

Historic Environment Character Zone

INK Inkpen

Historic Character

This is a mixed zone around the settlement of Inkpen comprising fields, woods and small commons. Much of Inkpen is recent in date and was built between the 1970s and 1990s. Historically the zone was a mix of irregularly-shaped fields and small blocks of woodland around Inkpen village with two areas of common heathland. Inkpen Great Common was the largest block of common heathland in this zone and covered most of the eastern part of the zone. Inkpen Little Common was much smaller and lay at the north-west tip of the zone. The commons and woods were the only parts of the zone not enclosed into fields by the 18th century. All of Little Common and most of Great Common were enclosed into fields by Act of Parliament in the early 19th century. Inkpen was not a nucleated village and was composed of four separate foci at Lower Green, Upper Green, Manor Farm and around St Michael's Church. Great Common was also a focus for settlement, and five small settlements, including Hell Corner, existed around its fringe. These have their roots in squatter occupation to exploit the common's resources.

The grain of the landscape varied across the zone. Over the western part, the interplay of topography, roads and fields created a very sinuous grain. The landscape of the eastern portion had a very regular grain mostly as a result of the straight roads and rectilinear fields created by Parliamentary enclosure of Inkpen Great Common.

There has been major change in the zone through settlement growth, agricultural processes and an increase in tree-cover. Settlement growth has been intense in this zone and new housing has been built at each of the historic settlement nuclei. Most growth has been at those settlements around the former Inkpen Great Common. The majority of new housing was constructed between the 1970s and 1990s and is characterised by a mix of large family houses and small-scale housing developments. The expansion has begun to join the previously distinct settlement nuclei and has created what is becoming a sprawling modern settlement.

The adoption of mechanised farming has led to the reorganisation of fieldscapes in order to create larger, more regular holdings. About half of the historic fields have been modified but some areas of early enclosures have been left largely unaltered. Parliamentary enclosures do not survive well, and only a very small number remain in agricultural use. Most have either been used for housing or as the sites of tree-plantations.

All of the plantations are on areas that were Parliamentary fields created from Great Common. Most had been established by the late 19th century and this may have been because the fields, created from heath, were found to be too poor to support long-term agriculture. The plantations are rectilinear and preserve much of the regular grain of the parliamentary enclosure landscape. The remaining areas of Inkpen Great Common have developed into scrubby woodland in places. The big increase in tree-cover has brought a very wooded character to the eastern part of the zone that it did not previously possess.

Changes to the landscape have fragmented the grain and character of this zone and although parts retain a historic appearance much of the landscape is modern. The zone that retains the greatest historic character is around Lower Green and the Church.

Historic Environment Character Zone

Historic Environment

HER records are very scattered in this zone and little archaeological work has been carried out. The zone was covered by the National Mapping Programme but has not been looked at by any other large-scale survey project. Only very low levels of prehistoric activity have been documented in this zone and this is also the case in neighbouring zones. Finds include one of the few known Beaker burials from the district and shows that the zone was used to some extent but the intensity and nature of this activity is unclear on present evidence. No Romano-British material has yet been recorded from this zone. Limited evidence of activity of this period has been located to the south-west but it is unclear the extent to which this zone may have been used in this period.

No early medieval evidence has been recovered from the zone but a settlement at Inkpen existed by the 10th century and was mentioned in the charter of 935 AD. Little else is known of this settlement, and its location, origin and nature are unclear. Later medieval evidence has not been found in the zone and the only feature from this period is St Michael's Church. Post-medieval features are the best documented, but are dominated by records of standing buildings at Inkpen. A kiln site at Pottery Lane, which operated from the 16th century, is the only place where below-ground deposits have been explored.

There are 22 listed buildings in the zone and the majority are 17th and 18th century domestic structures. Most listed structures are in Lower Green or the area around St Michael's Church, and only two come from settlements around the former Inkpen Great Common. The area around Lower Green has been designated a Conservation Area.

Historic Environment Potential

The potential is very hard to assess as so few records exist across the zone. Prehistoric and Romano-British activity is not well-documented but it is possible that deposits of these dates may be present however; it is not possible to be more specific about their location, nature and quality. Deposits relating to the early development of settlement are likely to survive within the historic settlement nuclei. Any such deposits are expected to be crucial to understanding the development of settlement in this zone. An area of specific high potential exists around St Michael's Church, where early medieval settlement and church buildings and burials are likely to be encountered. There has been limited study of the historic building stock, particularly of the settlements around the former Inkpen Great Common, and it is possible that further significant structures will be identified.

Historic Environment Action Plan

Conservation Issues

- Intensive modern agriculture threatens the resource on buried archaeological sites.
- More detail is needed on the historic building stock to ensure appropriate policies are put in place to conserve this resource.
- A Conservation Area appraisal and management plan required.
- Development pressure.
- Management of woodlands, conservation of surviving ancient woodlands and replacement of plantations with more mixed tree coverage.
- Potential gravel extraction in zone.

Historic Environment Character Zone

Research Priorities

- What was the nature of land use in the prehistoric and Romano-British periods? Does the paucity of evidence represent a true picture of the level of activity here?
- What are the origins of the settlements in the zone? Does evidence for early medieval settlement activity survive?
- What are the origins of the farmsteads in the zone?
- Can the nature and extent of the post medieval pottery industry be determined?
- Do the historic buildings in the zone contain any information about post-medieval and modern changes to land use and agricultural systems?