



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

Humberhead Levels

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 39



Introduction

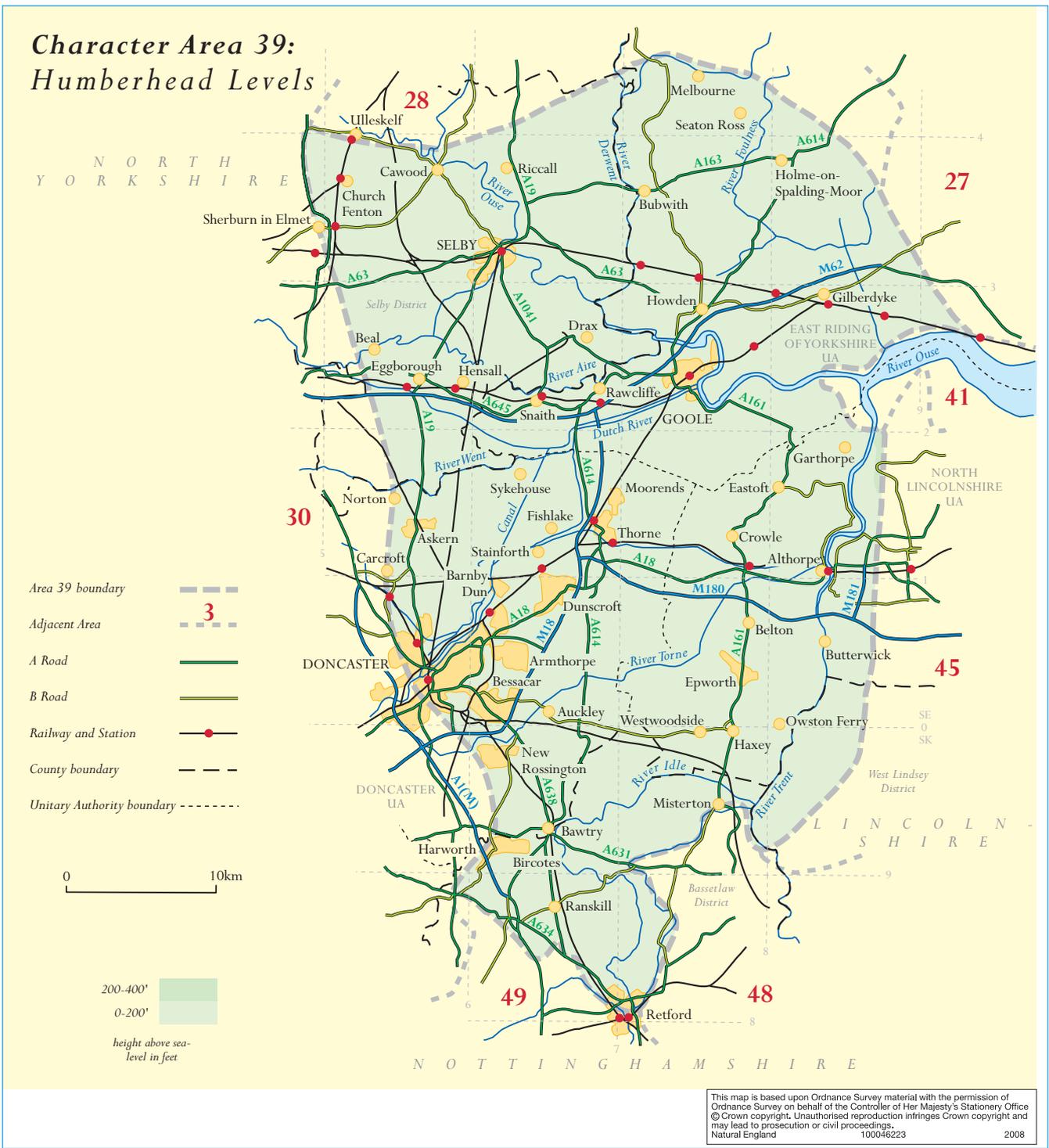
The Farmstead and Landscape Statements will help you to identify the historic character of traditional farmsteads and their buildings in all parts of England, and how they relate to their surrounding landscapes. They are now available for all of England's National Character Areas (NCAs), and should be 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>).



