

# National Character Area 69 **Trent Valley Washlands**

## **Summary**

The Trent Valley Washlands comprise the linear, river floodplain corridor of the River Trent, as it passes through its middle reaches between Barton under Needwood and Nottingham. The character area also includes the river floodplains of two of the principal tributaries to the Trent, the Tame and the Soar, which drain in from the south. The area is classified as 23% 'urban' and urban development is prominent in many parts of the open floodplain.

### **Landscape and Settlement**

- Strong pattern of nucleated settlement, with 21.4% of farmsteads in villages and 5.7% in hamlets. Urban development has subsumed many small settlements.
- Low density of farmsteads in the landscape.
- Large to very large-scale farmsteads predominant (34 and 29.6%), with smaller-scale farmsteads concentrated in settlements.

### **Farmstead and Building Types**

- Three-storey and 2-storey and attic farmhouses forming part of a wider distribution of this house form across the northern part of the Midland Plain.
- Brick-built regular courtyard plan farmsteads, particularly U-plan and regular multi-yard plans.
- Limited survival of timber-framed farm buildings, in some cases framing including crucks, can be found with later re-modelling.
- Some loose courtyard plan farmsteads and a small number of small linear farmsteads.

### **Rarity and Significance**

- Low rates of survival of traditional farmsteads – 18% loss, 7% have lost all their working buildings. 57% recorded from late 19th century maps (in Staffordshire and Warwickshire) retaining more than half of their historic footprint.
- Recorded pre-1800 farmstead buildings comprise 17% of those recorded from late 19th century maps, pre-1600 buildings being exceptionally rare. There is a low survival of pre-1750 farmstead buildings by national standards, early buildings are mainly threshing barns and some timber framing, clustered in settlements.
- There is a greater mix of farmstead types and scales in this area than in neighbouring other village-based farmlands.

