

Historic Environment Character Zone

MB Military Burghfield

Historic Character

AWE (Atomic Weapons Establishment) Burghfield, a facility for construction, maintenance and decommissioning of nuclear warheads, occupies this entire zone. The site is occupied by a dense mix of bunkers and later 20th century military buildings. Military use of this zone began in the Second World War when a munitions factory was established on the site. Following the war it was used as a storage depot until the early 1950s, when it was chosen as a site for weapon construction due to the expanding nuclear weapons programme and its proximity to AWE Aldermaston. Prior to military usage the zone was part of the same agricultural landscape as found in neighbouring HECZ *SMW*, and was covered by fields belonging to several farms including Burghfield Place and Saunderscourt Farm. The construction of the facility entailed considerable earth-moving and led to the removal of all previous landscape features including Saunderscourt Farm over the whole site and the diversion of the Burghfield Brook around the south-eastern perimeter.

Historic Environment

Due to the nature of land-use that occupies much of this zone, little archaeological work has been conducted in the past and information on features prior to WWII is necessarily scarce. However, a characterisation exercise was carried out in 2007 for all the AWE sites (including Aldermaston in *MA* and Blacknest in *AUNS*) and this has identified significant heritage features and outlined management issues. As a result of this, archaeological survey and recording is beginning to be carried out.

The zone does lie in the midst of areas of Prehistoric, Roman and medieval activity. There is a suggestion from place name evidence that there may have been a moated manorial site at Burghfield Place. AWE Burghfield is itself significant as a monument to the Cold War period, but it is also a functioning facility. With the onset of the next generation of Trident missiles, the use of the facility is set to continue and it is likely that considerable modification to existing buildings and processes will be required by the new system.

Historic Environment Potential

The military facility lies in an area which has produced significant archaeological sites and features, especially related to prehistoric activity. Although the development of the site for military uses will have compromised much of the archaeological resource, it is likely that unrecorded features do survive within the facility. This was confirmed in 2008 by the discovery of an Iron Age cremation in an area of the site untouched by WWII or post-war development.

The zone contains nationally important structures relating to WWII and the Cold War, and the history of Britain's nuclear arsenal. The importance of its structures must be taken into account during any re-development. If modification or demolition of any structures is proposed, a programme of research and recording will be required to preserve the important history of this site.

Historic Environment Action Plan

Conservation Issues

- Major new investment in the AWE facilities will result in major changes to the existing facilities at Burghfield. The removal of structures of historic interest due to their origins in

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WWII or the Cold War will result in a loss of historic interest and a change to the character of the site. A Heritage Plan has been produced by AWE and it will be necessary to ensure that managers, planners, architects, etc involved in future development are aware of this and abide by its principles.

- The potential impact of development on the site to buried archaeological features should also be considered as an issue within this zone.

Research Priorities

- What is the evidence for prehistoric or Roman activity in the zone? Does it mirror the evidence from adjacent areas?
- Does any evidence survive of the medieval moated site?
- How can the WWII ordnance factory help us understand the facility, its design, construction and use? What survives of the WWII fabric and how significant is this?
- What archaeological evidence is contained at the site for the Cold War the development of Britain's nuclear arsenal? Can the recording of structures prior to demolition unlock important new data about the processes involved in this industry?