



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

# The Vale of York

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 28



# Introduction

The Farmstead and Landscape Statements will help you to identify the historic character of traditional farmsteads and their buildings in all parts of England, and how they relate to their surrounding landscapes. They are now available for all of England's National Character Areas (NCAs), and should be read in conjunction with the NCA profiles which have been produced by Natural England using a wide range of environmental information (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-character-area-profiles-data-for-local-decision-making/national-character-area-profiles>). Each Farmstead and Landscape Statement is supported by Historic England's advice on farm buildings (<https://historicengland.org.uk/farmbuildings>), which provides links to the *National Farmsteads Character Statement*, national guidance on **Farm Building Types** and a fully-sourced summary in the *Historic Farmsteads: Preliminary Character Statements*. It also forms part of additional research on historic landscapes, including the mapping of farmsteads in some parts of England (see <https://historicengland.org.uk/characterisation>).











This large, mid-19th-century farmstead, with its house facing into its own gardens and a large combination barn along one side of a large cattle yard (with modern sheds), was built within fields already enclosed from one of the medieval open fields to the east of the shrunken medieval settlement of Bossall. The farm worked extensive arable land and meadows along the River Derwent, which probably explains the presence of the large brick-built and open-fronted barns for harvested corn and hay built within the former stack yard. Photo © Historic England

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**Front cover:** The early to mid-19th-century farmstead at East Lilling Grange, with the earthworks of a deserted medieval village within the grassed enclosure to its north-east (top of image, see p 8). Photo © Historic England 28476/013



