



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

Trent and Belvoir Vales

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 48



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>).

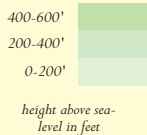


Farmsteads within villages, as here at Askham, illustrate the development of village-based farms within the confines of their plots and of the medieval open fields that surrounded them until enclosure. Photo © Jen Deadman

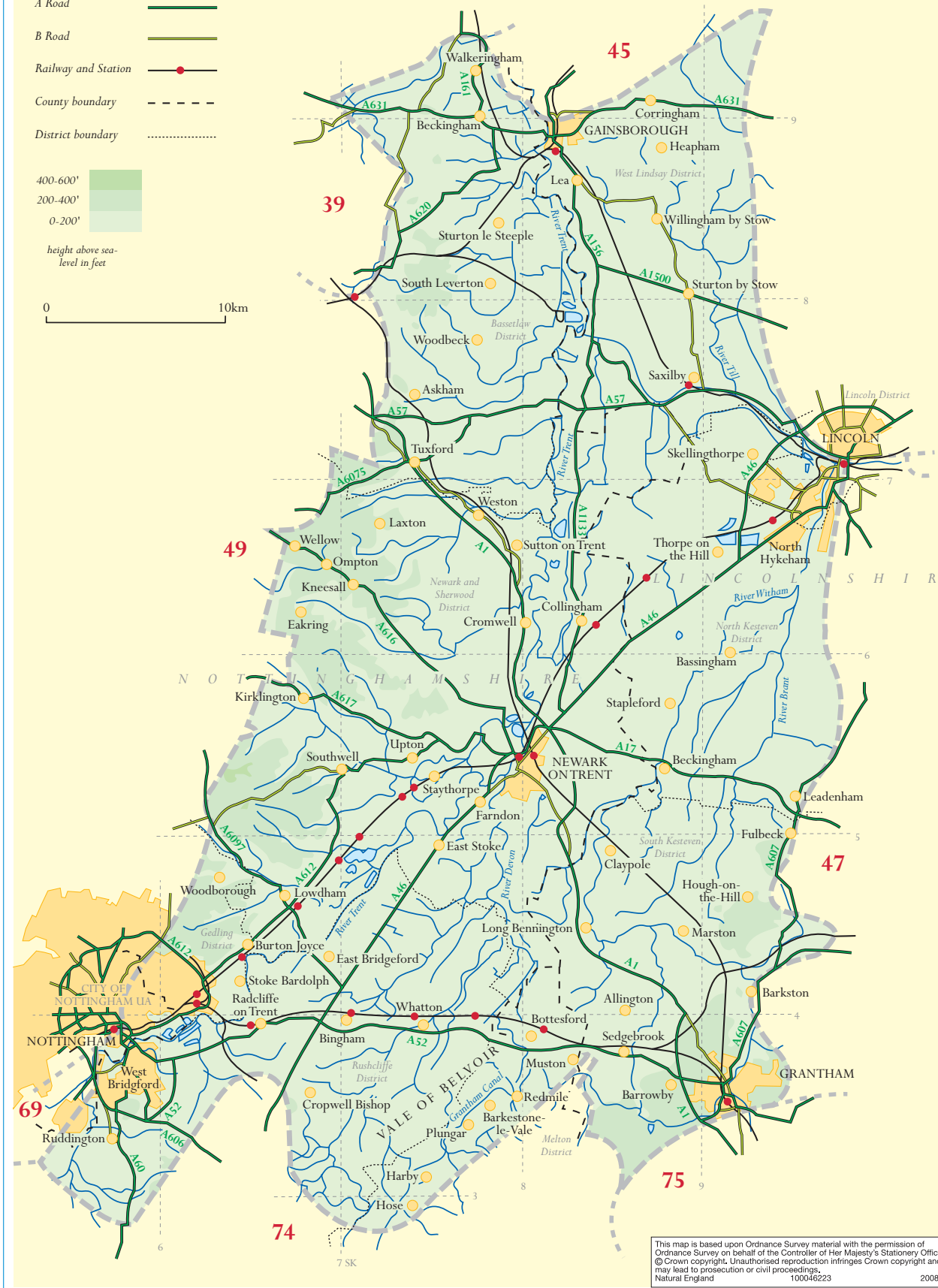
Front cover: Laxton, notable in a national context for the continuance of part of the open-field farming system. Note how the curvilinear field boundaries – many established by the 17th century – retain the outlines of medieval strip fields. Many working historic farm ranges, mostly resulting from rebuilding in the early to mid-19th century but often with earlier houses, can be identified within the village itself. Photo © Historic England 28557/063

