

Historic Environment Character Zone

UECA Urban East Commercial Area

Historic Character

This is a zone of mixed business use bisected by the M4 and comprising office parks, light-industrial units, out-of-town shopping developments, and railway sidings. The zone has developed as a significant business location due to its proximity to the M4/A4 junction, railway, and the edge of Reading. Prior to development, the landscape was characterised by early enclosures, parliamentary fields and meadows. Development has removed most of this landscape, but vestiges of it survive in as yet undeveloped areas by the river and M4.

Historic Environment

HER records are very scarce in this zone and archaeological work has only been carried out ahead of recent developments. Activity of all periods has been documented in adjacent zones, but only a small number of pre-20th century records exist, comprised of Roman finds and features and a single early medieval findspot.

The industrial development of the zone began with the establishment of a munitions factory between the railway and Theale during the Second World War. This was demolished and its site has now been totally redeveloped. Some associated defence features, including tank traps and pillboxes survive. The only pre-World War II buildings are at the west end of the zone and consist of a decaying farm building and a short stretch of early 20th terraced housing.

Historic Environment Potential

The archaeological potential across much of the zone is low, as deposits are likely to have been removed during development. Buried archaeological deposits are possible in undeveloped areas by the river and M4. The nature and quality of any deposits is hard to estimate on present evidence and it is also possible that any adjacent to the river could be well-preserved.

Historic Environment Action Plan

Conservation Issues

- There is continued development pressure in the area.

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?
- Do historic buildings at the farms in the zone contain information about post-medieval and modern farming practises?
- Can the surviving WWII defensive features in the Kennet Valley help us understand the military and political history of that period?