A regular courtyard farmstead, with its early 19th-century house detached from it, in a contemporary enclosure period landscape of dykes and ditches Photo © Jen Deadman

Front cover: View of Adlingfleet, its houses and farm buildings rebuilt from the mid-18th century, looking north to Ousefleet. Photo © Historic England 28479/006

Character Area 39: Humberhead Levels



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This map shows the Humberhead Levels, 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 Humberhead Levels is a low-lying agricultural landscape including the floodplains of a number of rivers which drain into the Humber Estuary. Isolated pockets of high ground exist throughout the Character Area on outcroppings of bedrock or gravel terraces. The land is intensively farmed and is characterised by large, open, rectilinear fields usually divided by ditches rather than hedgerows. There is a mix of built-up areas, industrial land and dereliction, and farmed open country. Approximately 7% is classed as urban, 78% is agricultural and 4% is woodland.

Historic character

- The landscape is predominantly arable, with large open fields resulting from 17th-century wetland reclamation.
- There is a strong contrast between regular planned fieldscapes on floodplains – where most farmsteads are of late 18th- and 19th-century date – and ancient irregular enclosure on higher ground where medieval nucleated settlements are concentrated.
- Regular courtyard farmsteads are widespread in reclaimed and planned former wetlands.
- There is a regionally high concentration of small-scale loose courtyard and dispersed plan farmsteads with 18th-century and earlier buildings on higher ground around villages and in the vicinity of early enclosure of common land.
- Most 19th-century farm buildings are brick and pantile, supplied by the local brick and tile works on the southern bank of the River Humber and on the Isle of Axholme.

Significance

- The mapping of farmsteads in Lincolnshire has shown that the area has, in a national context, a below-average survival of traditional farmsteads dating from around 1900 – 44% have more than 50% of their historic form surviving (42.85% in Greater Lincolnshire) and 23% (28% in Greater Lincolnshire) retaining some, but less than 50%, of their historic form. Of these, 4.5% are associated with a listed building – either a farmhouse or, in rare cases, a listed working building. These are predominantly of 18th-century origin, any earlier examples being very rare.
- Isolated planned farmsteads of regular courtyard plan with large barns and rare horse engine houses sit within their contemporary 19th-century fieldscapes, combining to form a landscape character that illustrates 19th-century approaches to land reclamation and the planning of farming landscapes of rectilinear, planned fields enclosed by drains that are accompanied by high-banked warping ditches with their working buildings and areas.
- There are some 19th-century isolated farmsteads in the reclaimed land around the Isle of Axholme which may be on the sites of the ‘Adventurers’ Farms’ which were

constructed immediately after drainage and reclamation of land in the 17th century.

- Village farmsteads on the Isle of Axholme are a significant component of the open-field farming system that survives to this day.

Present and future issues

- Historically important open-field farming strips around villages are vulnerable to amalgamation due to change of use, especially for horse-rearing and liveryes.
- The area includes some of the most productive soils in the country, most comprising free-draining sandy, loamy or clay soils.
- There is a marked contrast between large farm holdings (those over 100ha in size comprise 72% of the farmed area) and small farms under 5ha, which have declined considerably in recent years.
- There is a high concentration of moated sites.
- Small farmsteads, usually of loose courtyard form, and smallholdings were a typical feature of this area, and are now very rare.
- This decline has led to a high level of dereliction or conversion of traditional buildings, as well as the construction of new sheds and farm workers' accommodation.
- In this National Character Area, the Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a low proportion of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use (24.4%, the national average being 32%). The project also noted an above-average percentage (23.3%, the national average being 7.5%) of listed working farm buildings showing obvious signs of structural disrepair.

