

**PTHL            Pang-Thames Historic Landscape**

**Historic Character**

This is a fairly well-wooded rural zone containing some historic settlements. Historically, most of the zone was covered by a mix of small fields and woods and the combination of land-use and topography created a landscape with a very sinuous grain. Most fields were small and irregularly-shaped, and were probably created on an ad-hoc basis by medieval assartment. Most woods were ancient woodlands and had very irregular edges, probably as a result of this. The historic settlement pattern was composed mainly of farms with a hamlet at Westridge Green near the northern tip of the zone.

Unlike most parts of the district, there has not been extensive modification of fieldscapes in the zone and large areas of relatively unaltered historic fields exist. There has been significant alteration in woodland cover with areas of ancient and other old woodland grubbed-up for farmland or to create tree plantations. Replanted woods have a totally different tree cover, usually densely planted single species trees rather than open broadleaf woodland, and lack the biodiversity of ancient woodlands. This has caused a significant impact by changing the feel of the landscape and has further contributed to by the establishment of several large tree plantations across the zone. These have the same dense tree-cover as replanted woods. The grain of the landscape remains largely intact but the character has been slightly altered due to the spread of single-species plantations.

**Historic Environment**

HER records are unevenly distributed and are fairly dense across the northern part of the zone, but scattered in the south. Records are dominated by earthworks, cropmarks and findspots. The whole zone was covered by the Berkshire Downs Survey, whereas only the very northernmost part of the zone was covered by the National Mapping Programme. Some excavation and survey was done on the Grim's Ditch earthwork, but no other recorded archaeological work has been carried out in the zone.

The only definite prehistoric material recovered from the zone is a Neolithic axe found near Upper Basildon. There are numerous earthwork and cropmarked features thought to be of prehistoric date. The most visible is Grim's Ditch, a probable Bronze Age territorial earthwork that runs between the Pang and Thames valleys through the zone. Grim's Ditch exists for significant sections as an earthwork at Foxborough Copse and Portobello Wood in the west of the zone and Holies Shaw in the east and can be partially traced as a cropmark in between. Earthworks and cropmarks of probable later prehistoric/Romano-British field systems exist over much of the northern part of the zone and this includes a continuation of the system mapped around Streatley Warren in the *Thames Valley* Historic Environment Character Area.

Other Romano-British features, in addition to the field systems, have been found in the area. A villa has been observed as cropmarks north of Southridge Farm, it has not been excavated but has been speculatively dated it to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century on morphological grounds. Romano-British pottery was found in the ditches of Grim's Ditch during limited excavation at the Portobello Wood section. An artefact scatter was also found during fieldwalking on land to the north of this section. Roman milestones were historically recorded as existing on the Aldworth – Streatley road, but their fate and location is unknown.

There is scant medieval evidence in the zone. It has been suggested that Hartridge Farm is the site of a deserted medieval village. It is possible that deposits relating to early settlement exist at the site, but no physical remains have yet been found. The farms in the zone, and the settlement

## *Historic Environment Character Zone*

at Westridge Green were in existence by the 18<sup>th</sup> century and may be late medieval in origin. Deposits relating to early occupation may exist at these sites. The lack of medieval records probably reflects the fact that most of the zone was farmland and woodland during these periods.

Post-medieval records are confined to structural remains and buildings. There are 19 listed buildings in the zone; most are 17<sup>th</sup> century farm buildings and domestic structures. Several 19<sup>th</sup> century farm buildings are listed at Hookend Farm. The late 17<sup>th</sup> century tomb of an eccentric Quaker and several early 20<sup>th</sup> century cottages by Lutyens are also listed. The zone seems to have a well-understood historic building stock.

### **Historic Environment Potential**

The archaeological potential of most of the zone is high. Significant deposits of Bronze Age to Romano-British date are likely to exist across much of the zone. The preservation of deposits and features may be varied, most of the zone has been ploughed since the medieval period and truncation of archaeological layers may have occurred. However, little information on below-ground conditions is available for the zone to assess the degree of truncation. Deposits relating to early occupation may survive within historic settlement nuclei and any such deposits could be crucial to understanding the development of settlement in this zone. The historic buildings are fairly well-studied but it is possible that further significant buildings or structural elements may be identified.

### **Historic Environment Action Plan**

#### Conservation Issues

- Zone retains a strong character related to historic processes and land-use.
- Settlements are traditionally small and scattered and any new development could compromise this character.
- Maintenance of the surviving earthwork components of Grim's Ditch.
- Ancient woodland has not been well managed in recent years and this poses a threat to its survival.
- There is a need to ensure that any new tree planting avoids the visually and archaeologically erosive impacts of recent plantations. Where possible opportunities to soften the impact of recent plantations should be encouraged.

#### Research Priorities

- What are the origins and function of Grim's Ditch?
- Does the zone contain evidence of prehistoric activity?
- What is the date of the villas at Southridge Farm? Does it lie on a pre-existing settlement site?
- What is the evidence for medieval occupation at Hartridge Farm?
- Does the pattern of small settlements and farms represent an historic, medieval pattern of settlement?
- Do historic buildings at the farms in the zone contain information about post-medieval and modern farming practises?