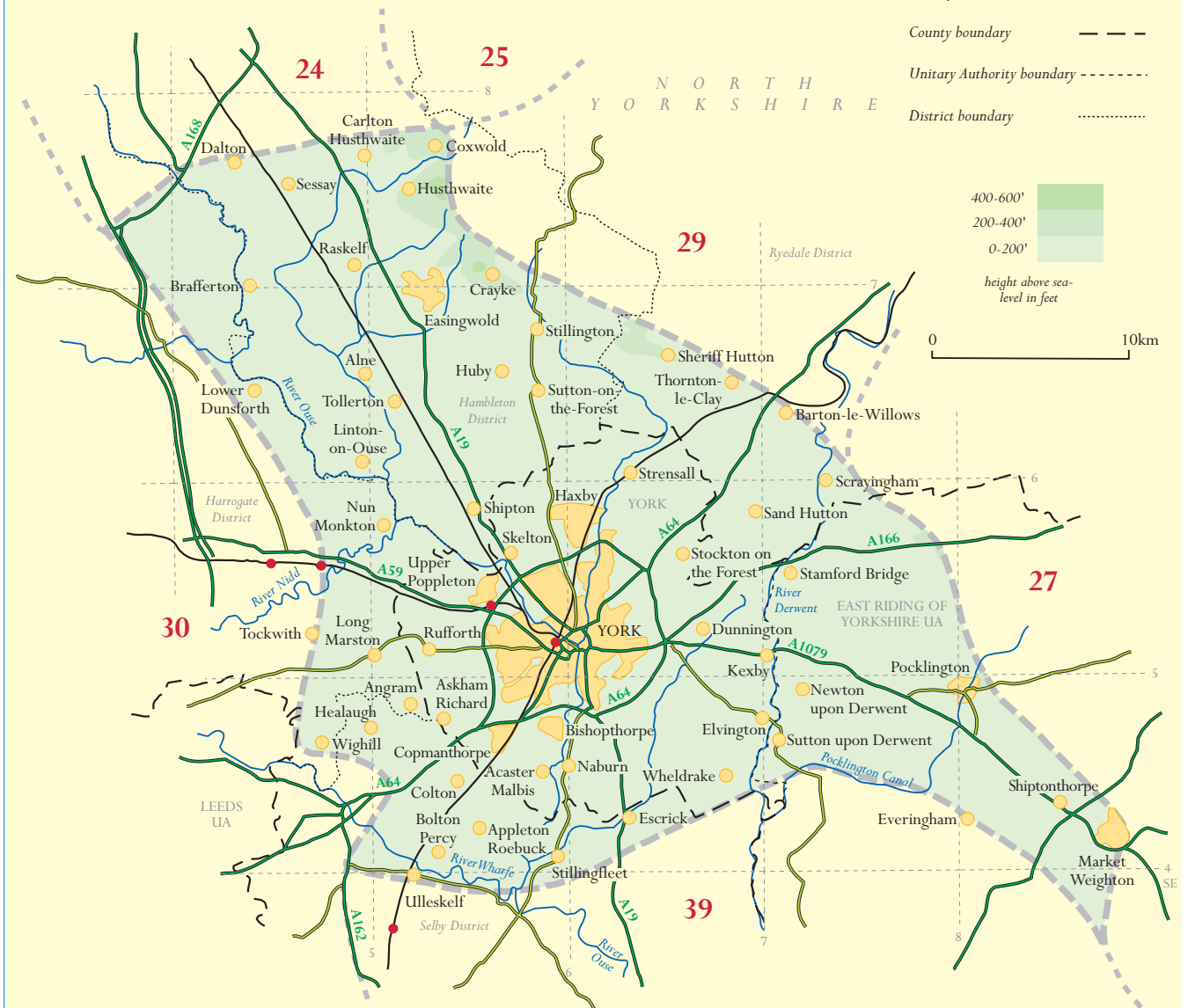
## Character Area 28: Vale of York

- Area 28 boundary 
- Adjacent Area **3** 
- A Road 
- B Road 
- Railway and Station 
- County boundary 
- Unitary Authority boundary 
- District boundary 

400-600'  
200-400'  
0-200'

height above sea-level in feet

0 10km



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This map shows the Yorkshire Wolds, with the numbers of the neighbouring National Character Areas around it.

# Summary

See the National Farmsteads Character Statement for a short introduction to the headings below, including maps and tables.

The Vale of York is a gently undulating area bounded by the ridge of Magnesian Limestone that rises to the west and the Howardian Hills and Yorkshire Wolds to the east. It forms a transition from the more varied topography and mixed farming of the Vale of Mowbray to the north and the open levels of the Humberhead Levels to the south. Major rivers include the Swale and Ure, merging as the Ouse before it flows through York into the Humber. There are also the Derwent, Nidd and Fosse. Of the area, 6% is urban, 3% is woodland and 73% is under cultivation.

## Historic character

- Medieval villages and isolated farms, including grange farms, developed on higher land to exploit the more fertile soils of this area, farming communities also having access to heathland on sandy soils and areas of wet pasture (concentrated in the south of the area) which were mostly drained for improved agriculture in the late 18th and 19th centuries.
- Farmsteads and their landscapes reflect these developments, loose and some linear layouts being found within villages and loose courtyards in landscapes of piecemeal enclosure as mostly completed by the 18th century. Many farmsteads throughout the area were developed as regular courtyards within regular enclosure landscapes from the late 18th century, many of those on the sandy and newly drained soils concentrated in the south of the area. The largest farms had two or more cattle yards (multi-yards) and covered yards as used from the 1850s, which produced large quantities of manure to boost fertility.

## Significance

- Buildings of the 18th century and earlier, including some 16th-century and earlier houses and timber-framed barns, are very rare. They are concentrated in medieval settlement sites and areas, and some farmsteads relate to the earthworks of shrunken medieval settlements.
- Restructuring during the 20th century has swept away many buildings in this area, and complete groups, which demonstrate through their diversity of buildings the farming history of this area are increasingly rare.

## Present and future issues

- In this National Character Area, the Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a medium proportion of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use (35%, the national average being 32%).