Historic development

- The modern day landscape of the Humberhead Levels roughly corresponds to the area occupied by the glacial Lake Humber. Blocked from discharging into the sea by ice to the north, this lake deposited clay layers up to 20m deep over the area. When the lake drained, the resulting poorly drained marshland soils led to the formation of peat deposits across the area. Bedrock protrusions or glacial deposits of sand and gravel formed islands within the marshes.
- Early settlement of the area was impeded by the marshy conditions. Some Bronze Age clearance of forests occurred in the north of the area on drier soils, but the greater part of the area remained uncolonised due to extensive wetland conditions.
- The earliest surviving settlements in this marshy area were small Saxon and Danish villages located on high ground, such as the Isle of Axholme, while some of the planned linear settlements to the north of the area date from the 11th century. Communal townfields were prevalent but widely dispersed, with later enclosure preserving strips and furlongs, for example those around Sykehouse and Fishlake near Thorne. Where settlements were in close proximity to each other, such as those on the Isle of Axholme, the open fields abutted each other at parish boundaries.
- Fewer than 18% of recorded farmsteads in Lincolnshire are sited in villages. Most isolated farmsteads relate to 18th- and 19th-century enclosure. Some isolated farmsteads in the area may relate to shrunken settlements, former monastic granges and specialist steadings. There is also a high concentration of moated sites around the Isle of Axholme and to the north of Doncaster.
- Waterways throughout wetland areas have long served as communication links to the Pennines and into the Midlands. Fishing, wildfowling and other marsh-edge activities

comprised important sources of income in wetland areas. The extensive peat fens and seasonally inundated marshlands were used for grazing livestock, and as a source of fuel and building materials. Hemp and flax were also widely cultivated on the marshy soils.

- Although there is evidence of attempts to drain parts of the area from the Roman period, and by local abbeys in the 12th century, the major phase of reclamation began in the 17th century with the help of Dutch engineers. Cornelius Vermuyden was contracted to undertake the task in 1626. He succeeded in draining a wide area of the levels, including the marshland around the Isle of Axholme.
- This period also saw the introduction of the process of 'warping,' whereby low-lying farmland was deliberately flooded with tidal waters carrying fertile silts both to

enhance the soil and to raise its height. This practice has been an important factor in the agricultural development of the landscape by bringing low-lying parts of the former wetland and marshes into cultivation.

- In some parishes, specific areas were allocated for peat-cutting after drainage and enclosure. Even today, there still remain distinctive groups of cottages within original turbarry plots, such as the small hamlet of Epworth Turbarry.
- The later transition of the area to corn production, especially in the mid- to late 19th century, led to a greater proportion of yard-fed rather than grazed cattle, and a related increase in the size and standardisation of farm complexes to accommodate both the herds and associated machinery and equipment.

Landscape and settlement

- The modern landscape of the Humberhead Levels reflects its status as one of the most productive areas of arable farming in the country, especially of root crops and cereals. Modern farm buildings and equipment sit alongside historic farm complexes, which themselves often display signs of alteration or dilapidation associated with changing farming practices. Although arable farming is dominant, there is also a robust livestock industry on the higher ground around historic settlements.
- Fields in the Character Area are a combination of large, regular planned fields to the east,

bounded by dykes and ditches, with less regular hedged fields to the west. This reflects a distinction between the eastern arable areas and the historic grazing lands to the west.

- The Isle of Axholme in the south-east of the Character Area is remarkable for the largest and most varied survival of open-field strip-cultivation in the country. As a whole, the Isle is characterised by straggling linear settlement surrounded by extensive areas of narrow, hedgeless, cultivated strips or 'lands' often arranged in a contrasting patchwork of differently aligned groups or furlongs.

Farmstead and building types

- The scale of rebuilding and the rarity of any 18th-century or earlier buildings demonstrates the philosophy of improvement and the increased dominance of arable cultivation in the later 18th and 19th centuries, following the drainage and improvement of the former marshland. There are some farmhouses with

recorded fabric dating from the late 17th century, very rarely before. Older farmsteads are typically found in villages and in the vicinity of early enclosure, and include a higher proportion of 18th-century buildings than in other parts of Lincolnshire (69.6%, county average of 46.7%).

Farmstead types

Farmsteads in the Character Area divide into two general types:

- Over 80% of the farmsteads in the Lincolnshire part of the area are of a regular courtyard plan type and are dominant on the low-lying drained wetlands. 74% are large to very large, the key types being full, E- or U-plan regular courtyards with large cattle yards.
- In areas of higher ground, and centred around historic settlements, where older field systems

are better preserved, there are farmsteads that are more irregular in their form with detached buildings and/or yards dispersed in the overall boundary of the farmstead (dispersed plans), built with farmhouses and working buildings in-line (linear plans) or set with detached buildings (mostly around two or three sides) of a main yard (loose courtyard plans).

