

TVSD Thames Valley - Streatley and Downs

Historic Character

This is a mixed zone of recent and historic fields, woodland, leisure landscapes and recent settlement. Historically, the zone was unsettled and covered by common downland grazing, although small areas of open field also existed around Streatley Hill. These were enclosed into fields by Act of Parliament in the early 19th century and only a small area of downland remained near Streatley Warren. Farms existed at Warren Farm and New Farm by the end of the 19th century. Field Barn Farm developed from a field-barn situated at the edge of an open field. An extensive area of ancient and other old woods existed in the south of the zone above Streatley. An area of fields, created before the 18th century probably by woodland clearance, existed in the centre of this wooded area. Some of the extensive late 19th and early 20th century growth of Streatley spread into the zone around Lough Down and the housing of this period is typified by large detached villa style properties.

Most historic enclosures have been reorganised since the mid-20th century, but since historic fieldscapes were regularly-shaped this has not had a major impact on the historic character of the zone. The development of Streatley Golf Course has removed land from agricultural production and altered the landscape. Many tree plantations have been created on the golf course that has introduced a wooded element that did not previously exist and closed off views across the downs. Further housing growth has occurred at Streatley and extended into this zone at Coombe Bottom. It is characterised by a mix of large, individually constructed detached houses and a small estate. Streatley continues to be focus of housing growth. Although some change has occurred most has been within the grain of the landscape and the zone's character is largely unaltered.

Historic Environment

HER records are common and well-distributed across this zone and most are of cropmarks and findspots. The zone was covered by the Berkshire Downs Survey and the National Mapping Programme, but little other archaeological work has been carried out.

Mesolithic flintwork, including a macehead, has been recovered from Coombe Bottom and Streatley Hill indicating some level of activity during this period. The nature of Mesolithic use of the zone and whether any deposits of this date exist is unclear. A few finds of Neolithic flintwork provide limited evidence of activity during this period. Again, the nature of activity and whether any Neolithic deposits exist is unclear. Evidence of activity is more widespread from the Bronze Age onwards. Cropmarks interpreted as a Bronze Age barrow cemetery exist north of Field Barn Farm. Grim's Ditch, a probable Bronze Age territorial earthwork, runs through the zone between the Pang and Thames valleys. Significant sections survive as earthworks at High Holies Wood. Field-systems of probable later Iron Age/Romano-British date have been mapped over much of the zone. Most are evidenced by cropmarks, but elements survive as earthworks at Streatley Warren and Holies Wood. A lynchet within the Streatley Warren field system was partially excavated and dated to the Iron Age.

Some Romano-British material has been recovered from the zone in addition to the activity indicated the extensive field systems. Roman building material and other finds were brought up by the plough north of Warren Farm and probably indicate the remains of a building of this date. A possible hoard of mostly late 3rd to 4th century coins was also found near Holies Wood.

Historic Environment Character Zone

There is scant medieval and post-medieval evidence in the zone and all comes from finds. A 15th century coin hoard was found at Streatley Warren and 18th century cloth seals were found near Thurle Grange (formerly New Farm). The lack of medieval and post-medieval records probably reflects the fact that this zone was part of Streatley's grazing hinterland and not densely settled during these periods.

The Ridgeway runs through this zone. Although its origins are unclear this long distance recreational route has now been formalised as a National Trail.

There are few historic buildings in the zone and none are listed or recorded on the HER. There has been some redevelopment of the 19th century farms but it remains possible that they contain significant buildings or structural elements.

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 might have occurred. Little information on below-ground conditions is available for this zone to assess the degree of truncation. The few historic buildings are not well-studied and it is possible that 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.
- Maintenance of the surviving earthwork components of Grim's Ditch and Streatley Warren field system.
- 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

- Does evidence survive for the early prehistoric exploitation of this zone?
- What are the origins and function of Grim's Ditch?
- Can investigation into the landscape features in the zone provide indications as to the origins and function of the Ridgeway in the prehistoric or Roman periods?
- Do Iron Age settlements exist in the area that relate to the utilisation of the field systems?
- What is the character, date and extent of the Romano-British activity at North Warren 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?