

TSA Thatcham Suburban Area

Historic Character

Thatcham remained a small town well into the middle of the 20th century, but since then has rapidly expanded on all sides of the town's historic core; this is the TSA zone. Although some growth took place prior to this (with developments of detached houses constructed along the A4 Bath Road and Northfield Road), the major expansion of Thatcham started in the early 1960s. Large housing estates were constructed on the west and south sides of the town during the 1960s and 1970s. Most land on all sides of the town had been developed into housing estates by the 1990s creating a large settlement running along the A4 Bath Road and stretching from the river up the valley side. The growth of Thatcham slowed at the start of the 21st century and only two more large estates have been developed in this time; Dunston Park to the northeast and Kennet Park on the site of the former Ordnance Depot next to the railway. There are schools, a leisure centre, parks and playing fields and a cemetery within the housing estates. Thatcham is continuing to develop and the focus of house building has now shifted away from large housing estates to increasing the density of housing within the town.

Historic Environment

Activity for most periods has been found within the zone, and claims have been made for Thatcham as a place that has been continuously occupied for millennia. Most archaeological evidence comes from locations such as Dunston Park and the Community Hospital where systematic work has been carried out prior to development, and evidence is patchy across the rest of the zone. Significant Mesolithic sites were excavated at the Sewage Works and gravel pits at Lower Way, and some Palaeolithic finds were also made. There is some evidence of Bronze Age activity from excavated features and stray finds and there is a putative burnt mound at Dunston Park. Iron Age activity is well documented from several sites across the zone, with evidence of settlement found at Dunston Park.

This zone appears to have been a considerable focus for Roman activity. The course of Ermin Street ran through this zone although its route has not been fully established. A sizeable late Roman roadside settlement was located at Thatcham Newtown in the 1920s-30s, and some elements of it such as wells and ditches have been excavated. The exact extent of the settlement and what happened to it into the early medieval period is unclear. Early Roman burials were excavated at the Community Hospital. Cropmarks of probable Iron Age or Roman field boundaries and enclosures have been recorded across the zone

Evidence for later periods is much sparser reflecting the fact that most of this zone was part of the field system that supported Thatcham from the medieval period into the 20th century. Recent excavations have shown that the Saxon activity around St Mary's Church in the *THC HECZ* spread into this adjacent zone. It is unclear what the nature and extent of this activity was. In the post-medieval period, the country house and landscape park of Dunston Park was created, although the mansion was demolished by the end of the 18th century.

There are a few listed buildings in the zone, mainly connected to historic farmsteads or gentry houses in areas adjacent to the town centre, and the town centre Conservation Area extends into the zone.

Historic Environment Potential

Recent excavations have shown that this zone was part of a settled and farmed landscape during later prehistory and into the Roman period, and have provided glimpses into the nature of

Historic Environment Character Zone

this. Most of the zone was green-field prior to development so the survival of archaeological deposits between developments is possible, and therefore the archaeological potential of any open areas is likely to be high. The housing estates were constructed with modern-earth moving machinery so it is possible that there has been a combination of truncation of deposits and then deeper burial under levelling material over much of the zone. The survival of “islands” of archaeological deposits amongst housing is therefore possible. It is also likely that there could be further Mesolithic material in un-quarried land adjacent to the river.

Historic Environment Action Plan

Conservation Issues

- Development pressure.
- High archaeological potential in some areas.
- Conservation Area appraisal and management plan overdue.

Research Priorities

- Can settlement continuity from the prehistoric period to the current day be established?
- Do further Mesolithic sites exist in the southern part of the zone?
- Does evidence survive for later prehistoric utilisation of the gravel terraces?
- What does the evidence for Iron Age activity in the Dunston Park area tell us about later prehistoric activity in the area?
- Can the line of the Roman road be established? How extensive was the Roman settlement adjacent to Bath Road? Does another roadside settlement exist south-east of the town centre? What is the connection between ‘Thatcham Newtown’ and the earlier Roman evidence at the Community Hospital site?
- Can the evidence of WWII features along the canal side help us understand the military planning in 1939-40?