

**MUL            Mortimer Urban Landscape**

**Historic Character**

This is a zone of early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century housing, developed around a small historic settlement nuclei west of Stratfield Mortimer. Prior to development this zone was mostly covered by fields that had been created by the enclosure of Mortimer Common by Act of Parliament only fifty years previously. This was a sparsely settled zone with only a few small common-edge settlements of only a handful of houses, each strung out around the former common. Development within this zone began at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century following the construction of a station at Stratfield Mortimer which enabled an easy commute into Reading. The housing was constructed in a series of discrete developments and much of the central area is characterised by large Edwardian villa properties while the eastern area comprises 1950s semi-detached houses. The developments also largely follow the field pattern of the Parliamentary enclosures, and combined with the coherence of the housing developments this produces a very definite ordered character to the housing. The *MUL* HECZ is an island of urban living within a countryside that remains largely rural and sparsely settled in character.

**Historic Environment**

There has been limited archaeological work carried out in this zone and there is comparatively little known archaeological evidence from within and around it. A Bronze Age barrow cemetery exists nearby at Holden's Firs in the *AUNS* HECZ and an outlier to this group has been identified and scheduled at Stephen's Firs housing estate. However, a further barrow on the same alignment which was shown on an 18<sup>th</sup> century map does not appear to have survived as an earthwork on the Recreation Field. A stretch of the Grim's Bank earthwork of unknown date also crossed Stephen's Firs, but now only survives in fragmentary condition amongst dense housing. Buried archaeology may be present in places as evidenced by cropmarks within the larger recreation ground opposite St John's Church; it was conjectured that these might represent a Roman road. Romano-British features including ditches, pits and cremations were excavated in advance of housing development at Mortimer Hill. The foundations of a possible medieval building were also uncovered.

It is thought that deposits relating to the deserted settlement of Longmoor may extend into undeveloped land at the northern edge of this zone. Much of this zone was common heathland which is a vegetation type that gives little indication of the extent of any buried archaeology, due to its scrubby nature and failure to produce cropmarks. The lack of known archaeology in this zone probably results from these factors and lack of subsequent archaeological work.

There are only two listed buildings in this zone, both large houses probably dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Victorian church of St John's is unusually for ecclesiastical buildings, not listed. A windmill formerly existed in Mortimer but had been removed by the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Historic Environment Potential**

The archaeological potential of much of this zone is likely to be low due to disturbance of sub-surface deposits by housing construction. The excavations at Mortimer Hill have however shown that the open areas within this zone can yield significant archaeological remains. The potential of the few open areas should be considered to be medium to high. This may be especially important if development of back-gardens for housing, as seen elsewhere in the district, is proposed.

## **Historic Environment Action Plan**

### Conservation Issues

- The intensification of development within the settlement presents a significant threat to the character of the village. The late Victorian and Edwardian elements are largely unrecognised currently despite the fact that they play a major role in informing the character of the settlement
- Unquantified archaeological resource, importance of monitoring development in open areas.
- Management of woodlands, conservation of surviving ancient woodlands and replacement of plantations with more mixed tree coverage.

### Research Priorities

- How did the current modern settlement evolve? Why did it grow in this location? What role did the squatter settlement play in the development of the settlement?
- Does the location of the barrow at Stephens Firs and the adjacent cemetery at Holdens Firs give us information about the utilisation of the landscape in the Bronze Age? Are any of the barrows undisturbed? Do further outliers shown on Rocque's map survive below ground?
- What is the character of the Roman activity? How does this relate to the nearby town of Silchester?
- What is the date and function of Grim's Bank? How does it relate to the late Iron Age and Roman activity at Silchester?
- Can further study of the archaeological resource provide information about the use of this landscape in the pre-modern period?