

Historic Environment Character Zone

WVDE Winterbourne Valley and Downs East

Historic Character

This is a rural zone on the Winterbourne – Pang watershed. It is bisected by the A34 and contains the historic settlements of Beedon, Stanmore, Catmore and Bothampstead. Historically, the zone was covered by a mix of open field, common downland grazing and ancient woodland. The downland and the majority of open field were enclosed into regular and irregularly-shaped fields by the 18th century. These were probably created through a mix of agreement between farmers and piecemeal enclosure. The remaining open field was enclosed into fields by Act of Parliament in the early 19th century. Small areas of irregularly-shaped fields interspersed with woods existed near the edges of the zone and probably represent areas of medieval and later assartment. Most wooded areas were located on or near parish boundaries. The historic settlement pattern was a mix of hamlets and farms. There were only two minor parks in the zone, the adjoining Priorscourt and Bradley Parks. The interplay of fields, woods and roads created a landscape with a very sinuous grain.

There has been major change since the mid-20th century and most historic fields have been altered into holdings better suited to modern agriculture. The construction of the M4 and A34 were significant contributing factors to change, by disrupting and truncating fieldscapes. Areas of gravel extraction were also opened up around the A34/M4 junction to provide material for construction. Most woodland has been altered and several large blocks of ancient woodland have been cleared for agriculture. Ancient woodlands at Beedon and Catmore have been cleared of native tree cover and replanted with other species. These plantations have a totally different tree-cover and lack the biodiversity of ancient woodlands. Clearance is also likely to have damaged or removed historic features such as woodbanks. Several linear plantations have been created around Catmore and run counter to the established grain of the landscape. Much of the formal landscape at Priorscourt and Bradley Parks has been converted into fields and Priorscourt House is now a school. Very little settlement growth has occurred.

Historic Environment

HER records are fairly evenly distributed across the zone and many records were added following the work of the Berkshire Downs Survey and the National Mapping Programme. Most other archaeological work has been in advance of development, particularly ahead of the A34/M4 junction redevelopment, although some antiquarian excavations also took place. At present there is a long running excavation of an Iron Age and Romano-British site near Stanmore Farm being run by a local volunteer group. The round barrow at Barrow Hill near Beedon is the only scheduled monument in the zone.

Evidence of early prehistoric activity is uncommon in the zone and no Palaeolithic material has yet been found. Mesolithic flintwork has been recovered from near Beedon Manor and Oareborough Hill. Early Neolithic to early Bronze Age flintwork has been found near Newbury services, Newbury Showground, Beedon Manor and on the route of the Beedon bypass, but it is unclear what kind of activity these artefact scatters represent. An area of burnt flint and charcoal found during quarrying at Oareborough Hill is the only possible early prehistoric occupation that has been excavated in the zone. More evidence of Bronze Age activity exists, and several definite and probable round barrows exist near the crest of the watershed. These include the scheduled Barrow Hill barrow and an earthwork in Parson's Row that has been tentatively identified as the *Cat Barrow*, a feature known from Anglo-Saxon charters. Evidence of a Bronze Age settlement near Beedon Wood was found by fieldwalking by the Berkshire Downs Survey and later excavated. Later prehistoric evidence is better documented than in adjacent zones

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and Iron Age occupation has been found during excavations at Oareborough Hill, Stanmore and World's End. Cropmarks of field systems of probable later prehistoric/Romano-British date have been mapped at the northern edge of the zone but are less extensive than in the adjacent Upper Pang Valley.

Although Romano-British activity is not widespread across the zone evidence of settlement of this period has been found during excavations at Stanmore, World's End and Oareborough Hill. The Iron Age settlement at Oareborough Hill was re-occupied during the late Roman period and it has been suggested, on the basis of finds and cropmarks, that a villa exists a short distance to the north of this settlement. Evidence of Romano-British buildings was also found during the 19th century at Stanmore Farm and Beedon Brickworks.

Settlements are known to have existed at Beedon and Catmore by the mid-10th century, and were mentioned in Anglo-Saxon documents and also recorded in Domesday. Nothing is known of the nature or extent of each settlement during the early medieval period as no deposits of this period have yet been found. Evidence of other activity of this period is scarce and confined to finds of early medieval pottery and a quernstone from possibly contemporary pits excavated prior to work on the A34 and M4 junction redevelopment near Newbury Services.

Catmore grew into a village in the late medieval period and was granted a weekly market and a yearly fair in 1306. It had contracted to a single farm and a church by the 18th century, and it is likely that buried remains of the medieval village survive around the present buildings. Catmore church is largely 12th century, but was heavily Victorianised. The church at Beedon has a mix of 13th and 14th century elements, and contains early 17th century wall paintings. Beedon Manor Farm is a 16th century timber-framed building. A deer park, established in the 14th century, existed immediately southwest of Beedon and elements of the park, such as at Park Copse, are still visible in the landscape. It is unclear when the other historic settlements in Beedon Parish, Stanmore, Beedon Hill and World's End developed, but they may be of medieval origin. There is some evidence for a village having existed at Langley and it is possible that buried remains of the settlement exist. It has been suggested that Priors Court was a manor but no medieval features have yet been found at the site.

Post-medieval records are mainly of buildings. The only non-building records for the zone consist of the Newbury to Abingdon toll-road and some of its milestones. There are 37 listed buildings in the zone and almost half are 16th to 18th century farm buildings. A significant number of 19th century farm out-buildings and 16th-18th century domestic buildings, and the churches at Beedon and Catmore are also listed. In addition two milestones are listed. An unlisted Methodist chapel at Beedon is recorded but was demolished in the 20th century.

The only 20th century record in this zone is that of a bombing decoy at Beedon.

Historic Environment Potential

The archaeological potential of the zone is varied and deposits of Bronze Age to Romano-British date are likely to exist across much of the zone. The preservation of deposits may be varied as ploughing since the medieval period has possibly truncated the archaeological layers. Deposits relating to early occupation may 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.
- Large quantity of archaeological material from a broad date range indicates a high potential for future discoveries.
- Settlements are traditionally small and scattered. Development pressure may lead to settlement expansion that erodes this character.
- 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.
- 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?
- What is the nature of the Iron Age occupation at Oareborough Hill? Does a Roman Villa exist at this location?
- Can the broad date range of archaeological material present be used to create detailed picture of land-use and settlement continuity?
- Where were the early medieval (Saxon) settlements? What were their origins and how do they relate to the later medieval settlement pattern?
- What were the origins of the Deer Park at Beedon?
- Does the surviving settlement pattern represent significant medieval shrinkage or desertion? What information do these shrunken/deserted settlements contain for understanding how medieval population utilised the landscape?
- What is the nature of the medieval activity at Langley?
- Do the surviving settlements represent surviving medieval foci?
- What level of medieval fabric survives in the churches at Catmore and Beedon?
- Do the historic buildings in the zone contain any information about post-medieval and modern changes to land use and agricultural systems?