

Historic Environment Character Zone

EA Enborne Assarts

Historic Character

Historically the zone, lying between the River Enborne and Greenham and Crookham Commons was characterised by a series of common-edge settlements set within assart fields, with a strip of enclosed meadows along the Enborne, and ancient and other old woodland at the eastern end. The settlements were very small and unplanned and probably began as squatter occupation on the common fringe. They were in existence by the 18th century but may date back further into the medieval period. There are three main nuclei at Bishop's Green, Head's Hill/Goldfinch Bottom, and an unnamed settlement around Compton Wood and Thornford Gully.

Over the latter half of the 20th century many of the historic fields were modified into more regularly-shaped fields or paddocks, and some have been used for housing. Some fields have undergone less intensive farming use and have become wooded-over through regeneration. Woodland regeneration has also occurred on stubs of fields cut through by the A339 trunk road.

Despite these changes, the general division between settlement areas and fields remains largely intact. Significant change has however occurred to the historic settlement which has become gentrified, and old cottages and houses have either been extended into large dwellings or replaced with large family homes; this process began at the end of the 19th century. New housing has also been added to Goldfinch Bottom and Bishop's Green and some ancient woodland has been lost through housing construction at Compton Wood. Most new housing comprises large detached properties, some with tennis courts and swimming pools. Alterations of the historic settlements, and new growth, have changed what would have been fairly poor, dispersed squatter settlements into enclaves of affluent housing.

Historic Environment

There are very few HER records for this zone, only a historic farmstead, two 18th-19th century Grade II listed cottages and two unlisted country houses, and no recorded archaeological work has been carried out. It is unclear why there is a total lack of evidence for the medieval period and earlier. One factor could be that the zone has historically undergone land-use unfavourable to the recognition of archaeological deposits or it may reflect that this zone was relatively little used prior to this date. The potential interest and value of buildings within common-edge settlements is demonstrated by the designation of two cottages as listed buildings, but the settlements as a whole have received little attention. Although common-edge settlements are an important component of the historic settlement pattern of the district they are not well-recorded or understood, and their origins are particularly unclear.

Historic Environment Potential

The absence of recorded sites in this zone is not necessarily an indication of its archaeological potential. Work ahead of quarrying at nearby George's Farm produced evidence for later prehistoric and Roman settlement from a previously unpromising area, demonstrating that the area around the Enborne was exploited at that time. Such deposits may lie within this zone, but it is not possible to be more specific about the nature and quality of any below-ground archaeology.

The buildings and plots within the settlements at Bishop's Green, Head's Hill/Goldfinch Bottom, and Compton Wood/Thornford Gully have the potential to advance our understanding of their evolution and the nature of common-edge settlements as a whole, but this has so far not been explored. Much evidence may have already been lost as their historic fabric is being eroded by

Historic Environment Character Zone

degrees through unmonitored renovation and demolition of historic structures, and alteration of plot boundaries. Development within these settlements should be more carefully monitored and opportunities to record buildings during work must be better utilised.

Historic Environment Action Plan

Conservation Issues

- There is continued development pressure in the zone, much of it unsympathetic in scale and design. This could lead to further erosion of the historic character.
- 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.
- Poorly understood archaeological resource.

Research Priorities

- Do unrecorded archaeological sites/features survive within the wooded areas?
- What evidence survives of early prehistoric exploitation of this landscape?
- Does evidence survive on the nature and origins of the medieval settlement?
- Does archaeological evidence survive for structures/dwellings associated with medieval assarting activity?
- What are the date, function and significance of the historic buildings in the zone?