

Historic Environment Character Zone

HW Hampshire Watershed

Historic Character

This zone is focussed around the West End Brook and is comprised of fields, wooded areas, recent settlement, and small-scale industrial development. Most land-uses are fairly recent in date but there are areas of ancient woodland and historic enclosures along the West End Brook. Historically, much of the zone away from the brook was part of the extensive gravel heathland found on the Hampshire border. These were enclosed into fields by an Act of Parliament in the mid-19th century but proved to be poor quality farmland and had become woodland plantations by the end of the century. Intensive gravel extraction took place in the former heath areas over the latter half of the 20th century. The quarries have all now been refilled and some areas have been re-used as fields, paddocks and small industrial sites. The remaining restored quarry areas have not been re-used and have become scrubbed-over waste ground.

Historic Environment

There is an almost total lack of known archaeology from this zone and no archaeological work has been carried out here. There are only two Historic Environment Records for the zone; a post-medieval brick-kiln and the possible course of Ermin Street. This scarcity of information is odd as activity of all periods has been documented in similar neighbouring areas, and this zone lies in very close proximity to the Roman town of Silchester.

Archaeological monitoring of nearby gravel quarries has frequently located Iron Age and Romano-British evidence, however, there was no monitoring of gravel extraction in this area and no chance finds during quarrying are documented. The area where Ermin Street is thought to lie has already been removed by quarrying. Much of this zone was heathland which is a landuse that often gives little indication of the extent of the buried archaeology present, as it can be scrubby and is not conducive to cropmark formation. The lack of known archaeology in this zone is probably due to a combination of this land-use with a lack of archaeological scrutiny during development.

Historic Environment Potential

Buried archaeological deposits will have been removed in quarried areas. It is reasonable to suggest that the kind of Iron Age and Romano-British evidence found in similar neighbouring zones could be encountered in unquarried and undeveloped parts of this zone. These areas should be regarded as having high archaeological potential.

Historic Environment Action Plan

Conservation Issues

- There is continued development pressure in the zone, much of it unsympathetic in scale and design. This could lead to further erosion of the historic character.
- Possible further gravel extraction.

Research Priorities

- Does evidence for the early settlement and exploitation of the zone survive?
- What are the origins of the brick works in the zone? How significant were they and where were their main markets?