

## *Historic Environment Character Zone*

### **BSE            Beenham and South End**

#### **Historic Character**

This zone is the centre of the Bourne valley and is characterised by recent and historic fields, wooded areas and housing. Historically, most of the zone was covered by a mix of regularly and irregularly-shaped early enclosure fields. The regular fields formed a large block between Beenham Stocks and South End. Although this zone was not highly wooded, most woods were ancient and were located around the Bourne. The settlement pattern was a mix of farms and poly-focal hamlets. Beenham and South End were the largest settlements and both comprised several nuclei clustered around road junctions. Most farms were in the block of regular enclosures. A single park, Beenham House, existed at the southern edge of the zone.

Agricultural change and settlement growth have caused substantial change. Most historic fields have been reorganised into larger holdings suited to mechanised agriculture, but this has substantially affected the grain of the landscape. Large areas of paddocks have been created around South End and Tutts Clump and this caused some blurring of the urban/ rural boundary. Small rectilinear tree-plantations have been created at several locations. Most are at previously unwooded sites, but, as they are small in size and fit into the landscape's grain, they have not had a significant impact on character. Despite loss or replanting at some woods, most historic woodlands are largely unaltered. Huge housing growth has occurred over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Housing was constructed at Tutts Clump in the 1900s and became a focus of further development, and now forms a settlement in its own right. Most housing developments from the 1960s concentrated around the historic settlements of South End and Beenham. This is typified by small housing estates and developments constructed around the historic nuclei. Development at South End has shifted the settlement's focus to the south-west and away from the historic core. At Beenham, housing has been built between the previously separate historic nuclei of Beenham, Beenham Stocks and Beenham Hill, creating a linear village out of what was a poly-focal settlement.

#### **Historic Environment**

HER records are unevenly distributed across this zone; they are fairly common south of the Bourne around Beenham and a small group exists at the northern edge, but they are rare elsewhere. Fieldwalking was carried out in the south of the zone as part of the Lower Kennet Valley Survey and this probably accounts for the large number of records for this part of the zone. There has been very little other archaeological work, and the zone has not been covered by the National Mapping Programme.

Significant concentrations of Neolithic and Bronze Age flintwork and some late Bronze Age pottery were found during fieldwalking around Beenham. This material probably represents occupation and certainly shows the use of the zone during these periods, but no occupation sites have yet been firmly identified. No evidence of later prehistoric activity has been recovered from the zone, although activity of this date has been documented in nearby sections of the Kennet and Pang valleys.

Romano-British material is very scarce in this zone and limited to a few potsherds found at two locations around Beenham during fieldwalking for the Lower Kennet Valley Survey. Neighbouring areas were occupied and farmed in this period but it is unclear whether this was the case in this zone.

## *Historic Environment Character Zone*

Early medieval evidence has not yet been recovered from this zone and it is unknown whether any of the settlements in the zone date back to this period. Beenham is known to have existed during the late medieval period and was mentioned in documents in AD1142. Four very late medieval buildings survive in and around Beenham, but few other medieval features are known. Beenham's church was rebuilt in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and it is unclear whether any medieval fabric or features are preserved in the present structure. It is likely that below-ground deposits relating to medieval settlement survive within Beenham's historic nuclei. Very little is known about South End and it is unclear when the settlement was established.

Post-medieval features are represented by standing buildings, and there are 20 listed buildings in the zone. Most listed buildings are farm buildings and domestic structures, some of a 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century date, and Beenham church and two of its tombs are listed. The vast majority of listed buildings are in and around Beenham and only two buildings at South End are listed. It is likely that there are further significant buildings and structural elements at South End.

### **Historic Environment Potential**

The potential of the zone as a whole is hard to assess on present evidence. It is likely that below-ground deposits of Neolithic and Bronze Age date exist, but it is not possible to be more specific about the, location, nature and quality of any below-ground archaeology. Most of the zone has been subject to ploughing since the medieval period and it is possible that this has caused truncation of deposits in places. Below-ground deposits of medieval settlement are likely to survive at Beenham and South End and any such material will be important in understanding the origin of this settlement. The settlement at South End is very poorly understood and any sub-surface settlement deposits or early standing buildings could help to clarify its origin and development. Study of the historic building stock has been limited, and it is possible that further significant structures will be identified.

### **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.
- Historic building stock is poorly understood and little protection is currently afforded to this resource.

#### Research Priorities

- Does evidence for the early settlement and exploitation of the zone survive?
- Does the paucity of Roman evidence give a true indication of the level of activity in this period?
- Does evidence survive on the nature and origins of medieval settlement in the zone?
- What are the dates, function and significance of the historic buildings in the zone?