Building types

- The buildings found in these farmsteads relate very strongly to arable exploitation, including threshing barns, combination barns, large granaries, and cart sheds. Open areas for yard fed cattle and stack yards further indicate the heavy reliance on arable cultivation.
- Pre-19th-century threshing barns are rare. Most steadings have combination barns dating from the late 18th century, with threshing barns to the centre or at one side of stabling, cart sheds or cattle housing (loose boxes and shelter sheds), with first-floor granaries and mixing houses. Dedicated threshing barns tend to be quite large in relation to other farm buildings. Horse engine houses (horse gins), which

powered threshing and fodder-processing machinery in barns, are now rare.

- There are many examples of late 19th- to mid-20th-century Dutch barns in the area, potentially reflecting extensive hay production on the former wetlands.

Small farms and smallholdings developed as a distinctive feature of the area. They are typically concentrated in villages, or on former turbaries around the Isle of Axholme, and represent a locally significant survival of a specific agricultural type.

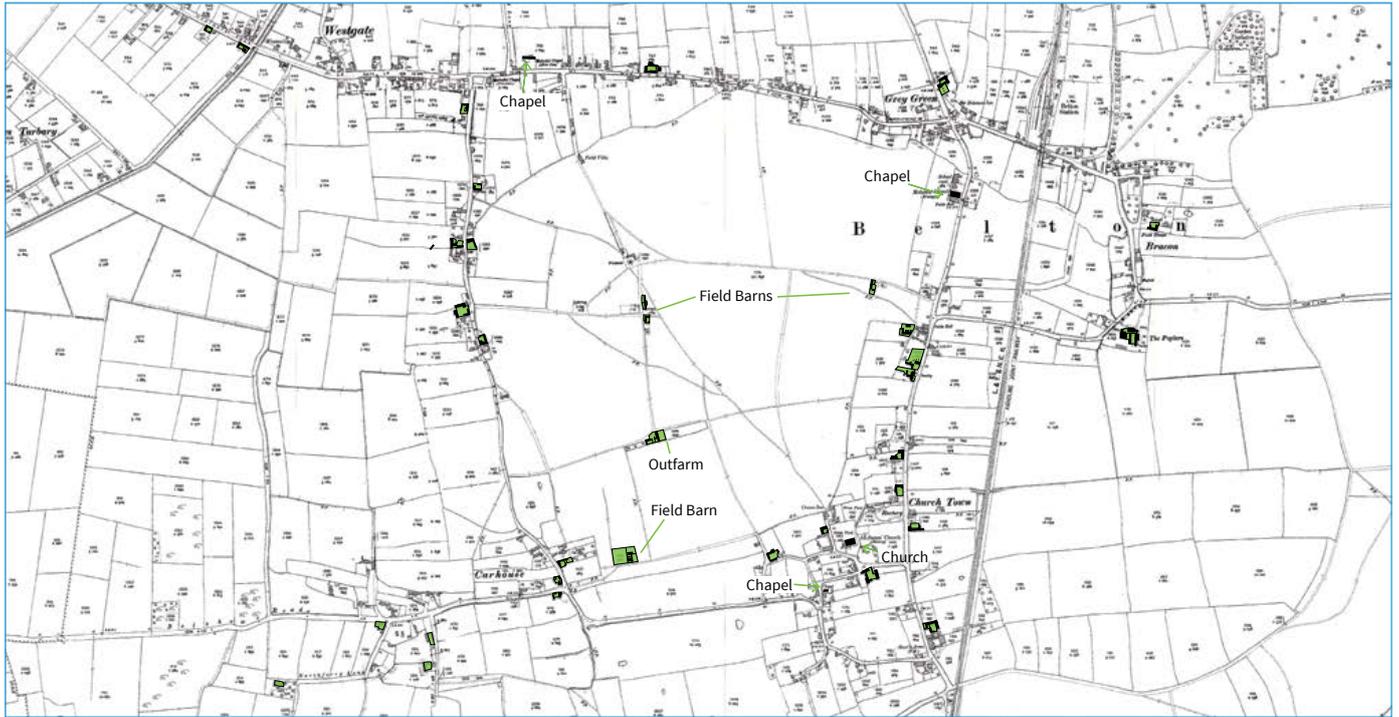
Some outfarms for cattle, which may have internal stone piers to aisles.



