

## *Historic Environment Character Zone*

### **TVF            Thames Valley Floor**

#### **Historic Character**

This is a largely agricultural zone and contains the settlements of Streatley and Basildon. Historically, the zone was mostly open fields with areas of common meadow grazing next to the river. Areas of open field and some meadow had been enclosed into fields by the 18<sup>th</sup> century. At Streatley Farm and Basildon Farm, these were regularly-shaped fields suggestive of planned enclosures, whereas in the south, at Westbury Farm and Scrace's Farm, they were irregularly-shaped and probably created on a piecemeal basis. The remaining open field and meadow was enclosed into fields by Act of Parliament in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Streatley was the largest settlement and was a village composed of rows of buildings around the junction of the Reading to Wallingford road and the Thames crossing. Extensive settlement growth, typified by detached villa properties, took place around Streatley in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century following construction of the railway. Basildon was a much smaller hamlet comprising houses, farms and an inn at the northern tip of Basildon Park.

Most historic enclosures have been reorganised since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, but since historic fieldscapes were regularly-shaped, this has not had a major impact on the zone's historic character. The development of Beale Park removed land from agricultural production and introduced a significant new element into the landscape. Further housing growth has occurred at Streatley and some growth has also occurred at Basildon. Recent housing follows the pattern established by early 20<sup>th</sup> century development and consists mostly of large, individually constructed detached houses. Both settlements continue to be foci of housing development. Although some change has occurred most has been within the grain of the landscape and the zone's character is largely unaltered.

#### **Historic Environment**

HER records are common and well-distributed across this zone; they are dominated by cropmarks, buildings, and features known from documentary sources. The zone was covered by the Middle Thames Survey and the National Mapping Programme, but very little other archaeological work has been carried out. Several features were discovered during railway construction in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, and numerous finds of prehistoric to medieval date have been recovered from dredging along the Thames.

Early prehistoric material is scarce and has only been found at Streatley Farm: it consists of a Palaeolithic hand axe and Mesolithic worked flints. Mesolithic flintwork has also been found during dredging of the Thames. Some level of activity during the Mesolithic is indicated, but nothing like the intensity of exploitation seen on the Kennet valley floor. This may be a true lack of usage of the area or could reflect the general lack of fieldwork. Evidence of activity is much more widespread from the Neolithic onwards. Cropmarks interpreted as a Neolithic funerary area exist west of Westbury Farm/Scrace's Farm. The zone includes a probable long mortuary enclosure and long barrow and it has also been suggested that funerary activity may have continued into the early Bronze Age. The eastern end of Grim's Ditch, a possible Bronze Age territorial earthwork, runs down to the Thames and forms the parish boundary between Basildon and Streatley. The earthwork has been traced intermittently across the downs for 5km eastwards to the Pang Valley. Evidence of later Neolithic early/Bronze Age activity also exists around Streatley. A decorated urn was found in the bank of Thames near the village and several cropmarks of ring-ditches exist around Streatley Farm. Cropmarks of a probable Iron Age settlement have also been mapped to the north of Streatley Farm. Cropmarks of a probable Iron Age/Romano-British settlement and

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associated field-systems overlies part of the Neolithic funerary area and extend further south-west towards Pangbourne.

Romano-British activity has been documented between Basildon and Streatley. The road between Silchester to Dorchester runs through the zone and the modern A329 follows its course around Streatley. The name Streatley is thought to refer to its location on the Roman road and it has also been suggested that a ford over the Thames existed at Streatley during this period. Coins and pottery have been found in the village, but no evidence of settlement has yet been located. A villa was found north of Basildon during construction of the railway. It is thought that the main villa building was destroyed by this work, but recent geophysical survey has located what may be related structures and enclosures.

Considerable evidence for early medieval activity exists in the zone. The earliest reference to Streatley comes from AD690 and both it and Basildon were recorded as manors with churches in Domesday. It is thought that the early medieval church was on the site of the present church and that the manor may have been at Place Farm. Little else is known about the nature of the settlement. A single pre-Christian inhumation burial was found north of village in the 1930s. It is possible that the burial forms part of a larger cemetery and that further burials exist in this area. A similar inhumation burial was found in south of the zone during railway construction.

Late medieval activity is concentrated at historic settlement nuclei. There is some documentary evidence that Westbury Farm/Scrace's Farm are on the site of Purley Parva deserted medieval settlement. Partial excavation at the site in the 1970s was inconclusive, but located undated structural remains and finds dating from the early medieval onwards. Basildon was recorded as a village with a market in AD1309 and much of the fabric of its church is 13<sup>th</sup> century. It is suggested that settlement shift has taken place as the church and church farm lie isolated from what has been the nucleus of the village since at least the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is possible that buried remains of medieval settlement exist around the church. Much of the layout and plot patterns of Streatley are probably late medieval, but are not recorded on the HER. Some medieval features are recorded at Streatley. The church was heavily Victorianised but retains a 15<sup>th</sup> century tower. A 16<sup>th</sup> century stable has been incorporated into the Swan Hotel. Earthworks at Place Farm are thought to be medieval, but their function is unclear.

Post-medieval evidence consists of buildings and milestones. There are 50 listed buildings distributed across the zone, mostly 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century domestic and farm buildings. A wide range of dates and other building types are represented. The other listed structures include the churches at Basildon and Streatley, milestones, a dovecote (which is also a scheduled monument) and a roadside well-head and pump. The zone seems to have a well-understood historic building stock, and the historic cores of Streatley and Lower Basildon have been designated as Conservation Areas. Two Second World War structures from the GHQ stop-line, a pillbox and gun-emplacement, exist in the zone. These structures were an important component of this system but are now falling into disrepair.

### **Historic Environment Potential**

The archaeological potential of most of the zone is high. Significant deposits of Neolithic to Romano-British date are likely to exist across much of the zone. The preservation of deposits and features may be varied, most of the zone has been ploughed since the medieval period and truncation of archaeological layers may have occurred. Little information on below-ground conditions is available for the zone to assess the degree of truncation. Deposits relating to early occupation may survive within historic settlement nuclei and any such deposits could be crucial to

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understanding the development of settlement in this zone. The historic building stock is well-studied, but it is possible that further significant buildings or structural elements may be identified.

### **Historic Environment Action Plan**

#### Conservation Issues

- There is continued development pressure in the area. This could result in a loss of character.
- Historic building stock is poorly understood and little protection is currently afforded to this resource.
- Conservation Area appraisals and management plans are required for Streatley and Lower Basildon.
- Management and dredging of the River Thames.
- Management of surviving WWII stop line features.

#### Research Priorities

- What is the significance of the Palaeolithic finds retrieved from the River Thames? Are these indicative of activity in the area?
- What are the cropmark features at Westbury/Scrace's Farm? Do they represent a Neolithic complex?
- What is the date and function of Grim's Ditch? How does this feature relate to other linear monuments in the area and what can it tell us about the function of the River Thames?
- How extensive is the Romano-British activity at Basildon? Has the main buildings at this site been destroyed by the railway?
- Given the probable significance of the Thames as a route into the Upper Thames basin does early Saxon settlement activity survive in the zone? Does Streatley represent the site of settlement continuity from the Romano-British period to the current day?
- What are the date, function and significance of the historic buildings in the area?
- Can archaeological study of the WWII stop line features advance our understanding of military strategy?