## Historic development

- There is extensive (mostly cropmark) evidence for Romano-British and earlier settlement, especially to the western fringe and on the well-drained and sandy soils of the area. The south of the area extending to the Humberhead Levels was affected by the spread of lowland wetlands over the Bronze Age, as the climate cooled and rainfall increased.
- Roads radiate from the Roman fortress of York (Eboracum), which developed as a trading settlement from the Anglo-Scandinavian period, a centre of the medieval wool industry, as a county town and a rail hub from the 1830s.
- Arable cultivation intermixed with livestock grazed on extensive meadows, pastures and heaths dominated agriculture in the 11th to 14th centuries. Landed estates increasingly absorbed and expanded monastic holdings and grange farms, particularly after the Dissolution of the Monasteries. Mixed farming was intermixed with cattle rearing and dairying to the west and horse breeding to the east. Stud farms around the major cultural and transport centre of York developed in the 18th and 19th centuries, these areas also supplying large quantities of hay.
- The late 18th and 19th centuries witnessed extensive drainage and enclosure of the seasonally wet pastures and enclosure of the heathland. Brick and tile works, gravel pits, marl pits, brick kilns and gravel pits can be seen across the area on 19th-century maps.
- A dual economy (combining farming with linen weaving in northern part of Vale) enabled smaller farms to survive into the 20th century.

## Landscape and settlement

- A defining characteristic of this landscape, of importance to the development of its agriculture and communities, is that it is crossed by rivers flowing from the surrounding uplands which flow southwards towards the Humber basin.
- The present strong pattern of nucleated settlement, with many villages being sited on higher land, developed between the 9th (usually the late 11th) and 13th centuries. Open fields surrounded villages, and the most intensively used areas were those with loamy soils; clay soils are concentrated to the far east and to the north and north-west of York and lighter, sandy soils to the south and south-west of York. Formerly extensive water meadows, valley mires, marshes and swampy woodland have given their name to Old Norse 'ing' and 'carr' place names; heathland developed on areas of sandy soil.
- There is also a high concentration of deserted and shrunken medieval settlement, marking the contraction from the peak of medieval settlement and arable cultivation in the early 14th century.
- Isolated farmsteads relate to shrunken settlements (including the moated sites which are most densely concentrated in the south of the area and extend into the Humberhead Levels), former medieval grange farms of monastic foundations and post-medieval enclosure landscapes. The establishment of country houses with their parkland and shooting estates from the 16th century (for example Bilton Hall, Rufforth Hall, Beningbrough Hall) is a strong feature of this area, despite significant losses in the 20th century.
- The Vale of York is dominated by patterns of medium to large-scale piecemeal enclosure with hedges and also ditches to floodplain areas, sometimes – particularly around villages – retaining the profiles of medieval strips. Most of the area's open fields had been enclosed by the late 18th century, although remaining farmsteads either developed within

villages or were not often sited amongst their own fields until the decades around 1800.

- The area is characterised by a high proportion of enclosure by parliamentary act between the mid-18th century and 1815. These areas are concentrated in the south of the area and characterised by low hedgerows with sparse trees, with ditches where the land has been drained. They are also found in areas enclosed from common land on sandy soil, to the east of the vale and along the Derwent. Ancient woodland is mixed with estate-style plantations of the 19th century in these areas.
- Substantial areas of woodland extended across the area in the medieval period, subject to enclosure under license (assarting) in the 12th and 13th centuries. Much was cleared in the 17th to 19th centuries, leaving scattered woodland including remnants of the historic Galtres Forest north of York. Extensive conifer plantations date from the late 19th century and are sited to the north, east and south of York. Shelter belts and game coverts were also linked to the growth of field sports across the area.

## Farmstead and building types

- There are a small number of medieval to early 18th-century timber-framed barns. The earliest buildings on farmsteads are typically the farmhouses, which are concentrated within villages. From the 17th century, houses were increasingly built in brick, with services built to the rear of symmetrical front ranges. The overwhelming majority of houses on isolated farmsteads date from the late 18th century, and farm buildings from the 19th century.