Regular U-plan farmstead built in two or more phases in the early to mid-19th century. To the left is a hip-roofed threshing barn, and to the right a later stable range with a first-floor granary. Photo © Jen Deadman



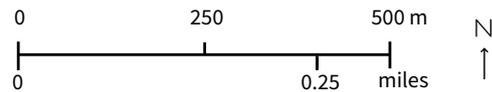
Early to mid-19th-century village farmstead, where the house is set back from the roadside and flanked by two ranges of single-storey buildings (stables and cow houses). Photo © Jen Deadman



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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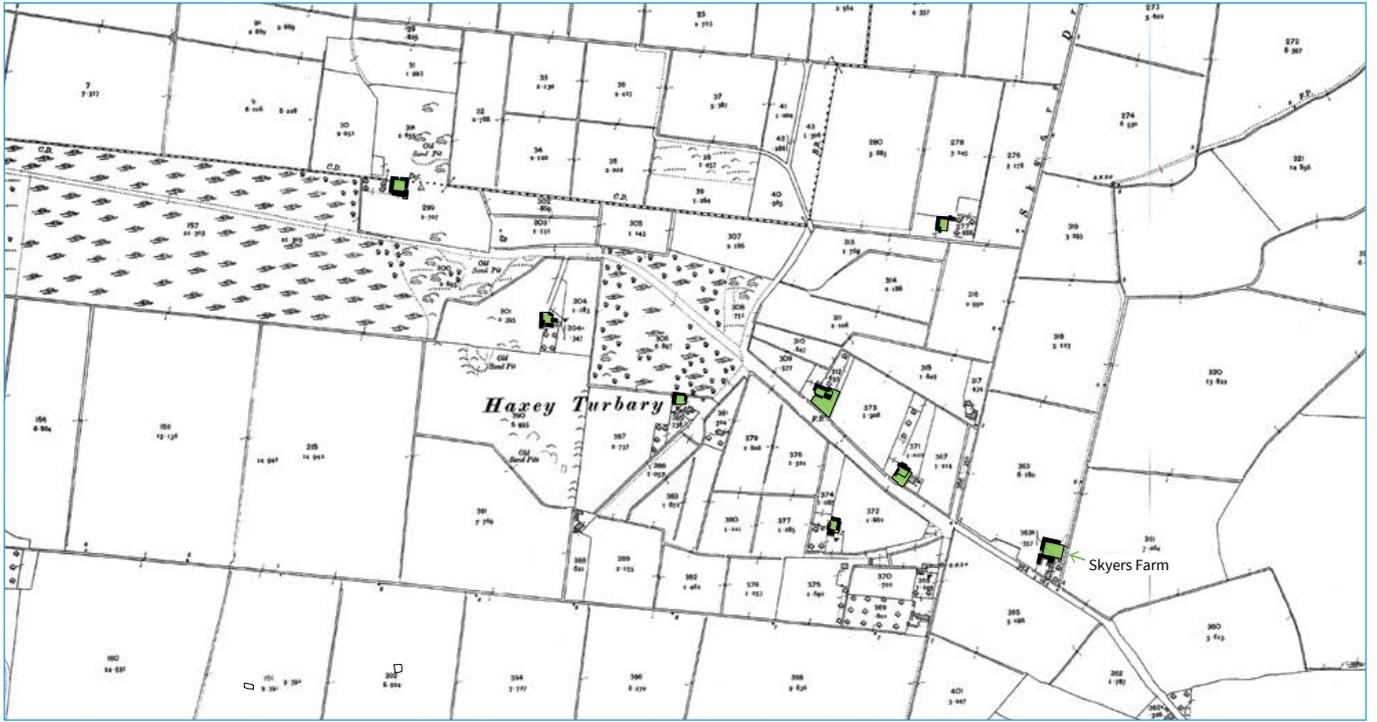


Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.



Belton

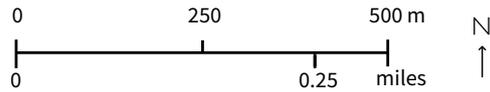
Historic farmsteads in the landscape around Belton Great Field. Despite the extensive enclosure of the surrounding wetlands, Belton Field remains unenclosed to this day. The pattern of village farmsteads seen here – mostly small-scale courtyard plans – follows the growth of the settlement around the unenclosed area. Note the field barns and outfarms in the Great Field, and located in its centre a late 18th-century linear farmstead which is in alignment with the north–south orientation of the medieval strips.



