

# National Character Area 95 **Northamptonshire Uplands**

## Summary

This area consists of a long range of low clay hills, which extends from the Cotswolds and the Cherwell valley in the south west to the lowlands of the Leicestershire Vales around Market Harborough. It is a relatively open, rural landscape which is 2% woodland and 4% 'urban'. A tiny fraction of the area (1%) falls within the Cotswolds AONB.

### Landscape and Settlement

- Strong pattern of nucleated settlement, with (in Warwickshire) 34.8% of farmsteads in villages and 2.2% in hamlets.
- Low density of farmsteads in the landscape.
- Predominant pattern of large (44.4%) to very large-scale (33.3%) farmsteads, with smaller-scale farmsteads concentrated in and around the villages.

### Farmstead and Building Types

- Medium to large scale regular and loose courtyard farmsteads developed on the edge of villages and within fields of piecemeal and regular enclosure with little woodland.
- Loose courtyard plans most commonly developed with working buildings to two or three sides of the yard.
- Regular courtyard plans most commonly incorporate L-shaped ranges with additional buildings to the third side of the yard, and comprise multi-yard plans, full courtyards and U-plans.

### Rarity and Significance

- High rates of survival in Warwickshire, with 66% of farmsteads recorded from late 19th century maps retaining more than half of their historic footprint.
- The area has a low level of survival of 18th century and earlier farm buildings, principally barns, although there are many fine stone-built former farmhouses of late 16th to early 18th century date.
- Isolated farmsteads with early buildings relate to clear field evidence for shrunken and abandoned settlement.
- Farm buildings built of cob and thatched agricultural buildings are significant survivals.
- Coherent historic farmstead groups within or on the edge of villages.

### Drivers for Change

- 0.5-5% of listed working buildings have obvious signs of structural disrepair; and 30-40% with visible adaptive reuse.
- Within Warwickshire, a relatively high proportion of farmsteads in this area remain in agricultural use (37%), and farmstead diversification has occurred to a higher degree than is typical (particularly retail and workshop facilities) and with higher proportions of residents participating in business either farmstead-based or as directors of substantial companies (42 directorships per hundred farmsteads).



## I HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

- Much of the area, particularly the clay plateau to the north-east and the lias uplands of the south-east, was cleared for grazing in the later prehistoric and Roman period and there is scattered evidence for settlement of this period.
- Woodland, either residual or re-established, was mostly cleared by the 11th century.
- As in the Cotswolds plateau to the south, arable farming was gradually yet widely replaced by sheep farming for wool production from the 15th century, accompanied by the abandonment and shrinkage of villages.
- The consolidation of land into the hands of estates is reflected in the elaboration of major country houses, which are a particularly notable feature of the undulating hills and valleys of the southern edge, and 19th century estate architecture. Smaller estates reflected in fine manor houses and gentry houses, some of medieval date, are another distinctive feature.
- Village enlargement in the 20th century is largely confined to the areas surrounding the larger urban centres - Banbury, Rugby, Daventry - which provide either direct employment, or commuting links to London or the West Midlands.

