

**UPVP Upper Pang Valley – mostly prehistoric**

**Historic Character**

This is a zone dominated by arable cultivation at the head of the Pang valley, containing the historic settlement of West Ilsley. The zone also contains small wooded areas and some paddocks and gallops. Historically, the lower slopes and south side of the valley were covered in open fields, and downland grazing existed across the rest of the zone. Some open field south of West Ilsley had been enclosed by the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the open field and downland were enclosed through Act of Parliament in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, but open field within East Ilsley parish was enclosed late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by agreement. East Ilsley's downland remained open into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This was a relatively unwooded area although some blocks of ancient woodland existed at the south-western edge of the zone. West Ilsley was the only village in the zone, and a small farm, Hodcott Farm, existed just south-east of the settlement.

Mechanisation of agriculture in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century led to a near total re-organisation of fieldscapes in this zone, and few historic enclosures remain unaltered. These changes have not had as drastic an effect on character as in other parts of the district since historic fieldscapes were regularly-shaped. The area cultivated has also expanded and the East Ilsley downs are now mostly enclosed into fields. The loss of downland has had a significant effect on the character of the zone. The growth of the racing industry has introduced a new element to the landscape with the development of extensive gallops and of studs and paddocks. Some plantations have been created, and contrast with the unwooded nature of the landscape. They are not common features and are mostly small-scale so have not yet had an impact on the overall character of the zone. There has been a small amount of settlement growth at West Ilsley.

**Historic Environment**

HER records are densely distributed across the zone and include several scheduled monuments. Records are heavily dominated by cropmarks, but significant earthworks have also been recorded. The zone was covered by both the Berkshire Downs Survey and the National Mapping Programme and other archaeological work including survey and small-scale excavation has also been carried out.

Early prehistoric material is scarce across the zone and consists of finds of worked flint found around Grim's Ditch in the northern tip of the zone. A land-surface, thought to be Neolithic, was found under the mound during excavations at Hodcott Barrow in the 1970s. Activity is better documented from the Bronze Age onwards. Several barrows exist on Sheep Down and Hodcott Down, many survive as earthworks and three are scheduled. It has been suggested that the Hodcott Down barrows were part of a barrow cemetery. A group of several ring-ditches southwest of Hodcott Farm has also been interpreted as a barrow cemetery. Grim's Ditch, a probable Bronze Age territorial earthwork, forms the edge of the zone, and also the parish boundary between the northern tip of the zone and the A34. This section of the earthwork is also scheduled. Late Bronze Age features were also found during excavation prior to construction of an all-weather gallop on Compton Down.

Field systems of probable later prehistoric/Romano-British date exist over much of the zone and indicate intensive exploitation and settlement during these periods. The field systems are mostly evidenced by cropmarks, but earthwork elements are also recorded. There has been no systematic excavation of the systems and the period of their development and use, and whether

## *Historic Environment Character Zone*

any were contemporary is unknown. A single Iron Age find, a coin from near Greyfield Row, has been made in this zone.

Other Romano-British evidence comes from finds including a silver coin hoard from the Ridgeway, a coin from Compton Down gallop and pottery from fieldwalking near Grim's Ditch. Three mounds existed near the West Ilsley/East Hendred boundary and Grim's Ditch. These were excavated in the 1930s and assigned a Roman or post-Roman date on the basis of Roman pottery in the subsoil under the mound. The mounds lacked any internal features and have been interpreted as Roman or early medieval boundary markers.

Evidence of early medieval activity is scarce and consists of a single spearhead found near East Ilsley Barn Farm. A settlement may have existed at West Ilsley during this period. Ilsley (HILDESLEI) was recorded in Domesday, but it unclear whether this refers to East or West Ilsley. No physical remains of this date have yet been discovered in the village. The earliest reference to West Ilsley in its own right was in 1220. Two late medieval structures exist in West Ilsley; All Saint's Church retains significant 14<sup>th</sup> century elements despite restoration in 1881, and a 16<sup>th</sup> century barn exists near the church. A mill was documented in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and it is thought that this was on Windmill Down where a windmill stood until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. A modern house now stands at this location with the windmill site in a garden area, and remains of the mill are thought to survive. Good documentary evidence exists for a deserted medieval village at Hodcott Farm and earthworks existed immediately south of the farm in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This area has been redeveloped as a stud farm and the earthworks appear to have been removed. Several groups of medieval lynchets exist near East Ilsley.

There are 17 listed buildings and monuments in the zone, and all but one, an 18<sup>th</sup> century milestone, are in West Ilsley. The majority of listed buildings are 18<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> century farm buildings and cottages. The church, 16<sup>th</sup> century barn and 17<sup>th</sup> century cottage are also listed. The whole of the village at West Ilsley is designated as a Conservation Area.

### **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 as most of the zone has been ploughed since the medieval period and truncation of archaeological layers might have occurred. Little information on sub-surface conditions is available for the zone to assess the degree of truncation. Deposits relating to early occupation might survive within historic settlement nuclei and any such deposits could be crucial to understanding the development of settlement in this zone. The historic building stock is fairly well-studied but it is possible that further significant buildings or structural elements may be identified.

### **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.
- There are a small number of earthwork archaeological monuments that require careful management to ensure their preservation.
- Large quantities of archaeological material from a broad date range indicates a high potential for future discoveries.

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- Development pressure may lead to settlement expansion that erodes their character.
- Conservation Area Appraisals and management plans is required for West Ilsley
- More detail is needed on the historic building stock to ensure appropriate policies are put in place to conserve this resource. Of particular relevance is the small number of listed buildings which does not appear to be an accurate reflection of the significance of the building stock in these hamlets.
- The move towards 'all weather gallops' threatens the survival of the traditional grass gallops.
- There is a need to ensure that any new tree planting avoids the visually and archaeologically erosive impacts of recent plantations.

#### 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?
- Is Grim's ditch a late Bronze Age feature and what can it tell us about land use and economy in this period?
- Can the broad date range of archaeological material present be used to create detailed picture of land-use and settlement continuity?
- What can be learnt about the date, origins and use of the extensive field systems?
- Do Romano-British rural settlements exist within the field systems?
- Does the existing settlement pattern reflect the establishment of settlement in the early medieval period? Does evidence for settlement continuity exist within West Ilsley?
- Was there a major rural settlement at Hodcott farm in the medieval period? What led to its decline and desertion?
- Do the historic buildings in the zone contain any information about post-medieval and modern changes to land use and agricultural systems?