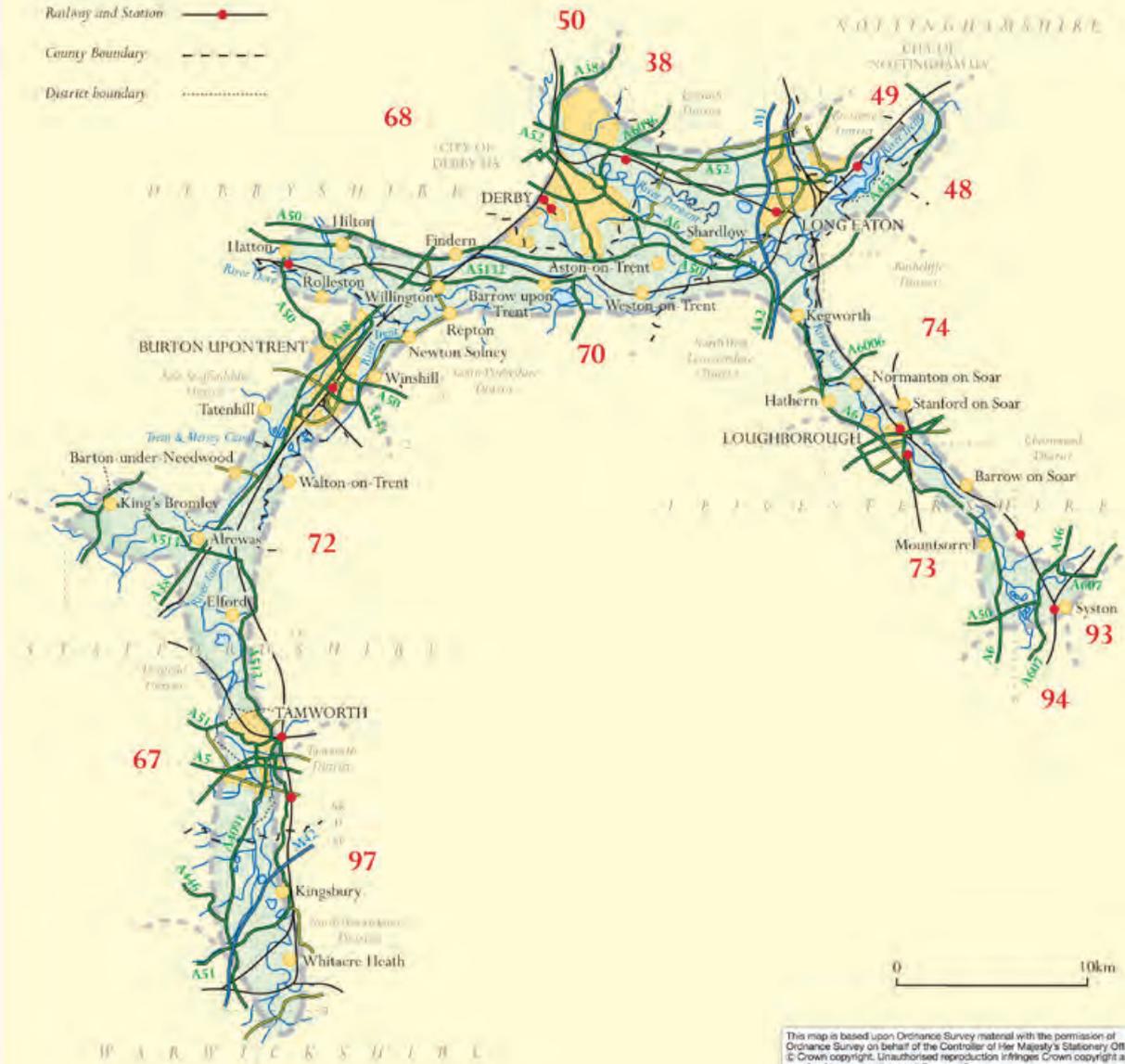
### **Drivers for Change**

- A low proportion of farmsteads (in Staffordshire and Warwickshire) remain in agricultural use (24%) but with high levels of farm diversification (with creation of office and retail facilities exceeding expectations). More than 70% of farmsteads are residential use, residents having high participation in small business (11% of farmsteads are company registered offices) but low participation in substantial firms at director level.

## Character Area 69 Trent Valley Washlands

- Area 69 boundary
- Adjacent Area **70**
- Motorway
- A Road
- B Road
- Railway and Station
- County Boundary
- District boundary

200-400'  
0-200'  
height above sea-level in feet



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## I HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