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Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.



Haxe Turbary

Small farmsteads (green) situated in and around the former Haxe Turbary. When this part of the isle was enclosed by act of Parliament, this small area of common land was set aside for peat extraction. Smallholdings were established nearby and have developed over time into a small hamlet. To the east of the map is a starkly contrasting regular courtyard farmstead established in the adjacent enclosure landscape.



Early 19th-century threshing barn flanked by seven-bay cart shed to left and range with arched entry to farmyard and first-floor granary. Photo © Jen Deadman



Combination barns dating from the late 18th century are a common feature of the area. Both of these barns have granaries above stables, the barn to the right having a mid-19th-century, single-storey stable added to it. Photo © Jen Deadman



Barns and stables with first-floor granaries might also be built in-line as here, both testifying to the scale of arable farming and associated drainage in this area. Photo © Jen Deadman



Church End to the west of North Frodingham. The farmhouse, dated 1619, is an exceptionally early example of brick construction, the working buildings being rebuilt around a courtyard in the mid-19th century. Photo © Historic England 28481/034



The mid-17th-century brick house at Eske Manor, and surviving 19th-century farm buildings, were built within a medieval village site now surviving as earthworks across low-lying level ground on the east bank of the River Hull. Photo © Historic England 28481/018



This large farmstead was built just to the north of the Cistercian foundation of Meaux Abbey, the remains of which are which situated on a slight rise in the valley of the River Hull, almost opposite Beverley. The farmstead was clearly rebuilt in about 1840. The farmhouse faces into its own garden, itself an indication of the large scale and status of the steading which is built to a regular courtyard plan with a large-scale threshing barn, shelter sheds for fatstock and a granary/stable range. Photo © Historic England 28480/056



Smallholdings around Haxey Turbary. Photo © Historic England 28521/062



This farmstead was built in the late 18th century in Belton Great Field, and comprises a farmhouse and an attached granary/stable range. It represents an early move of farmsteads out of the village core. Photo © Historic England



Barn of coursed limestone with a hipped roof, in a village setting in the west of the area. Photo © Jen Deadman



An early 19th-century dovecote on a large farmstead with two-bay cart shed below. The nesting boxes are of brick. A drive shaft and belt in the cart shed would suggest a secondary function for the latter such as a turnip house with motive power sourced from the now derelict adjoining building. Photo © Jen Deadman



Barn, part of small yard complex in village setting. Dated 1839 as evidenced on tie bar ends. Note the arched taking-in doors and diamond-shaped air vents. Photo © Jen Deadman



Farmstead on the banks of the Dutch river set against a backdrop of Goole docks and now surrounded by modern housing. A fine example of a large, 19th-century courtyard complex. Photo © Jen Deadman



Once a common component of the yard, few horse engine sheds (this having a polygonal roof) now remain. Evidence for them can be found occasionally in roof lines discernible on the rear walls of some barns, while some, as here, still survive. Photo © Jen Deadman

Materials and detail

- Historic farm buildings are typically constructed from red brick and red pantiles, and mostly date from the mid-18th century.
- Pantile roofs frequently have tumbled and dentilated eaves.
- Local brick and tile was produced from the surface outcroppings of marl and mudstone, especially in Crowle.
- Later buildings of high status occasionally use imported materials such as gault and London brick, with occasional use of limestone to the west of the area.
- Locally sourced gypsum is commonly used on walls and floors.
- Mud and stud construction has been documented but there are no known surviving examples.
- Evidence for pre-17th-century timber-framing is generally confined to towns (for example in the centre of Doncaster).



Historic England

This guidance has been prepared by Alastair Macintosh and Adam Partington, Locus Consultants, with Jeremy Lake.

Please refer to this document as:
Historic England 2020 Farmstead and Landscape
Statement:Humberhead Levels. Historic
England: Swindon

The **Greater Lincolnshire Farmsteads and Landscapes Project**, led by Historic England, has mapped the historic character, survival and use of farmsteads. For the Assessment Framework and reports of 2015 see https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/lincsfarm_he_2015/

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Product code: 52153 RRL code: 043/2020

Publication date: February 2020 © Historic England

Design: Historic England and Chantal Freeman, Diva Arts