## 2 LANDSCAPE AND SETTLEMENT

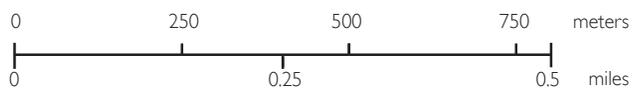
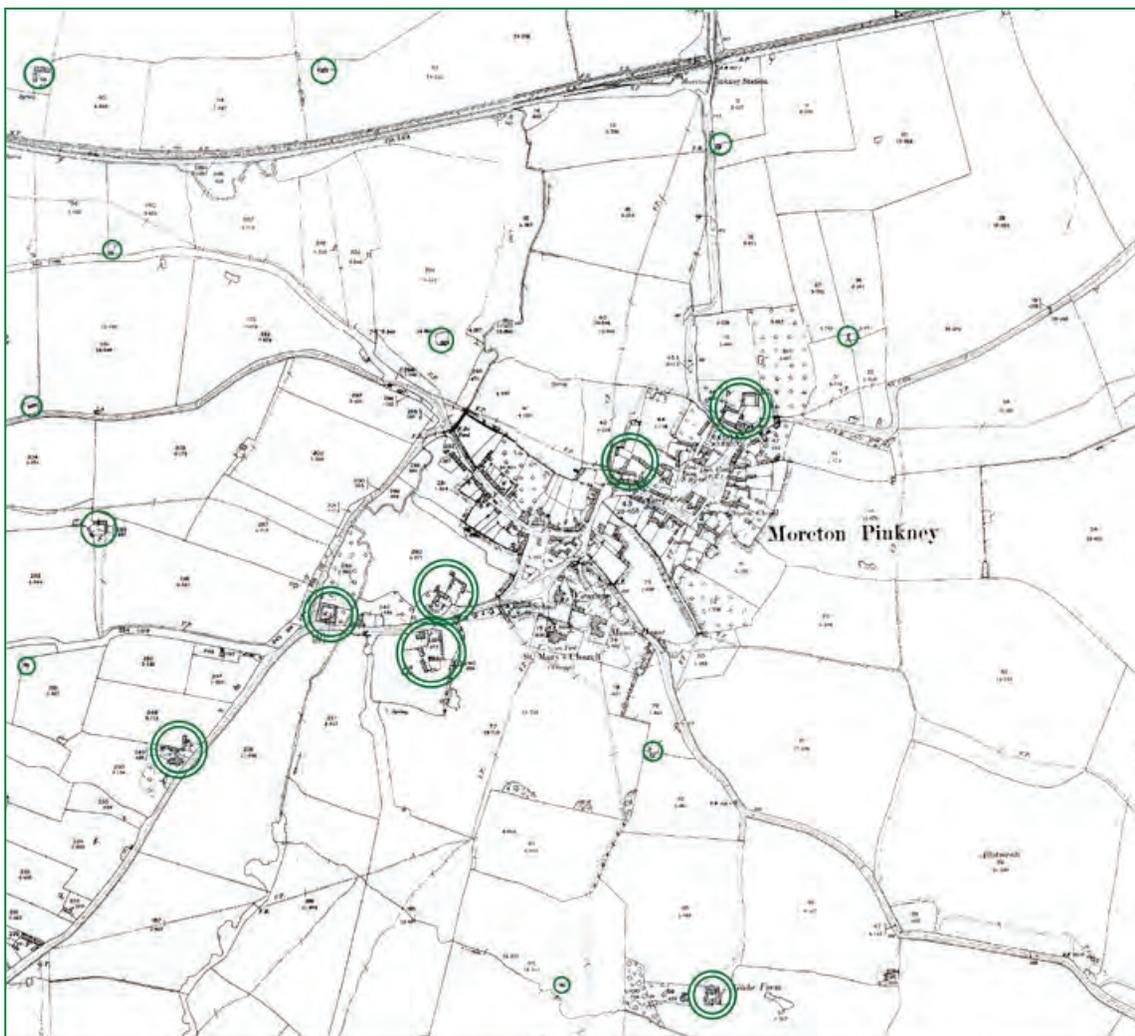
- The predominant pattern of nucleated settlement had developed by the 11th century. Open fields extended over most of the farmland in the medieval period. The area had been substantially cleared of woodland by

this period, and remains largely unwooded except to the south.

- Tenant and freehold graziers tended to maintain or improve village-based farmsteads. Many historic houses within the villages originated as farmhouses, changing their function as new steadings were built in the newly-enclosed fields.
- Earthworks from former medieval villages and shrunken ends of settlements are a common characteristic of the area, together with nationally important survival of ridge and furrow reflecting the former extent of open field arable.
- Isolated farmsteads can relate to:
  - shrunken medieval settlements.
  - post-medieval piecemeal enclosure generally defined by thick, mature and woody hedgerows (e.g. around the Charwelton Hills, to the east of Banbury and in the Ironstone Hills to either side of the A14, around Cold Ashby to the east and Holdenby to the south).
  - areas of large-scale regular enclosure of the 18th and 19th centuries, concentrated east of the River Chelmer; within the centre of the Ironstone Hills (either side of the A428) and across the northern part of the clay plateau.
  - Post-1950 boundary loss concentrated across the undulating hills south of Daventry, and combined with holding reorganised around new roads across the Brampton Ironstone Hills, to the north of Northampton, and along the M40 corridor south of Banbury.



