

Historic Environment Character Zone

PPC Plantations, Parliamentary, Commons

Historic Character

This is a zone characterised by a mix of plantation woodland and recent and historic fields. Historically, much of the zone was covered by common land, which was probably established from areas of heathland in the early medieval period. About half of the commons were enclosed into fields by private agreement or Act of Parliament by the early 19th century. The rest of the common heathland had been covered by tree plantations by the 1880s. These plantations turned most of what was a very open zone into a densely wooded and visually-enclosed area. A small area of fields and an ancient wood, Elingpark Copse, existed at the northern tip of the zone. Settlement was almost entirely absent from the zone.

Some changes have occurred in this zone since the mid-20th century, but have not yet had a significant impact on its character. As with other zones, most historic fields have been reorganised, although the construction of the M4 through the zone appears to have been the main driver behind this activity. Field modification has not had a particularly erosive effect on the grain of this part of the zone. Areas of unaltered parliamentary fields survive around Elingpark Copse. Further tree plantations have been created on fields enclosed from common heathland, mostly adjacent to the M4.

Historic Environment

HER records are scattered across this zone and are largely composed of cropmarks and records of post-medieval and later industry. The zone was covered by the Berkshire Downs Survey and the National Mapping Programme, but little other archaeological work has been carried out.

Few traces of prehistoric activity have been found in this zone; stray finds of a Neolithic axe and a piece of Bronze Age metalwork are the only objects of this period to have been recovered. The only other possible features from this period are cropmarks of a possible later prehistoric/Romano-British settlement recorded by the National Mapping Programme in fields north of the M4. Roman coins have been recovered from the south of the zone near Hermitage.

No early or late medieval features or finds have been recorded from this zone. This probably reflects the fact that much of the zone was in use as common grazing throughout most of this time. Several records of 19th and 20th century industrial features exist. A large brickworks existed on the edge of the zone by Little Hungerford, and part of its site was used in the mid-20th century as a military facility. The brickworks and military buildings have been demolished, but areas of clay pits survive at the site and recently part of the site has been used to construct a new housing development. A chalk mine was discovered during the construction of the M4. The railway line from Newbury to Oxford ran along the north-western edge of the zone, it is now disused but survives as a tree-covered earthwork.

There are no recorded historic buildings in the zone.

Historic Environment Potential

The potential of the zone as a whole is hard to assess on present evidence. Some indication of prehistoric and Romano-British activity is present and it is possible that below-ground deposits of these dates exist, but it is not possible to be more specific about the location, nature and quality of any below-ground archaeology. Deposits of early and late medieval date are unlikely within

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this zone. It is possible that further material related to post-medieval extraction and tile manufacture may be discovered.

Historic Environment Action Plan

Conservation Issues

- Management of woodlands, conservation of surviving ancient woodlands and replacement of plantations with more mixed tree coverage.
- Archaeological sites recorded from aerial photography within arable cultivation.
- Management of archaeological sites within woodland to ensure root/wind blow damage does not occur.

Research Priorities

- What evidence survives of early prehistoric exploitation of this landscape?
- What was the nature of the later prehistoric land-use context around Grimsbury Castle?
- What is the date, nature and function of the sites recorded on aerial photographs north of the M4?
- Do unrecorded archaeological sites/features survive within the wooded areas?
- Does further evidence of the tile industry exist in the zone? What are the origins of this industry?