Character Area 48 Trent and Belvoir Vales

- Area 48 boundary
- Adjacent Area
- A Road
- B Road
- Railway and Station
- County boundary
- District boundary



0 10km



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This map shows the Trent and Belvoir Vales 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.

This area of farmland is centred on the River Trent (as it flows north between Nottingham and Gainsborough) and the Rivers Witham and Till to the east. Of the area, 7% is 'urban', the remainder is characterised by undulating, strongly rural arable farmland. It is an open landscape, with less than 3% woodland cover.

Historic character

- This is a former medieval landscape of nucleated villages and open fields.
- 17th-century and earlier farmsteads occur at the edges of settlements, often in proximity to early irregular enclosures for sheep rearing and stock control, with linear or L-plan forms.
- The area was extensively enclosed during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, often by Act of Parliament.
- Heavy clay soils required extensive drainage and improvement before becoming viable for tillage, resulting in extensive patterns of ditched field boundaries.
- Regular planned farmsteads occur in isolated locations, often indicating mixed arable and pastoral farming regimes of the mid- to late 19th century.
- Farm buildings are typically brick-built, and include threshing barns, granaries and cart sheds, indicative of productive arable cultivation. These are often associated with cattle sheds and yards for the production of manure.
- Long, straight east-west aligned droves lead from the Trent floodplain up to the Lincoln Heath, occasionally punctuated by brick-built outfarms and field barns
- Smaller sub-areas of historic wooded landscape are found across the area, especially on higher sand and gravel terraces.

Significance

- The mapping of farmsteads in Lincolnshire has shown that the area has, in a national context, a below-average survival of traditional farmsteads from around 1900 – 55% have more than 50% of their historic form surviving (42.85% in Greater Lincolnshire) and 24% (28% in Greater Lincolnshire) retaining some, but less than 50%, of their historic form.
- Any pre-19th-century buildings are rare, and may also relate to legible boundaries and other features of pre-enclosure landscapes.
- 19th-century enclosure landscape features, such as straight roads, rectilinear field boundaries and isolated farms, are the dominant historic characteristics.
- Post-enclosure mixed farming regimes are readable in the survival of livestock ranges

within and around farmsteads, outfarms, and pasture enclosures adjacent to villages.

- Nationally important cob buildings survive in the Vale of Belvoir, including free-standing dovecotes.

Present and future issues

- Agricultural intensification is accelerating the conversion of pastoral land to arable cultivation, accompanied by a continuing decrease in numbers of farms. Sand and gravel extraction also takes areas of agricultural land out of cultivation.
- In this National Character Area, the Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a low

proportion of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use (29.6%, the national average being 32%). The project also noted an above-average percentage (12.2%, the national average being 7.5%) of listed working farm buildings showing obvious signs of structural disrepair.

Historic development

- Early settlement of the Character Area by Bronze Age and Iron Age farming communities is indicated by extensive cropmark evidence and by archaeological excavations undertaken in advance of the many quarries that are found in the area, primarily focussed on the sand and gravel terraces that rise above the floodplains of the rivers. Roman settlement is frequently found to overlie these early farming landscapes, while environmental evidence has revealed substantial woodland clearance by the beginning of the Roman period.
- In comparison with other areas of Lincolnshire, a high proportion (24.4%) of recorded farmsteads are sited in villages. Most isolated farmsteads relate to 18th- and 19th-century enclosure. The vales and farmlands formed part of the central landscapes of middle England over which the classic open field system developed from the late Saxon period. This system of two, three or occasionally more great open fields, farmed in rotation from nucleated settlements, remained the dominant feature of the medieval economy until climatic and population changes in the 14th and 15th centuries began a swing towards enclosure and animal husbandry, which continued until the 18th century.
- The piecemeal, semi-regular enclosures of the 16th to early-18th centuries are

