

BCUL Burghfield Common Urban Landscape

Historic Character

This is a zone dominated by mid to late 20th century housing, developed around small historic settlement nuclei. Prior to development, this zone was mostly covered by a mixed landscape of fields, woodland and parkland. Some of the fields were early enclosures dating back to before the 18th century; however, most had been created by the enclosure of Burghfield Common by act of Parliament in the mid 19th century. The zone remained a sparsely settled area into the mid-20th century with small historic settlement nuclei at Burghfield Common, a hamlet arranged around the green at Burghfield, and some farms and houses spread out along the road between them at Burghfield Hill. It includes small parts of the parishes of Ufton Nervet, Sulhamstead and Wokefield.

Development of this zone began during the middle of the 20th century following the establishment of Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) at Burghfield, and the naval training base for WRNS, HMS Dauntless. The main impetus to the growth of housing seems to have been the need to house the personnel required by these facilities. The majority of housing was constructed in the zone of the former Burghfield Common during the 1950s and 1960s and is characterised by estates of semi-detached houses. These developments also follow the field pattern of the Parliamentary enclosures and this produces a very definite regular character to the housing. More housing has been constructed in recent years, expanding the developed area of Burghfield Common, and infilling and expanding the settlements at Burghfield and Burghfield Hill. Some of the recent development within the historic core of Burghfield has included redevelopment and infilling between historic buildings, and this has partially eroded the historic character of the hamlet. HMS Dauntless was decommissioned in the late 20th century and has been re-developed into housing, still for military personnel. Elements of earlier landscapes are present within the zone, such as fields, ancient woods and elements of small parklands. The majority of these are highly truncated and degraded remnants. The zone is an island of urban living within a countryside that remains largely rural and sparsely settled in character.

Historic Environment

Prehistoric and Roman activity has been documented in adjacent zones but there is relatively little known archaeological evidence from within the zone. Prehistoric and Roman finds have been recovered and a round barrow at Poor's Allotments on the edge of the zone is a Scheduled Monument. A further ring ditch was located close by during topsoil stripping although little detail was recorded. There has been hardly any archaeological work carried out in this zone as much of the housing was constructed prior to routine monitoring of developments and the onset of developer-funded archaeology. An evaluation at Benham's Farm in 2001, however, found no below ground traces of a possible enclosure seen in aerial photographs.

Burghfield was a Domesday settlement and Burghfield village itself has medieval links; the church although Victorian contains a 14th century effigy, and The Old Rectory is possibly on the site of a moated manor house. The zone also contains several historic farmsteads, some 19th century country houses, a distinctive village school and some estate farm cottages. Very few of these buildings are listed.

Much of this zone was common heathland which is a landuse that often gives little indication of the extent of buried archaeology present as it can be scrubby and is not prone to producing cropmarks. The lack of known archaeology in this zone is probably due to a combination of this land-use and a lack of archaeological work.

Historic Environment Character Zone

Historic Environment Potential

The archaeological potential of much of this zone is likely to be low due to disturbance of below-ground deposits by housing construction. However, on the basis of archaeological evidence in surrounding zones, open areas within the zone should be considered to have the potential to yield deposits of prehistoric and Roman date. It is also likely that medieval deposits would be encountered within Burghfield itself.

Historic Environment Action Plan

Conservation Issues

- Unquantified archaeological resource, importance of monitoring development in open areas.
- Development pressure threatening to spread the existing settlement out into the surrounding landscape.
- 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.

Research Priorities

- What are the origins of the village of Burghfield? Does evidence for early medieval settlement activity survive?
- Does any evidence survive to indicate the use of this landscape in the pre-modern era?