

Historic Environment Character Zone

PTSB Pang-Thames Settled Belt

Historic Character

This is a zone of recent housing with some fields and wooded areas focussing on the historic settlement nuclei of Ashampstead and Upper Basildon. Historically, most of the zone was covered by irregularly-shaped early enclosures with some areas of woodland.

Major change has occurred since the later 20th century and the majority of the zone is now covered by housing. Most housing is affluent in nature and is characterised by a mix of small estates and developments of a few large houses. Swimming pools and tennis courts are common features. Development has been extensive and it has spread along the roads and joined up the previously separate historic settlements. There is now an almost continuous belt of housing from Ashampstead to Upper Basildon and then north to Basildon and east to Pangbourne. A large area of land at the eastern end of the zone is now occupied by Pangbourne College. Some agricultural land remains and consists of modern fields created by rationalisation of historic enclosures through boundary removal and reorganisation. Large areas of paddocks have also been created around Ashampstead and Upper Basildon. Areas of historic woodland remain around Pangbourne College and between Ashampstead and Upper Basildon. Several tree plantations have been created between Ashampstead and Upper Basildon making this part of the zone much more wooded than previously.

Historic Environment

HER records are unevenly distributed across the zone and are mostly concentrated around Ashampstead and Upper Basildon and very few elsewhere. Records are dominated by findspots and standing buildings. The zone was covered by the Berkshire Downs Survey, but this located few features no other recorded archaeological work has been carried out.

Very limited evidence of prehistoric activity has been recovered from this zone. The only definite prehistoric material comes from finds of two Palaeolithic hand-axes at Upper Basildon. Some evidence of prehistoric activity exists in neighbouring areas so it is likely that this zone was used in this period. The nature of activity and whether any prehistoric deposits exist is unclear.

Romano-British finds were made in Upper Basildon at Kiln Ground and New Town. It has been suggested that the large quantities of roman pottery found at Kiln Ground are indicative of a settlement or pottery manufacturing site. Much of the zone has now been developed into housing, but it is possible that Romano-British deposits survive within remaining blocks of woodland.

No early medieval finds or features have been recovered from the zone. It is unclear when the settlement at Ashampstead was established, it was not mentioned in Domesday and the earliest reference to the settlement was in 1155. St Clement's church, Ashampstead, is largely 13th century in date and contains significant surviving 13th century wall-paintings. Three 16th century timber framed buildings exist at Ashampstead. A late 15th/early 16th century building also exists at Upper Basildon and is now a pub. It is unclear when the settlement at Upper Basildon originated. A settlement, known as Basildon Green, existed at this location on Rocque's 1760s map of Berkshire and it seems to have become known as Upper Basildon by the mid-19th century.

Post-medieval records are dominated by standing structures. A 19th century brickworks existed at Kiln Ground, much of its site has been re-developed into housing but it is possible that

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deposits relating to the brickworks survive within remaining blocks of woodland. There are 37 listed buildings existing in the zone, and consist mostly of 17th to 18th century farm and domestic structures. The list also contains St. Clement's Church and some of its tombs and a folly tower at Ashampstead. Two unlisted 20th century buildings are also recorded on the HER, Upper Basildon Church and the architecturally important 1960s house Davoli. Part of the historic core of Ashampstead has been designated as a Conservation Area.

Historic Environment Potential

The potential of the zone as a whole is hard to assess on present evidence, no excavation has taken place and little is known of below-ground conditions. Some prehistoric and Romano-British activity has been indicated by surface finds and below-ground deposits of these dates may exist. The potential of much of the zone is likely to be low due to disturbance caused by housing construction. Open areas, including gardens and gaps between housing, are likely to have the highest potential for pre-medieval deposits. Known historic settlements may have originated during the medieval period and it is possible that deposits relating to early occupation exist within their historic nuclei. Any such deposits will be crucial to understanding settlement development in this zone. The historic building stock is not well studied and it is likely that further significant buildings and structures will be identified.

Historic Environment Action Plan

Conservation Issues

- There is continued development pressure in the area.
- It is not clear whether the character of the area reflects any particular period or style.
- Historic building stock is poorly understood and little protection is currently afforded to this resource.
- Conservation Area appraisal and management plan is required for Ashampstead.
- Management of woodlands, conservation of surviving ancient woodlands and replacement of plantations with more mixed tree coverage.

Research Priorities

- Does the paucity of evidence for the prehistoric period represent a genuine picture of the level of activity in the zone in this period?
- How extensive is the Romano-British pottery industry in the woods at kiln ground? Do further kilns survive in the area?
- Does evidence survive on the nature and origins of the medieval settlement?
- What are the origins of the brick works in the zone? How significant were they and where were their main markets?
- What are the date, function and significance of the historic buildings in the area?