

## **N Newbury**

### **Topography, Geology and Soils**

This area is defined by the built-up area of Newbury and its urban fringe incorporating Speen, Donnington, Shaw, Hambridge, Greenham and Wash Common, and includes areas of differing relief and geology. The historic town centre lies in the bottom of the Kennet valley at a river crossing point. The town has expanded to cover the sides of the Kennet valley, the lower reaches of the Lambourn valley and its confluence with the Kennet, and parts of the Enborne watershed and valley. As this area cuts across several landscape types, the geology and soils are varied. Chalk overlain by gravels exists at the bases of the Kennet and Lambourn valleys and gives rise to humic-alluvial gley soils. The Kennet and Lambourn valley sides have Reading Beds and limited deposits of London Clays which are capped by gravels on the watersheds. Soils in these areas are a mix of argyllic brown earths with podzols and brown sands on the watershed. The base of the Enborne valley has London Clays giving rise to stagnogley soils. Its watershed has Bagshot Beds capped by extensive gravels on the watershed itself and podzols and brown sands.

### **Landscape History**

Newbury was founded as a new market centre following the Norman Conquest: it is first recorded in 1079 and grew into a town by the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It was sited at the convergence of local roads and major routes at a crossing on the Kennet, and the medieval town focussed around these routes, now Cheap Street, Bartholomew Street/Northbrook Street and Bath Road/London Road and the Market Place. Newbury and its immediate surroundings have the same sort of landscape history as the neighbouring *Kennet Valley West* HECA. This is typified by a nucleated settlement (ie Newbury itself) set within open fields with a mix of common meadow, water meadow and marshy land on the valley floor. Much of this land was enclosed into fields through Parliamentary enclosure during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, although some enclosure of parts of open fields had taken place by this time. The area around Speen, Donnington and Shaw had a similar landscape to the adjacent *Winterbourne Valley and Downs* and *Kennet Valley East* HECAs, with more land enclosed into fields by the 18<sup>th</sup> century and more woodland. South of Newbury the landscape was more like that of the neighbouring *Valleys South West* HECA and the adjacent area of Hampshire. This area consisted of an extensive area of common heathland grazing, Wash Common, surrounded by irregularly-shaped pre-18<sup>th</sup> century fields.

Further information on the origins and development of Newbury can be found in the *Newbury Historic Character Study*, a project undertaken by Oxford Archaeology and West Berkshire Council in 2006.

### **The Present Landscape**

The built-up area of the town has grown hugely over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and housing and small light-industrial estates now cover the majority of the *Newbury* HECA. There has been piecemeal redevelopment of some sites in the town and not all of it has been sympathetic to the character of the town. However, the main elements of the town's historic core - street pattern, plot orientation and scale of buildings - are largely preserved and Newbury retains the feel of an historic market town. Extensive suburbs have been developed to the north and south of the town, starting in the 1950s. Several multinational companies, such as Vodafone and Bayer, established their headquarters in

### *Historic Environment Character Area*

the town in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The economic boom led to further housing construction and the development of large office buildings within and on the edge of the town. Newbury has continued to be an important centre for local trades and services and this has led to the creation of industrial and retail estates on the eastern edge of the town around Hambridge Lane. These are occupied by a mixture of office buildings with more traditional trades like small factories, garages, builders' merchants and warehousing.

Further information on the development of Newbury over the 20<sup>th</sup> century is contained in the *Newbury Historic Character Study*.