

**STOF            Shaw-Thatcham Open Field**

**Historic Character**

This is a rural zone comprising recent fields, wooded areas and historic and modern settlement. Historically, most of the zone was covered by irregularly-shaped fields which were created by piecemeal enclosure of open fields. A belt of small woods ran through the zone, all of which were coppiced ancient woodlands. Farmsteads were the most common type of settlement; they were located near the edges of the zone and were mostly named after places or topographic features. Most farms were set at a distance from each other, perhaps within territories of fields. The Henwick farms were an exception to this pattern and were all located close to each other at the southern tip of the zone. Ashmore Green was the only non-farm settlement and was composed of a group of farms and cottages around a green.

Since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century there has been substantial change to fieldscapes and settlement. Some historic fields exist in the zone, but the majority have been altered to create fields better suited to modern mechanised agriculture through boundary removal and reorganisation. This has changed the character of the zone by creating a much more regular landscape than previously existed. The area west of the B4009 Shaw to Hermitage road has lost so many boundary features that it has become a near featureless arable expanse. Large areas of paddocks have been created from historic enclosures around settlements, extending the settled feel of the landscape into the countryside. Most blocks of ancient woodland have remained largely unaltered with only some minor loss occurring. A huge amount of new housing has been created in the zone. Most has been constructed along the roads into Ashmore Green creating a near continuous arc of housing from the outskirts of Newbury, through Ashmore Green, to the edge of Thatcham. Housing is a mix of small estates and one-off developments of large houses. The central portion of the zone now has a very settled, suburban, feel.

**Historic Environment**

HER records are scarce in this zone. Records are dominated by findspots with some features known from earthworks, cropmarks and documentary evidence. The zone was covered by the National Mapping Programme and the Lower Kennet Valley Survey, but few detailed investigations have taken place.

Limited evidence of prehistoric and Romano-British activity has been recovered from this zone. Small quantities of Neolithic and Bronze Age material has been found at several locations, but no sites of these dates are known. Probable Iron Age activity was found during a watching brief at Cold Ash Farm, but it is unclear what the nature of activity was. The same watching brief also located more extensive evidence of Romano-British activity which was interpreted as an occupation site.

No early medieval features are known from the zone. A late medieval village existed at Henwick and it is possible that this may have its roots in the early medieval period. This settlement contracted, or was deserted by the close of the medieval period. The close spacing of the "Henwick" farms suggests these might be the remains of the contracted village.

Post-medieval records are scarce and consist of the disused Newbury to Oxford railway line, the settlement at Ashmore Green and the historic farmsteads. Much of the course of the railway line exists as an earthwork running southwest-northeast through the zone. Some sections have become wooded over and one stretch in the centre of the zone has been levelled by ploughing.

## *Historic Environment Character Zone*

Little is known of the development of the settlement at Ashmore Green; it is known to have been in existence by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but it may date back into the medieval period.

There are four records of listed buildings, representing six structures, in the zone. Five are of 17<sup>th</sup> century houses and barns and the other is the 19<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse at Lower Henwick Farm. There are no listed buildings in Ashmore Green and its historic building stock has not been studied.

### **Historic Environment Potential**

The potential of the zone as a whole is hard to assess on present evidence. Some indication of prehistoric and Romano-British activity is present and it is possible that below-ground deposits of these dates exist in the zone. However, it is not possible to be more specific about the location, nature and quality of any below-ground archaeology. Most of the zone has been subject to ploughing since the medieval period and it is possible that this has caused truncation of deposits in places. Below-ground archaeological deposits of early settlement are likely to survive at the Henwick farms and possibly at Ashmore Green. Any such material will be important in understanding the development of settlement in this zone. It is possible that significant buildings or structural elements may exist at Ashmore Green.

### **Historic Environment Action Plan**

#### Conservation Issues

- Potential spread of Newbury/Thatcham and related urban and suburban features into the zone.
- Management of woodlands, conservation of surviving ancient woodlands and replacement of plantations with more mixed tree coverage.
- Archaeological sites within arable cultivation.
- Historic building stock is poorly understood and little protection is currently afforded to this resource.

#### Research Priorities

- What evidence survives of early prehistoric exploitation of this landscape?
- What is the nature and extent of the Romano-British site identified at Cold Ash Farm?
- What are the origins and nature of early settlement in the zone? Does the concentration of farms around Henwick represent medieval nucleated settlement?
- What are the date, function and significance of the historic buildings in the zone?