

Historic Environment Character Zone

HPK Hamstead Park

Historic Character

This zone is composed of the extensive landscape park of Hamstead Park and related fields, and ancient woodland next to the River Kennet. Hamstead Park has a long history and began as a deer park, which existed by the early 13th century and initially covered only the central part of the zone. The park was later owned by the Earls of Craven who enlarged the park and constructed a substantial mansion and formal gardens in the mid-17th century. Service buildings and a kitchen garden were also constructed at the park's north-western tip during this remodelling. It is also thought that the village of Hamstead Marshall was moved to its present location south of the park to allow the park to extend over the site of the medieval village at this date. The mansion was burnt down in the early 18th century and occupation shifted to Hamstead Lodge in the park's centre. The lodge was extended into a substantial country house, now known as Hamstead Park, during the 19th century. The park was also extended over the 18th and 19th centuries and converted into an informal parkland which also utilised the ancient wood of Enborne Copse on the eastern edge of the park.

There has been no substantial change in the nature of land-use and most of the zone is still part of Hamstead Park. The park is actively managed and retains significant areas of wood pasture including a large number of mature and veteran trees. A very small contraction in the area covered by the park has occurred on the western edge. Former parkland in this area is now under arable cultivation and this includes the 17th century mansion site and parts of the formal gardens. The service buildings and kitchen garden are no longer part of the park and are now private housing. This has mostly involved the re-use and conversion of estate buildings into housing, but one large new home was constructed in the former walled garden. This was built in the 1990s and removed elements of the garden that had survived up until that date. Parts of Enborne Copse have been cleared of mature tree cover and replanted with other species and this may have caused the loss of historic features and biodiversity.

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HER records are very dense in this zone and most records are of medieval and post-medieval earthworks and buildings. The above-ground monuments and structures known from documentary sources have been the focus of the archaeological work carried out in this zone. Finds and cropmarks are very uncommon but this is unsurprising as most of the zone has been covered in mature pasture and woodland for several centuries. These land-uses are generally unfavourable to artefacts and cropmarks discovery. Analysis of aerial photographs during the National Mapping Programme discovered cropmarks of the mansion and gardens in arable land on the western edge of the park.

Evidence for prehistoric and Romano-British material is absent from the zone. This absence could be due to the land being used as pasture which is not sensitive to cropmark formation and inhibits the discovery of artefact scatters. The zone lies within an area of prehistoric and Romano-British activity and it is possible that undetected features of these dates are present. Important Mesolithic material has been recovered from neighbouring parts of the Kennet Valley and sites of this date may exist within this zone. Some Bronze Age and Iron Age activity is present in adjacent zones and it is possible that this continued into the zone. Two Romano-British sites, a pottery kiln and a possible villa, lie just outside the western and eastern edges of the zone. It is likely that activity of this date, possibly relating to these sites, exists within the zone.

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Hamstead Park contains a rich range of medieval features, many of which are scheduled monuments. Perhaps the most important of these are three mottes, which have been interpreted as shifting castles and a 12th century siege work. Much of the pale of the deer park survives and extensive areas of earthworks around the church are thought to be the remains of the medieval village. It is unclear when the village was established and when and why it was abandoned. The church is the only surviving structure from the village and much of its fabric dates to the 14th century. The church is the only listed building in the zone that is not a parkland structure.

The zone contains an array of structures relating to the post-medieval and current Hamstead Park. Although burnt down and demolished, below-ground remains of the 17th century mansion and formal gardens are present and visible as cropmarks. The cropmarks show a high-level of detail enabling the pattern of planting and paths in the formal garden to be mapped. Elements of the formal garden remain above-ground: five pairs of entrance gate piers stand within fields and parts of the garden walls survive as boundaries. These structures and other park buildings at the north-western corner of the park are listed. The 18th and 19th century parkland itself is still in use and has been subject to little alteration.

Hamstead Park house and two other 19th century park buildings are listed buildings. The area around Hamstead Lock has been designated as a Conservation Area.

Historic Environment Potential

The zone as a whole has a high archaeological potential. The pre-medieval character of the zone is very poorly understood. The zone may contain Mesolithic and later prehistoric and Romano-British material but 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 still exist. Little is known about the medieval village of Hamstead Marshall, the chronology and use of the mottes and siegeworks, or the development of the park itself. Features and structures of medieval and post-medieval date can still yield further important information. The impact of continued cultivation on deposits at the mansion and garden site is unclear.

Historic Environment Action Plan

Conservation Issues

- Possible gravel extraction potential.
- More detail is needed on the historic building stock to ensure appropriate policies are put in place to conserve this resource.
- Conservation Area appraisal and management plan required.
- Management of surviving park features, in particular the pillars which remain on the English Heritage Buildings at Risk Register.
- Management of the earthwork features, especially the scheduled Motte and Bailey's.
- Ancient woodland has not been well managed in recent years and this poses a threat to its survival.
- Management of Kennet and Avon canal and possible impacts on surviving early fabric of locks, bridges, etc.
- Management of WWII features.

Research Priorities

- Do prehistoric and Romano-British features survive in the zone?

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- Can the development of the motte and bailey castles be determined? Why do two such sites exist in such close proximity?
- What is the nature and function of the isolated motte? Is this related to the deer park?
- Can the origins of the deer park be established?
- Does evidence survive for the medieval village? Does the site contain evidence for the development of the castles and the relationship of this with the local population? Was the village moved through emparkation?
- Does archaeological evidence for the historic management of the river survive, especially in relation to mills and water management?
- Does archaeological evidence survive for the development of the mansion and its related landscape gardens?
- Do the historic buildings in the zone contain any information about post-medieval and modern changes to land use and agricultural systems?
- Does archaeological evidence for the early development of the Kennet and Avon Canal survive in locks and other canal infrastructure?
- Can the surviving WWII defensive features in the Kennet valley help us understand the military and political history of that period?