

## **UE Urban East**

### **Topography, Geology and Soils**

This area is defined by the extent of the built-up area at the eastern tip of the district around Reading and the M4, and due to the administrative boundary is virtually two discrete regions joined by a narrow neck of land. It occupies a range of landscapes from the Kennet floodplain in the south, up the northern side of its valley across watershed ridges to the Thames Valley and the river itself. The geology of this area is fairly uniform with chalk covered by valley gravels in the base of both Kennet and Thames valleys, Reading Beds on the valley sides and London Clay capped with plateau gravel deposits on the tops of the watersheds. This gives rise to a range of soils: loamy argyllic brown earths by the Thames; in the Kennet valley clay stagnogley soils on its sides and alluvial gley soils on the valley floor; and clayey palaeo-argyllic soils on the ridges in between the two valleys.

### **Historic Landscape**

The historic landscape of this area is complex as it lies at the junction of several HECAs and is a combination of elements from each area. Historic settlements are a mix of nucleated settlements like Purley and Theale which are characteristic of *Kennet Valley East* and *Thames Valley* and dispersed settlements like The City similar to those found in the *Sulham Gap*. The area around Tilehurst was like that of *Kennet Valley East* but may represent a change to a different kind of landscape around Reading. This is not clear as no Historic Landscape Characterisation has been undertaken in eastern Berkshire. Significant blocks of ancient and other old woodland existed around Tilehurst and extensive parklands existed at Purley Hall and in Tilehurst at Calcot Park.

### **Modern Landscape**

This area experienced major urbanisation over the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and this process is still continuing. What was a largely rural area with a few scattered villages and farms became transformed from the 1960s into a continuous belt of suburb for Reading. Some historic features remain amongst the housing: the parklands of Calcot Park survive fairly well in its present incarnation as a golf course and blocks of ancient woodland around its edge have experienced only slight changes in their extent. Most of the parkland at Purley Hall has been sold-off for housing estates and a marina, although the house itself survives in much smaller grounds. The majority of the historic settlements that existed in this area have been redeveloped, with Calcot Row, Calcot Grange and Calcot Mill as notable exceptions. Calcot Row lies directly on the A4 but despite this, elements of its historic layout and buildings survive. Historic buildings also exist at Calcot Mill and nearby Calcot Grange in the midst of a housing estate. Few open spaces remain in this area; most are parks and sports facilities and are located on the western edge of the suburbs and between Calcot and the railway line. Theale has expanded significantly as a settlement and has also become a base for service and technological industries. The new office parks constructed to house these companies now fill up all the land between Theale and the M4. The historic core of Theale still possesses a visibly historic and fairly consistent High Street frontage; however the associated characteristic plot patterns behind the street have largely been lost to development.