### Farmstead types

- There are some linear farmsteads with houses and working buildings built in-line, which are concentrated within villages; there is documentary evidence for 16th-century longhouses where humans and cattle shared the same entrance.
- Courtyard plans are dominant. Loose courtyard plans with detached buildings, often of different dates, around one or more sides of a yard, are concentrated within villages where they developed in parallel to the decline of other farms. Regular courtyards with inter-linked buildings are the most common farmstead type in this area. The largest typically are built around E-shaped plans with south-facing yards and have multi-yard plans with cattle yards that may have been added on a piecemeal basis as they developed in the 19th century. Covered yards, which

developed from the 1850s to shelter fatstock and conserve the nutrients from their manure, are a highly-distinctive farmstead type in the Vale of York; they appear to be concentrated on estate farmland on recently enclosed heathland soils, which would have required substantial manuring.

### Building types

Building types display the evidence for the scale of arable farming and cattle management in this area:

- There are some pre-1840 threshing barns with wide doorways to threshing bays, which if timber-framed may contain evidence for a local tradition of aisled construction which extends into the Southern Magnesian Limestone (NCA 30) and around Halifax.
- Combination barns from the 19th-century are found with threshing barns (often with small doors to the threshing bay) above, to the centre or to one side of stables, cart shed(s) or (less frequently) cattle housing, with first-floor granaries
- Wheel houses, locally termed horse gins, which had been used in mines for centuries, were adapted from the late 18th century to provide rotary power for powering threshing



and also fodder-processing machines within barns.

- Some steam-engine houses are found associated with the largest-scale regular courtyard plan farmsteads.
- The scale of individual farms and of arable-based farming is reflected in the provision of granaries (frequently built as an upper storey over a cart shed or animal housing), cart sheds, implement sheds and stables.
- The most common buildings for cattle are outshots added to barns, loose boxes for fatstock, shelter sheds and cow houses for dairy cattle.
- Pigsties, often marked by yards with feeding troughs, are usually placed close to the house.



The earliest courtyard farms tended to develop in close association with high-status sites, as here, next to the 17th-century Osgoodby Hall. The group includes an unusually early (c 1700) example of a granary over a cart shed. Photo © Historic England 28530/0a39



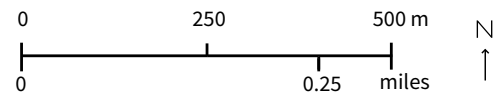
A combined barn and flanking cattle housing, recorded as late 18th-century, on a farmstead in a bend of the River Derwent to the south of Howsham. The internal arrangement, with arcades separating the barn from the cattle stalls, is similar to buildings built around the edge of the Norfolk Broads in the same period. Photo © Historic England 28476/054



Maps are based on 2nd edition 25" Ordnance Survey maps, which show farmsteads after the last major phase in the building of traditional farmsteads in England.  
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Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.



### East Lilling, north of Flaxton

The early to mid-19th-century farmstead at East Lilling Grange, sited at the end of its own driveway and set within fields reorganized in the same period with the earthworks of a deserted medieval village to its north-east.





A late 18th-century courtyard farmstead, set at the centre of its own newly enclosed fields to the west of Yafforth, with a wheel house (to power threshing machinery) attached to a combination barn, cow houses, stables and first-floor granary. Photo © Historic England 28524/055



Isolated steadings frequently relate to 18th- and 19th-century planned enclosure, sometimes by parliamentary act. Brick-built farmsteads of the 19th century, set in a courtyard arrangement with a mix of modern and traditional buildings and shelter provided by deciduous trees, are a characteristic feature of this fertile, rolling, open countryside. Hedgerow trees and low quickthorn hedgerows form part of the setting in these areas. Photo © Jen Deadman