Large farmsteads, served by isolated field barns and outfarms, are a distinctive feature of the open arable farming landscapes of this area.



-  Farmstead
-  Outfarm

#### Moreton Pinkney

Nucleated settlement is predominant across this character area. Despite the enclosure of the former open fields that surrounded the village, most of the farmsteads remained within the village. The larger farms, having multi-yard plans, are all found on the edges of the settlement. Smaller farms, most likely to have been long detached from agriculture, survived within the village at the end of the 19th century but are difficult to identify. The fields around the village are generally of medium scale and are irregular in shape indicative of piecemeal enclosure. The shape and boundaries of some fields to the north west retain the outlines of medieval cultivation strips: these fields contain numerous field barns. In contrast the fields to the south have been reorganised and enlarged over time. 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



Buildings of smaller-scale farmsteads rarely survive in this area. This late 17th or early 18th century house is attached to a small thatched threshing barn in the centre of the village.

### 3 FARMSTEAD AND BUILDING TYPES

#### Farmstead types

- Dominant pattern of medium-large scale loose and regular courtyard plans, the latter mostly comprising full courtyard, multi-yard and U-plan steadings. There are also significant numbers incorporating L-plan ranges with additional buildings to the third or (more rarely) fourth sides of the yard.
- Loose courtyards mostly comprise steadings with working buildings to 2 or 3 sides of the yard.

#### Building types

- Threshing barns, often attached to the farmhouse. Some barns incorporate animal housing at one end.
- Small barns (3-4 bays) often survive in villages.
- Granaries above cartsheds, stables or cow houses.

- Shelter sheds to cattle yards.
- Field barns and outfarms were a common feature, but are now increasingly rare.

### 4 BUILDING MATERIALS

- Main constructional materials as used from the 16th century are ironstone, limestone in the north.
- Some farm buildings and houses built of cob.
- Much 19th century brick intermixed with limestone, especially north of river Nene and Daventry.
- Pantile and plain clay tile roofs.
- Some survival of thatch on farm buildings.



Many village-based farmsteads, now mostly in residential use, make a positive contribution to the character of settlements in this area. The buildings are predominantly 19th century, with some earlier barns, whilst the character of many of the houses dates from rebuilding in the late 16th and 17th centuries – as in the Cotswolds to the south.



Many substantial farmsteads, successively rebuilt, were sited next the fine late 16th and 17th century houses of the gentry who drove the agricultural development of much of this area. Here are the gate piers to a 17th century house, facing away from the working buildings accessed from the road.



Smaller farmsteads of loose courtyard form developed in areas of medium to small scale piecemeal enclosure close to villages.



Large regular plan farmsteads, some with multiple cattle yards, also continued to be built on the edge of villages into the late 19th century. Brick, as here, was commonly intermixed with stone in the northern part of this area.



A large 17th century threshing barn within a gentry farmstead. It is sited in fields enclosed by this period on the edge of a village in the south of the area.



A 5-bay 18th century threshing barn, typical of this area, within a village.



Ironstone lends a distinctive character to the stone masonry of the Northamptonshire Uplands. The 17th century gentry house to the left is attached to an 18th or 19th century working building constructed of cob. This earth walling tradition is another distinctive characteristic of this area, extending into the East Midlands and into the Feldon area of Warwickshire.



Many farmsteads were built with cattle sheds facing into yards, with wide arched openings as here. These strongly resemble the 'hemmels' seen in those areas of Northumberland where large-scale arable farming also developed.



Outfarms, with threshing barns and walled cattle yards, were built to serve the large farm holdings that developed across this area. Few remain and most are in poor condition, as they are poorly sited for alternative uses.

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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