

Historic Environment Character Zone

NSA Newbury Suburban Area

Historic Character

This zone lies partially within the study area of the Newbury Historic Character Study and this should be referenced for more detailed description.

The zone comprises the largely 20th century suburban development around the north, west and south of the historic core of Newbury, infilling between the town and the historic settlements at Speen, Shaw, Hambridge, Stroud Green, Wash Common and Enborne Row. Historically the land use of this most of this zone was agricultural, predominantly open fields followed by enclosure at various times. However, there were also several parks and areas of commons and greens, some of which have survived as open spaces. The suburban area includes civic facilities such as schools, playing fields, cemeteries and allotments, although two hospital sites were developed for housing at the beginning of the 21st century.

To the north residential development has grown up on either side of the A4. This includes some distinctive local authority housing developments of the 1950s and 1960s. The zone includes modern Speen and Shaw, both greatly enlarged from their post medieval extents and now seamlessly joined to Newbury by modern housing development. A large office complex was created on greenfield land north of Shaw House for the headquarters of Vodafone, a company which originated in Newbury.

West of Newbury's historic core, Northcroft and Goldwell Parks are recreational areas created from former private gardens and meadows; south of the canal, the town's 'West Fields' were developed for housing in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Some more recent housing has also been erected on the fringes of this area, but with a layout and density of quite different in character.

Southeast of the town centre, the housing is again mixed with the area of 'East Fields' containing a distinctive group of late 19th century terrace houses. Stroud Green, a large open space, lies to the south, and Pyle Hill is lined with larger detached and semi detached Victorian villas, as is Newtown Road. Further out of the town later 20th century residential developments now form a near continuous band of housing up to the racecourse and Greenham village

To the southwest the major landscape feature is the Andover Road which forms a main route into Newbury town centre and is an axis of this part of the zone. The land rises to the south as the Andover Road climbs up onto Wash Common. Although some late 19th and early 20th century housing survives in pockets, including some characteristic terraced streets, the infilling of land either side of the Andover Road has gathered pace through the 20th century. From Newbury Town centre to the River Enborne there is little greenfield land apart from a small area at Wash Water. The recent trend of developing in the large gardens of the early-mid 20th century properties is increasing the density of development.

Historic Environment

Finds of archaeological interest have been found across much of the zone. However, the circumstances of discovery and the context for many of these finds are unclear. Aerial photography and other remote sensing techniques have not been used in the area as much of it is occupied by residential development. The zone was not included in the National Mapping Programme survey. Limited archaeological work has been carried out in the zone, mostly related to small scale development activity, especially in areas of higher potential. The exception to this would be in the vicinity of Shaw where evaluation preceded the building of Vodafone's offices,

Historic Environment Character Zone

and also the Heritage Lottery funded restoration of the Elizabethan Shaw House allowed for research and recording.

Early prehistoric activity is attested by the discovery in several locations of Palaeolithic hand axes or flint tools. Mesolithic material has also been found as isolated finds although possible areas of more intense activity have been recorded at Northcroft Park and north of Speenhamland. There is little evidence of Neolithic activity, apart from a possible henge monument at Wash Common. The barrow cemetery here is by far the most prominent and best preserved of the Bronze Age features in the zone. A total of six barrows were originally visible in this group although two have been now ploughed flat. The whole group has been designated as a scheduled monument. A possible burnt mound was excavated by the river Lambourn at the former Turnpike School site. There is little evidence of Iron Age activity in the zone.

The Roman period is well represented with a possible villa at Salcombe Road, kilns at Love Lane (close to the conjectural route of Ermin Street), and tentative evidence of activity on Pyle Hill and at the northern end of the Andover Road. Speen is recorded as a Saxon village and possible evidence of the early settlement has been located around the church. It would appear that the current village shifted to lie on the main London – Bath Road although it is not known when this occurred. Evidence of early Saxon activity has also been recorded at Enborne Gate.

Medieval finds are dotted around the zone, but the only significant settlement is that at Shaw, where the medieval manor and deer park were developed as a 16th century mansion and landscaped grounds. There were mills at Shaw and Hambridge on the river Lambourn. The post medieval period in this zone is dominated by buildings and structures linked with transport routes such as the Old Bath Road and the Kennet and Avon Canal, with small scale industrial activity such as brickworks at Clay Hill. There are also few historic farmsteads that have been engulfed in the suburban spread of Newbury. However, the zone also includes much of the site of the 1st Battle of Newbury (September 1643), although there is little tangible evidence. The area designated on the English Heritage Register of Battlefields deliberately excluded most (but not all) of this suburban zone, but it is thought that the Royalist lines lay along what is now the Andover Road and that some significant action took place on Wash Common, around the barrow cemetery. Some of the action of the Second Battle of Newbury (October 1644) also took place within this zone between Speen Hill, Donnington and Shaw House, although there is even less physical evidence for this Civil War encounter.

Listed buildings cluster around the edge of Newbury and in Speen. The Newbury Town centre and Canal Conservation Area overlaps into this zone. Other Conservation Areas are Stroud Green, Shaw village and Speen. At Smith's Crescent and Donnington Square are important groups of 19th century houses.

Historic Environment Potential

The nature and condition of any below-ground archaeology is largely unknown. Relatively little detailed investigation has taken place in the zone and its developed nature makes the use of remote sensing techniques of little value. Archaeological observation and investigation on areas in a similar topographic location on the sides of the Kennet Valley have produced significant evidence of later prehistoric and Romano-British activity and it is possible that sites of a similar nature await discovery on the valley side either side of the Andover Road. The presence of the Wash Common barrow cemetery is a significant feature in the landscape, although how it relates to the exploitation of the landscape and whether it is associated with any settlement activity remains unclear. The presence within the zone of the battlefield is a significant factor and it is

Historic Environment Character Zone

possible that further archaeological evidence related to this event could be recovered from the zone.

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.
- The large mature gardens associated with significant detached dwellings are a feature of this zone that is under real threat from more intensive development activity.
- Conservation Area Appraisals and management plans overdue.
- The mid 20th century local authority housing estates have a distinctive scale, layout and design, which could be compromised by modern development activity, especially infilling.
- Management of the Wash Common barrow cemetery within a public park presents significant issues.
- Management of registered battlefield site.
- Poorly understood archaeological resource.

Research Priorities

- Do unrecorded archaeological sites/features survive within this zone?
- What is the nature of the Mesolithic activity in the Kennet and Lambourn valleys?
- When did the landscape of the common develop? Does evidence of early prehistoric exploitation of the landscape survive?
- Can the barrow cemetery provide evidence of the Bronze Age use of this landscape?
- What is the nature of the Roman site at Salcombe Road? Do Romano-British sites exist at Pyle Hill and on the Andover Road?
- What is the relationship between the Romano-British activity at Salcombe Road and the nearby Saxon activity?
- Can early Saxon occupation be discovered at Speen?
- What evidence survives on the site of the 1st Battle of Newbury, both within the Registered Area and Newbury's suburbs? Can the archaeological and landscape value of the battlefield be quantified?
- What evidence survives of the 2nd Battle of Newbury? Can the archaeological and landscape value of the battlefield be quantified?