

## *Historic Environment Character Zone*

### **NFNW      Newbury Fringe North-West**

#### **Historic Character**

This is a transitional zone between the built-up area of Newbury and the surrounding countryside. It is defined by the A34, A339 and the northern edge of the suburbs and contains Donnington Castle and the historic settlement of Donnington. Although this zone is far less built-up than Newbury proper, neither is it rural in nature and it seems to represent suburban living extending into the countryside. Undeveloped areas (fields, leisure areas and woods) exist within this zone. The sinuous grain of the landscape established by roads and earlier land-use remains despite increased development. This imparts a tangible historic feel to the zone even though many individual landscape components have been significantly altered over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Housing has spread along the roads through the zone, radiating out from Donnington along routes leading from town to country. The housing is a mix of early 20<sup>th</sup> century villas and late 20<sup>th</sup> century large detached houses with extensive gardens. Most were constructed as one-off properties or as small groups of houses and is in stark contrast to the extensive housing estates characteristic of Newbury itself. This housing offers a desirable combination of proximity to town facilities with a countryside feel. The core of Donnington village appears to have remained largely unaltered despite the expansion of housing elsewhere and has been designated as a Conservation Area.

Fields are present in small, discontinuous groups and represent truncated stubs of the agricultural landscapes found in adjacent zones. Today many of these appear to function as much as unofficial recreation areas for the adjacent population as they do fields. Two golf courses have been established in the zone. Donnington Valley was laid out in the 1980s over an area of early enclosure fields. Unlike many golf courses, there is little visible trace of earlier landuse within the course. The other course was established in the 1990s and is within Donnington Grove, an 18<sup>th</sup> century mansion and Registered Park. The mansion has been re-used as its club house and several ancillary buildings are retained within the course. Some landscaping features (lake, tree lines and avenues) have been utilised within the course whereas others, such as internal divisions and some ornamental tree planting, were removed during construction. Some ancillary buildings have been subject to repair and conversion. Overall vestiges of Donnington Grove's landscaping survive within the course; however, changes to its components have affected the coherence and readability of the landscape park.

#### **Historic Environment**

The archaeological record is dominated by chance finds of artefacts but also includes some above-ground (Donnington Castle, Civil War earthworks) and below-ground archaeology (discovered during Newbury By-pass construction). The extent of below-ground archaeology is hard to assess, as unlike much of the surrounding areas cropmarks are almost entirely absent. It is unclear whether this is because this was a less-densely exploited zone or because other factors have militated against cropmark production. Much of the zone has been covered by land-uses less prone to cropmarking but its combination of geology and soils has proven favourable to cropmark production elsewhere in West Berkshire.

There is a general scatter of prehistoric artefacts but Bronze Age and Iron Age artefacts represent the earliest securely dateable activity. They were discovered as chance finds, and therefore indicate little about the nature of land-use during later prehistory. Romano-British material has been produced from several locations, including evidence of settlement from a farmstead excavated in advance of by-pass construction. It is unclear what kind of a landscape

## *Historic Environment Character Zone*

this farm functioned in, but it remains possible that other settlements and later prehistoric/Romano-British field systems, seen as cropmarks elsewhere in the district, existed in this zone. Ermin Street, connecting Silchester and Cirencester, has been traced through most of West Berkshire. The alignment of the road implies that it may run through the south of this HECZ. It has been suggested that a roadside settlement, known from Roman itineraries as *Spinae*, lies in this zone.

Early medieval evidence is limited to the settlement of Donnington and coin finds from Donnington Grove. It is unclear when a settlement came into existence at Donnington. It is listed in Domesday, but the exact form and location of the settlement at that date is unknown. Over the later medieval period Donnington became the main settlement in the zone, growing into a village. Donnington Castle was constructed north-west of the village in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century on a shoulder of land overlooking the river Lambourn, but it is unclear if its presence provided a stimulus for the growth of the village. There is some evidence for settlement having been more widespread (a croft/small farm discovered and excavated during by-pass construction), although it is unclear whether other settlements of this kind existed and at what date they were occupied or abandoned. A friary was established at Donnington in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, but its precise form is unknown as it was reconstructed as a house in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The Civil War dominates the post-medieval record. The second Battle of Newbury took place across this zone and Donnington Castle was a royalist stronghold and was besieged for a long period of the war. The extent of the battlefield is unknown, but antiquarian accounts place it ranging over most of NFNW and into adjacent areas. Defences and siegeworks were constructed around Donnington Castle and some traces of these survive as earthworks. Earthworks, thought to be siegeworks, survive within Donnington Grove and in woods adjacent to the A34.

There is also evidence of industrial activity, with a 19<sup>th</sup> century brick-kiln known at Packer's Copse.

### **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.
- Conservation Area appraisal and management plan is overdue.
- 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.
- Management of Donnington grove as a leisure complex.

#### Research Priorities

- Do unrecorded archaeological sites/features survive within the wooded areas?
- What evidence survives of early prehistoric exploitation of this landscape?
- Can the line of Ermine Street be determined? What is the nature of any roadside settlement in the area?
- Does evidence survive on the nature and origins of Donnington Village? Can the early medieval settlement focus be identified?

### *Historic Environment Character Zone*

- What are the origins of Donnington Castle? Does evidence survive to aid our understanding of its design, construction and use?
- What was the nature of the monastic house at Donnington priory?
- Can archaeological data be used to assist in the interpretation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> battle of Newbury and the siege at Donnington castle?
- What are the dates, function and significance of the historic buildings in the zone?
- Can Donnington Park help explain the development of architectural styles and landscape garden design in the late 18<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries?