

Historic Environment Character Zone

WDR Wooded Downs – Roman

Historic Character

This is a zone of mixed land-use defined by a buffer around the known concentration of HER records around Ermin Street. The extent is a reflection of the presence of known archaeology and, as no modern landscape rationale underlies it, the edges of the zone do not necessarily follow “real-world” boundaries. The zone is bisected by Ermin Street and contains a mix of fields, wooded areas, a stretch of the M4 including Membury Services and the former Membury airfield. Several historic settlements are sited on the road, but little is known of their origin and development.

Historic Environment

The dominant feature is the Ermin Street Roman road which still forms the major route through this zone as the B4000. The zone was covered by the Berkshire Downs Survey and aerial photograph transcription and analysis by the National Mapping Programme. Little other archaeological work has been carried out in the zone. Prehistoric material is not common and the only finds from this zone are a Mesolithic core and a Bronze Age axe. The north-eastern corner of Membury Camp hillfort is within this zone and is a scheduled ancient monument. Little is known about this hillfort as no excavations are known on the site. Cropmarks of field systems and boundaries thought to be of later prehistoric/ Romano-British date have been mapped at the extreme north-west of the zone. Although the course of Ermin Street is well-known and it is still largely in use, there has been limited investigation of the physical nature of the road itself. Other Romano-British features have been observed in this zone. A probable building was located on the site of Membury Services and a group of Romano-British features, including a corn-drier, were excavated at Lodge Farm prior to construction of the M4. Two furnaces excavated during road diversion at Lambourn Woodlands are the only medieval features known in this zone.

Later periods are represented almost entirely by standing buildings. The zone contains 12 listed buildings and the majority of these are 17th century cottages and 17th to 19th century farm buildings. Both Lambourn Woodlands and Shefford Woodlands contain 17th century buildings but it is unclear how long prior to this they date back. It is also unknown what their relationship to Lambourn and Great Shefford was.

Second World War military remains are found on land that was occupied by Membury airfield. Concrete runways remain within fields, and buildings related to the airfield are found over an extensive area to the north and east, many of which have been re-used for alternative, mainly industrial, uses.

Historic Environment Potential

The potential for buried archaeological deposits is varied across this zone. Earth moving during construction is thought to have removed all archaeological deposits from the areas covered by the M4 and Membury Services. It is likely that this has occurred to some extent in the area formerly occupied by Membury airfield. Prehistoric material is scarce but deposits may exist in this zone, particularly at Membury Camp and in the area of cropmarked field systems. The quality of deposits at Membury Camp hillfort is unclear. This section of the hillfort is covered by ancient semi-natural woodland and it is likely that tree-roots have caused disturbance of the Iron Age deposits. Physical remains of the Roman road are likely to survive underneath the present road surface and in areas on the course of the road where the modern route has been diverted. Excavations in advance of the M4 found some evidence for contemporary settlement along Ermin Street and it is possible that further settlement deposits are located on the course of the

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road. Deposits relating to early settlement development are likely to survive within the historic settlement nuclei. Any such deposits are likely to be crucial to understanding the development of settlement in this zone. There has been limited study of the historic building stock and it is possible that further significant structures will be identified.

Historic Environment Action Plan

Conservation Issues

- Varied archaeological resource
- The origins of Lambourn Woodlands and Shefford Woodlands is poorly understood
- Identify and record the various dispersed WWII features.
- More detail is needed on nature condition and extent of the historic building stock to ensure appropriate policies are put in place to conserve this resource

Research Priorities

- Is the paucity of prehistoric remains a true reflection of activity in the zone?
- How does the Roman road relate to the settlement features discovered along its route, and how representative are they of contemporary and later activity along this route, and in the area in general?
- What is the nature and construction of the Roman road?
- Can the Roman Road be shown to have continuity of use into the post-medieval era?
- What is the extent and condition of the historic building stock?