The former estate village of Nun Monkton sits at the confluence of the rivers Ouse and Nidd, eight miles north-west of York. Here, former farmsteads and cottages, 17th- and 18th-century in origin and backed by medieval tofts, are sited around a pond and associated common land – a designed layout peculiar to the north and west of the area. The common, still grazed by cattle, is one of the last working greens in Yorkshire. To the left are former steadings fronting the pond and village green, the loose yard arrangement of farm buildings to the rear being a plan form common to the Vale of York. To the right is a late 18th-century farmstead with a catslide roof to the house and a combination barn. Photos © Jen Deadman





There is a strong local tradition of eaves and gable ends being treated with dentilled eaves with tumbled-in brickwork. Photo © Jen Deadman



This early 19th-century village farmstead forms a more tightly knit courtyard arrangement with a stables and first-floor granary attached to the farmhouse (its display front facing the green) and a large combination barn to rear. Photo © Jen Deadman



Large and high-status farms, often termed Manor or Home Farm, have often developed since the medieval period on the edge of villages; many were rebuilt and extended for improved agriculture from the late 18th century. Home Farm at Myton on Swale, an estate village rebuilt in the mid-19th century, comprises a series of huge covered yards flanked by a long range of open-fronted cart sheds (bottom left). It is fronted by a manager's house, workers housing and offices (bottom right). To the rear (above) is a boiler house with a chimney designed to power a stationary engine which in turn powered the turnip cutters, feed mills and threshing machines. Parts of a narrow-gauge railway connected to York survive. Photos © Jen Deadman





In the south-west of the area, magnesium limestone becomes increasingly evident as an early building material. Many structures rebuilt or altered in brick have a limestone core. This combination barn is of several phases with limestone blocks forming the earliest phase. The front elevation is loosely coursed, the side is of random rubble, and much of the brickwork dates from the mid-18th century or even earlier. Photo © Jen Deadman



Combination barns are frequently the dominant agricultural building of the farm, accommodating a variety of functions. The mid-19th-century barn to the top left provided for full-height crop storage to the left of the threshing floor and a lofted cow house to the right; it is adjoined by a two-bay cart shed with a granary over accessed by external steps. To the bottom left, in the south-east of the area, is this barn with a threshing floor and flanking storage bays (marked by the ventilation slits) and to one end a granary (with two ventilated windows) sited over stables. The barn range on this very large c 1870 farmstead on the Melbourne estate south of York includes a six-bay cart shed and first-floor granary. Photos © Jen Deadman





Cart sheds with first-floor granaries are a distinctive building type, and illustrate the importance of arable-based husbandry in the agricultural improvement of this area. Photo © Jen Deadman



On larger farms, cattle sheds frequently flank covered yards. Here, two lofted cattle sheds flank a central yard with large entry to take a loaded hay wagon. Covered yards were built from the 1850s to shelter cattle and conserve their manure, these types of farmsteads being strongly associated with areas enclosed from heathland where the nutrients from manure were critical to maintaining fertility. Photo © Jen Deadman

On a more modest scale is this smaller, partially open-sided covered yard forming part of a courtyard arrangement. Photo © Jen Deadman



Outfarms make an equally notable contribution to the landscape. They provided housing for cattle away from the main farm complex. Here, the outfarm comprises two modestly sized ranges with a cattle yard (later covered over) between. There is also accommodation for hay storage and a cart shed. Field barns are rare. Photo © Jen Deadman

## Materials and detail

- The woodland of the Vale of York supplied timber for a rich tradition of timber frame – including aisled houses and barns – in the medieval period, this being the material commonly used for the construction of farm buildings until the 18th century. Brick was increasingly used from the 17th century, and in combination with the use of pantiles for roofing was the standard material used for the construction of farm buildings from the late 18th century. Magnesian limestone becomes increasingly evident as an early building material in the south-east of the area and many structures rebuilt or altered in brick have a limestone core.



# Historic England

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Jeremy Lake with Jen Deadman.

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