

## *Historic Environment Character Zone*

### **NMC Non-Military Common**

#### **Historic Character**

This zone comprises those discontinuous parts of Greenham and Crookham Commons that were not appropriated for Greenham Common airbase. The largest of these is along the southern edge of the common. Active grazing and management of these components of common heathland did not continue after the establishment of the airbase and they began to be colonised by trees, becoming almost totally wooded-over by the 1990s. Woodland colonisation has changed what were visually open areas into highly enclosed areas.

The northern area contains both wooded-over common and two historic common-edge settlement nuclei. These were small, unplanned settlements that began as squatter occupation on the common fringe and were in existence by at least the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Significant change has altered the nature of these settlements. The historic nuclei have been gentrified and old cottages and houses have been either extended into large dwellings or replaced with large family homes, although this process began at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. New housing has also been constructed within the historic nuclei. Most of this is large detached properties and some have facilities such as tennis courts and swimming pools. These alterations and growth have changed what would have been fairly poor, dispersed squatter settlements, into an enclave of affluent housing.

The re-establishment of the Greenham and Crookham Commons has now re-united these non-military areas with the parts that had been occupied by the base (GCC HECZ); however, there remains a visible division between the two zones. These areas are still much wooded, whereas the former airbase area is much more open and heath-like. The division of the zone, emphasised by the different land-cover, acts as a reminder of the divergent histories of parts of the common.

#### **Historic Environment**

There has been no recorded archaeological work carried out, and knowledge of periods prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century is very poor despite the fact that the zone was well-utilised in the past. Prehistoric farming and resultant soil exhaustion is thought to have been responsible for the creation of the heathland and it is likely that the medieval role of the zone as a grazing and fuel resource, and perhaps the site of small industries, has its roots in the Roman period. It is likely that archaeological deposits relating to these phases of use are present but the scarcity of archaeological evidence observed across adjacent zones is even more pronounced here. A series of parallel earthwork banks at the Crookham end of the common, described as early medieval cross ridge dykes, have largely been removed by construction of roads associated with the base (one lay within the GCC HECZ). The lack of known archaeology is probably due to a combination of the nature of land-use, since heathland cover gives little indication of the presence of buried archaeology, and a lack of opportunity for archaeological investigation. One of the earliest English golf courses existed on Crookham Common from the 1870s until the construction of Greenham Common airbase; it extended into this zone although it is unclear whether anything remains of its layout. As in the adjacent HECZ EA, several architect-designed buildings were constructed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, including a convalescent home. The sites of some of the 1980s Greenham women's peace camps are also recorded by the HER; others have not been accurately located.

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### **Historic Environment Potential**

Although the archaeological potential of the zone is poorly understood it is possible that deposits of buried archaeology are present. Work ahead of quarrying at nearby George's Farm produced later prehistoric and Roman settlement evidence from what was previously thought to be an archaeologically unpromising zone, and demonstrated that the area around the Enborne was exploited at this time. Such deposits might also lie within this zone but it is not possible to be more specific about the nature and quality of any below-ground archaeology. Recent exploratory work at the site of the Turquoise Peace Camp has demonstrated that archaeological deposits relating to the camps can be preserved below-ground, and when studied can produce meaningful results not previously documented. It is possible that such deposits might also be encountered at other camps within this zone.

The buildings and plots within the common-edge settlement in the northern part of this zone have the potential to help gain an understanding of their evolution and the nature of common-edge settlements as a whole, but this has yet to be explored. Much evidence may already have been lost, as its historic fabric is being eroded by degrees through unmonitored renovation and demolition of historic structures, and alteration of plot boundaries. Development within this settlement should be more carefully monitored and opportunities to record buildings during work must be better utilised. This should include an appreciation of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century architect-designed buildings.

### **Historic Environment Action Plan**

#### Conservation Issues

- There is continued development pressure in the zone, much of it unsympathetic in scale and design. This could lead to further erosion of the historic character.
- Management of woodlands, conservation of surviving ancient woodlands and replacement of plantations with more mixed tree coverage.
- Historic building stock is poorly understood and little protection is currently afforded to this resource.
- Poorly understood archaeological resource.

#### Research Priorities

- Do unrecorded archaeological sites/features survive within the wooded areas?
- What evidence survives of early prehistoric exploitation of this landscape? How did this influence the creation of the Commons ecology?
- Does evidence survive on the nature and origins of the medieval settlement?
- Does archaeological evidence survive for structures/dwellings associated with medieval assarting activity?
- What are the date, function and significance of the historic buildings in the zone?
- Can any elements of the earliest inland golf course in England be seen on Greenham or Crookham Commons?
- What evidence for the Greenham peace camps survives? Can this resource be used to understand the protest movement?