survey and National Mapping Programme, but no other recorded work has been carried out. The southern part was covered by the Berkshire Downs Survey and other work has taken place around Ashampstead Common.

Evidence of prehistoric activity is not common and comes from finds. Palaeolithic handaxes have been found at Pangbourne Hill, Pennycroft Copse and at Lambden's Bottom and other flint tools have been found south of Upper Basildon. Neolithic flintwork, including a core, has been found around Upper Basildon, tools have come from two locations at Ashampstead Common and axes have been found near Blandy's Farm and Ashampstead Common. No later prehistoric

Historic Environment Character Zone

material or features are known from this zone and the level of activity, if any, during this period is unknown.

Romano-British activity is slightly better documented. Kilns were found near Lynch's Copse during construction of the M4. One of the kilns was excavated and others may survive within fields north of the motorway. A lead container containing two coins was found near Northridge Shaw and coin finds have also been made at Ashampstead Common. The zone was probably well-used and evidence of activity, including villas and buildings, exists immediately outside of the zone.

Medieval evidence is not widely distributed and this probably reflects the fact that most of the zone was farmland, common and woodland during these periods. Bere Court was a residence of the Abbots of Reading established in the 13th century. It is now a house mostly dating from the 16th century and later, but incorporates some medieval monastic elements. Yattendon Court deer park is thought to extend into this zone at Old Park Woods, but it is unclear if any parkland features survive as the woods have been mechanically replanted. Most medieval records are at Ashampstead Common and include finds and a kiln. The kiln was discovered during landscaping at a bungalow and excavated and dated to the 12th to 13th century. Clay pits and further kilns may exist in the field north of the bungalow. Ashampstead Common contains three 15th and 16th century timber framed buildings and a settlement existed here by the end of the medieval period. It is unclear when it was established and no deposits relating to early occupation have yet been discovered. A bank and ditch has been observed at several locations on the edges of Ashampstead and Burnthill Commons. It has been suggested that this is a previously unrecorded deer park, but it may be a boundary feature demarking the commons. The farms and other settlements were in existence by the 18th century and could be of late medieval origin. Deposits relating to early occupation may exist at these settlements.

Post-medieval records are composed of industrial sites and buildings. A chalk mine was discovered south of Yattendon and 19th century brickworks existed at Frilsham Common and Luck's Hall Farm. Ruins of the works and pits survive at both brickworks sites. There are 24 listed buildings; most are 17th century domestic buildings. Other listed structures include Bere Court, 15th and 16th century timber-framed houses at Ashampstead and Frilsham Commons, 19th century mansion and lodges at Buckhold Park, and a 20th century house by Lutyens. Most of the zone seems to have a well-understood historic building stock; however few structures are recorded at Frilsham Common.

Historic Environment Potential

The archaeological potential of most of the zone is unclear. It is possible that prehistoric and Romano-British deposits exist in the zone but it is not possible to be more specific about the location, nature and quality of any below-ground archaeology. Deposits of early occupation may survive at historic settlement nuclei, and any such deposits could be crucial to understanding the development of settlement in this zone. The historic building stock is fairly well-studied but it is possible that further significant buildings or structural elements may be identified, particularly at Frilsham Common.

Historic Environment Action Plan

Conservation Issues

- Settlements are traditionally small and scattered and any new development could compromise this character.

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- Management of woodlands, conservation of surviving ancient woodlands and replacement of plantations with more mixed tree coverage.
- There is a need to ensure that any new tree planting avoids the visually and archaeologically erosive impacts of recent plantations. Where possible opportunities to soften the impact of recent plantations should be encouraged.

Research Priorities

- Does the paucity of evidence for the prehistoric period represent a genuine picture of the level of activity in the zone in this period?
- How extensive is the Romano-British pottery industry in the Lynch's Wood area? Do further kilns survive in the area?
- Does evidence survive on the nature and origins of the medieval settlement?
- Does evidence for the Abbots' residence survive within the fabric or as archaeological features at Bere Court?
- Are the features at Old Park Woods part of a medieval deer park?
- How extensive is the medieval pottery industry? Do further kilns survive in the area?
- What are the origins of the brick works in the zone? How significant were they, and where were their main markets?
- What are the date, function and significance of the historic buildings in the area?