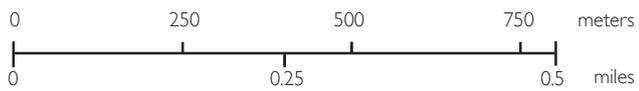
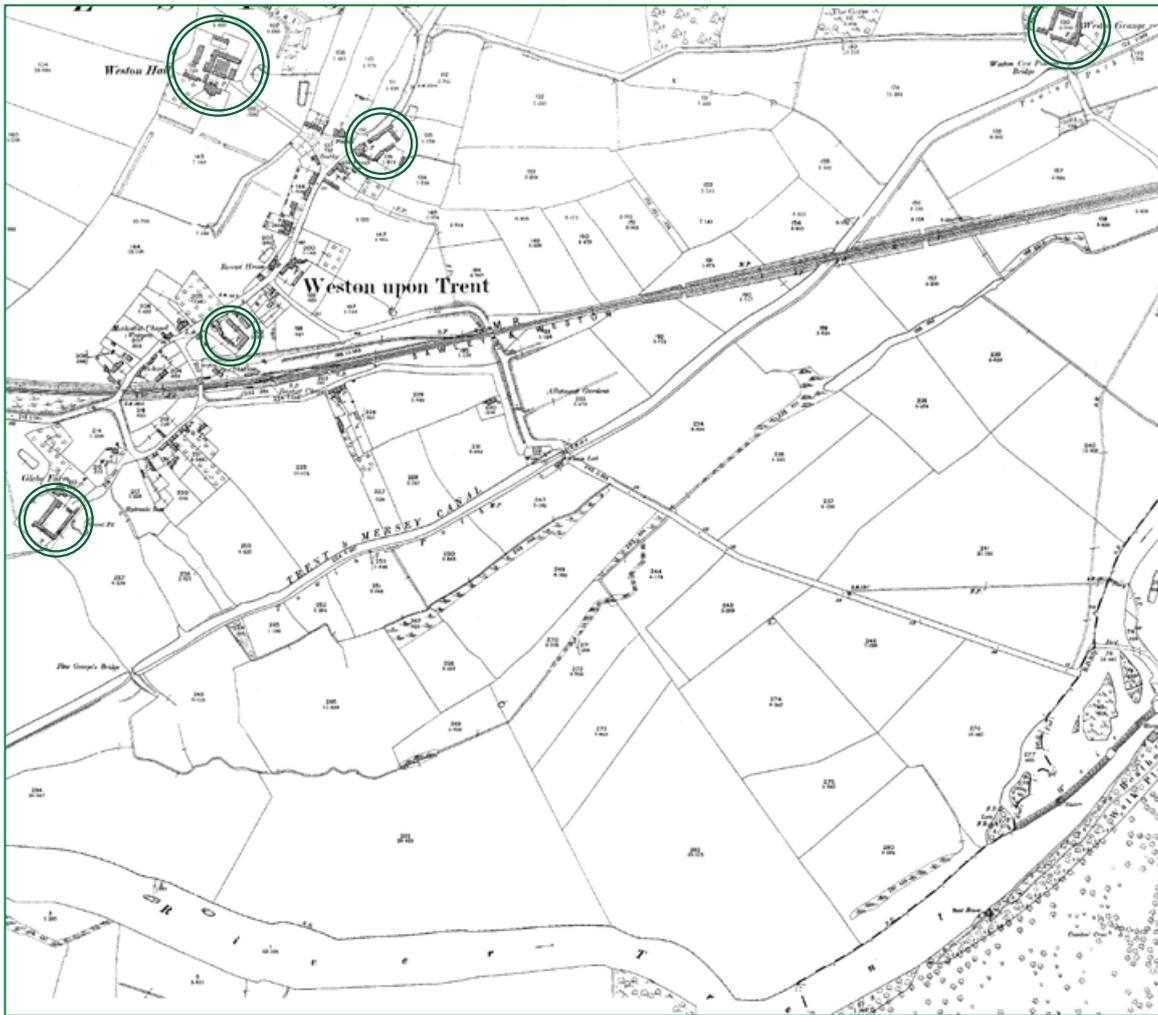
- Stock fattening and dairying (especially cheese) formed a significant part of farming income.
- The late 18th and 19th centuries was marked by a dramatic levels of farm amalgamation and enlargement, in part prompted by the area's favourable transport links and ability to serve developing urban centres –especially Derby, Nottingham, Burton on Trent and Tamworth.
- Extractive industries (sand, gravel and rock) developed in this area in the 20th century.

## 2 LANDSCAPE AND SETTLEMENT

- Settlement predominantly consists of nucleated villages, typically with linear plan forms, where some historic farmsteads remain. These had developed by the 11th century on both the drier river terraces and adjacent areas of the heavier clay lands. The isolated farmsteads, set within generally large-scale fields, generally developed from the 17th century in association with piecemeal and regular enclosure of the open fields which extended across most of the landscape in the medieval period.
- Very low levels of dispersed settlement, mostly farmsteads resulting from 18th and early 19th century enclosure.
- Predominant pattern of large-scale regular and semi-regular enclosure, much completed in 17th-18th centuries but enlarged and altered since. There are pockets of regular enclosure resulting mostly from the later 18th/19th century enclosure of remaining open fields. In some instances, especially to the north along the Derwent Valley, these enclosures retain the outline of the curved strip fields from the open fields which covered large parts of this area in the medieval period and in parts as late as the 19th century. There are fragmentary patterns of ridge and furrow earthworks.
- The largest-scale fields developed in the 19th-20th centuries along the valley-bottoms (where meadows were drained and enclosed in the 19th century) and along the better-drained terraces.
- Shelter belts to many of the isolated farmsteads.
- Some areas of common-edge settlement, for example, south of Tamworth, but cottages mostly sited along the roads.



Large-scale regular courtyard plan farmsteads developed as a characteristic feature of this area, in tandem with industrialisation and the enlargement of farms and fields.



