

**LVAC      Lambourn Valley – agricultural with extensive cropmarks**

**Historic Character**

This is an agricultural zone on the northern slope of the Lambourn valley from Stancombe Down to Great Shefford. Historically, the zone was covered by a mix of downland and open fields with a few small ancient woods in the southeast. Only a small area of open fields, lying north of Maidencourt Farm, had been enclosed into fields by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and these were mostly large, irregularly-shaped fields. Most downland in Lambourn Parish and all the remaining open fields were enclosed into large regularly-shaped fields by Act of Parliament in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. A large tract of unenclosed downland remained north of East Garston with small areas west of Lambourn. Settlement was almost entirely absent and comprised only four farms: Stancombe Farm, Lodge Farm, Northfield Farm and East Shefford Farm. Many isolated field barns also existed across the zone. Two large ancient woods existed north of Lodge Farm and the fields in this area seem to have been created through assartment.

Agricultural mechanisation from the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century led to a dramatic alteration of this landscape. Existing fields were amalgamated into larger holdings, through boundary removal or reorganisation, leading to the removal of historic features such as hedgerows. Most remaining downland has been enclosed for further large arable fields and only one area remains at Winterdown Bottom. The changes have had a significant impact on character as large, regular arable expanses have been created over the whole zone where previously there would have been either open downland or smaller fields. Some settlement growth has occurred with the expansion of the built-up area of both East Garston and Great Shefford from the valley floor onto the valley side since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Historic Environment**

HER records are densely distributed across the zone and are dominated by cropmarks and findspots. The zone was covered by the Berkshire Downs Survey and the National Mapping Programme and both added significant numbers of records to the HER. Little developer-funded work has taken place, largely reflecting the lack of development in this zone, but local archaeologists have carried out fieldwalking and excavation on cropmarked features in the west of the zone. The only scheduled monuments in the zone are two bowl barrows at Stancombe Hatts.

Prehistoric records are widespread, but early material is fairly scarce. Scatters of worked flint were found during fieldwalking at Crow Down, Eastbury Down and Eastbury Fields. It is unclear what kind of activity is represented by these scatters and little other evidence of early prehistoric activity has been recovered. Bronze Age evidence is more widespread and consists largely of barrows and probable barrows. These include the two scheduled barrows at Stancombe Hatts, which are part of a larger cemetery of at least seven barrows that extends over the district boundary into Oxfordshire. Several cropmarks of ring-ditches exist on Warren Down and Stancombe Down including a barrow on Warren Down that survived until recently as an earthwork, but has now been ploughed out. A hoard of middle to late Bronze Age gold torcs/armlets and bangles was found at Crow Down in 2004, and subsequent small scale investigation suggests that this material may be related to a structure of some sort. There are at least two linear ditches, East Ditch and East Garston Ditch, which run north to south into the Lambourn Valley from the Ridgeway and appear to relate to late Bronze Age land divisions. Definite Iron Age material is scarce in this zone and consists only of late Iron Age brooches found on Eastbury Down.

## *Historic Environment Character Zone*

Extensive cropmarks of field systems exist across the north of the zone, with substantial tracts also in the south at Eastbury Fields, East Garston Down and near Hasham Copse. Elements of the field-systems on the Lambourn Downs and near Hasham Copse survived until recently as earthworks, but have been levelled due to increased intensity of ploughing. The systems have generally been ascribed a later prehistoric/Romano-British date, but limited excavation has suggested that they are mainly Roman.

Significant Romano-British activity, in addition to the field-systems, is documented in this zone. A cemetery site and foundations of a villa were discovered during flint extraction on Stancombe Down in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The sites were partially excavated at the time of discovery and at least 12 inhumation burials were discovered. The presence of further buildings and burials is suggested by cropmarks of linear features and dark patches surrounding the site. Artefact scatters immediately north of Eastbury and on Bockhampton Down and Stancombe Down have been interpreted as settlements of this period. Finds of this period are not widespread, but include a bronze sceptre head from Eastbury in the form of a male head which has been interpreted as a cult object.

Medieval records are uncommon and consist of finds of an early medieval metal armlet from East Garston Down, a 13<sup>th</sup> century bronze Virgin and Child seal from Shepherd's Bottom and two late medieval silver coins found during a metal detectorists' rally at Grange Farm.

Post-medieval records are also scarce and consist of a probable deserted farming site and two listed buildings. Earthworks of buildings platforms and small enclosures immediately west of Winterdown Barn were interpreted as related to sheep farming. These have now been levelled by ploughing. The listed buildings are Harrow Cottage, a 19<sup>th</sup> century cottage on the fringe of Great Shefford, and a nearby 18<sup>th</sup> century milestone from the Hungerford to Wantage turnpike road, now the A338.

### **Historic Environment Potential**

Deposits of Bronze Age to Romano-British date are likely across the zone but preservation may be varied. Cropmarks are most extensive in areas of former downland that have only been enclosed and cultivated relatively recently. The remainder of the zone has been ploughed since the medieval period and cropmarks do exist but are less extensive. Ploughing is likely to have caused significant truncation of many features. The extent of survival of the cropmark features is unclear as few have been excavated, and deposits may range from relatively intact to very ephemeral and illegible. The origin of the farms is unknown, and any deposits relating to early occupation at these sites could help to understand the history and development of the settlements. Nothing is known about the nature of the historic building stock and it is possible that significant buildings or structural elements exist.

### **Historic Environment Action Plan**

#### Conservation Issues

- The open aspect of this zone is part of its historic character; will this be maintained with changing agricultural practices?
- Intensive modern agriculture threatens the resource on buried archaeological sites.
- Development pressure is forcing settlement to expand out of the valley floor onto the lower slopes.
- The zone has high potential for Prehistoric and Roman archaeological discoveries.

### *Historic Environment Character Zone*

- More detail is needed on the historic building stock to ensure appropriate policies are put in place to conserve this resource.
- 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 was the nature of land use in the earlier Prehistoric period?
- Do the locations of the Bronze Age burial mounds tell us anything about the use of the landscape in this period?
- Are East Ditch and East Garston ditch remnants of a late Bronze Age land management re-organisation and representative of social and economic changes at this time?
- Was the landscape empty in the Iron Age?
- Do Romano-British rural settlements exist in the zone and how do they relate to the extensive field systems?
- What are the origins of the farmsteads in the zone?
- Do the historic buildings in the zone contain any information about post-medieval and modern changes to land use and agricultural systems?