-  Farmstead
-  Outfarm

There is a relatively low density of settlement between the major towns along the Trent valley although some villages containing farmsteads and isolated farmsteads lie on the gravel terrace over-looking the flood plain of the river fall into the area. Farmsteads within this area are generally medium to large in scale, the majority having regular courtyard plans. The flood plain provided rich pasture land and the valley was a major transport corridor with the canal and, later, the railway giving farms along the valley the benefit of easy access to the growing markets of Birmingham and the Black Country in the 18th and 19th centuries. Map based on OS 2nd Edition 25" map © and database right Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Ltd (All rights reserved 2005) Licence numbers 000394 and TP0024

### 3 FARMSTEAD AND BUILDING TYPES

This area has, by national standards, a low density of pre-1750 farm buildings.

#### Farmstead Types

- Regular courtyard plans are predominant with a cluster of U-plans in the Alrewas area and L-plans and regular multi-yards along the valley sides.
- Loose courtyard plans are mostly small-medium in scale and with working buildings to one to three sides of the yard. These are concentrated in village-edge locations where larger village-based farmsteads developed in piecemeal fashion.
- Linear plans are rare in the area and are concentrated in the villages (eg Ingleby) where houses were most commonly joined to one range of working buildings.

#### Building Types

- There are a few examples of 17th century or earlier farmhouses but most farmhouses date from the 18th or 19th century, often of 3-storeys or 2-storeys and attic.



A four-square symmetrical early 19th century house, typical of the large farmsteads that had developed in the Trent Valley by this period.

- Small number of 3-5 bay timber-framed threshing barns dating from the 17th century, some retaining evidence of earlier buildings including cruck-frames. Most barns are of brick and date from the late 18th and early 19th century, and include multi-functional combination barns.
- Cattle housing predominantly of 19th century with occasional survival of earlier fabric.
- Stables typically of brick and 18th and 19th century date but some incorporate earlier timber-framed buildings.
- Granaries are typically incorporated into other buildings; above stables or cartsheds or form part of planned ranges.

### 4 BUILDING MATERIALS

- Predominant traditional building materials mostly dating from the late 18th-19th centuries are red brick, plain clay tile (including Staffordshire blues) and some pantile to the eastern part of the character area.
- Timber-framed buildings of 17th century or earlier date are found in parts of the inner Trent valley and in urban areas with occasional survival of cruck-framing.



Surviving timber frame is now very rare, and confined to the largest-scale buildings (houses and barns) which had the capacity to serve farmsteads as they expanded in size. This is a 17th century threshing barn, its square panelling being typical of the western English carpentry tradition.

Steps to a first-floor granary (right) and a cartshed (below). The large-scale arable-based farms of this area demanded substantial room for granaries and carts.



This is one of the **Farmsteads Character Statements** for the National Character Areas. Further illustrated guidance on historic character and significance, under the same headings, is provided in the **West Midlands Farmsteads Character Statement**. They result from *The West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project*, which has mapped the historic character and use of farmsteads across the region, and developed planning tools to inform future change. A *Summary Report* summarises the results of the whole project for the whole region and sets out policy and land use implications, and recommendations and next steps for further work.

The *Rarity and Significance* and *Drivers for Change* headings, and other elements of the main text, are based upon the mapping and interpretation of historic character. These records are stored in the relevant local authority *Historic Environment Record* and there is a *Historic Farmstead Characterisation Report* for each county and the Central Conurbation. These have been used as a baseline to determine the patterns of current use, as summarised for each area in the *Drivers for Change* section. There is a *Farmstead Use Report* for the region.

Also under the *Drivers for Change* heading are percentages of listed working farm buildings with visible structural failure and evidence of adaptive reuse. These are based on comparison of 1980s with 1999-2006 photographs, from the *Photo Image Survey* (University of Gloucestershire for English Heritage, 2009). In the West Midlands 27% of listed working farm buildings have evidence for residential reuse (national level 30%), 3% other (national 4%) and 70% (national 66%) have no other evidence for other use. 18.9% have evidence for structural failure (national 8.9%).

**The West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project** is a collaborative project led by English Heritage with the county and metropolitan authorities. This document has been written by Jeremy Lake of English Heritage's Characterisation Team with assistance from Bob Edwards of Forum Heritage Services. All photographs are by English Heritage and Forum Heritage Services unless otherwise acknowledged.



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