widespread and highly varied in composition, with the greatest survivals in the south Nottinghamshire farmlands, and the Vale of Belvoir, where their antiquity is reflected in the maturity of the wooded hedgerows. Broad geometric patterns of enclosure, both private and parliamentary, dating from the late 18th and early 19th centuries are found mainly on the sandlands and the mid-Nottinghamshire farmlands.

- Although private and piecemeal enclosure had certainly taken place before 1750 (most notably in the Vale of Belvoir) many open fields remained and the dominant settlement type was the linear village with farmsteads concentrated within it. The great acceleration of general enclosure took place in the late 18th century and by 1800 less than 10% of formerly open land in the area remained unenclosed. Enclosure usually resulted in a change from arable to pasture, and some depopulation, although for the most part the land continued to be farmed from within the villages. Most isolated farmsteads in the area were established subsequent to enclosure.
- The enclosure of the landscape was linked to the expansion of mixed and pastoral farming across the area, with stock fattening forming a significant part of farming income. Dairying was also important, particularly near the towns, with cheese being produced



Outlying farmsteads, such as this group of c 1840 with its detached farmhouse and E-shaped regular courtyard layout, usually result from the resiting of farmsteads amongst fields enclosed by the early 19th century; this often occurred some decades after enclosure, after farms had continued to exchange and amalgamate their land.
Photo © Jen Deadman

in the Vale of Trent, and Stilton in the Vale of Belvoir. Several of the important parks and country houses in the area, particularly those in existence by the 16th or 17th centuries, have origins in medieval deer parks, such as Knaith near Gainsborough.

- Industrial expansions were mostly confined to the City of Nottingham and its immediate hinterland, although the effects of feeding a growing industrial population in the 18th and 19th centuries are evident in the countryside, in the development of dairying and the

expansion of the market towns served by the railways.

- Agricultural changes since the beginning of the 20th century have resulted in greater areas of the landscape being turned over to arable cultivation, at the expense of mixed and pastoral farming. In some areas, particularly around Gainsborough and in the Trent Fens south-west of Lincoln, this has been accompanied by the consolidation of fields into large prairies, as well as the obsolescence of historic cowsheds.

Landscape and settlement

- The pattern of rural settlement is thought to have origins in the development of villages from the 10th century, and despite occasional abandonment, shifts in focus and expansions, displays remarkable continuity over a period of some 900 years – a strong pattern of nucleation and very low degree of dispersed settlement.
- The open field system which dominated the area until the 18th century is visible in curved boundaries within piecemeal enclosure patterns (particularly concentrated along the Washlands north of the A57) and remnant ridge and furrow. A remarkable survival is Laxton, a unique working open field landscape, recognisable still as that which was mapped

in 1635 and still maintained by the traditional Court Leet.

- Pasture remains the dominant feature of agriculture within the Vale of Belvoir, but elsewhere, and particularly across the heath and sandlands, there has been considerable arable intensification and farm expansion in the late 20th century.
- Field boundaries are typically constituted of hedgerows with occasional mature trees. There are also small clumps of ancient woodland throughout the Character Area, mostly limited to minor watercourses, parish boundaries and the fringes of the former open field systems. Pollard willows, sometimes in association with unenclosed river valley meadows, are a

characteristic of the Trent washlands and the former carrs north of Gainsborough.

- Great country house parks and gardens are a feature of the Trent Valley around Newark

and smaller, well-spaced estates and parkland feature prominently with the landscapes of the Vale of Belvoir, enclosing and preserving a wide range of abandoned settlements and other earthworks in this area.

Farmstead and building types

In the national context, this area has a low to medium survival of pre-1750 farmstead buildings, as much of the building stock was either rebuilt or remodelled in the later 18th and 19th centuries.

Farmstead types

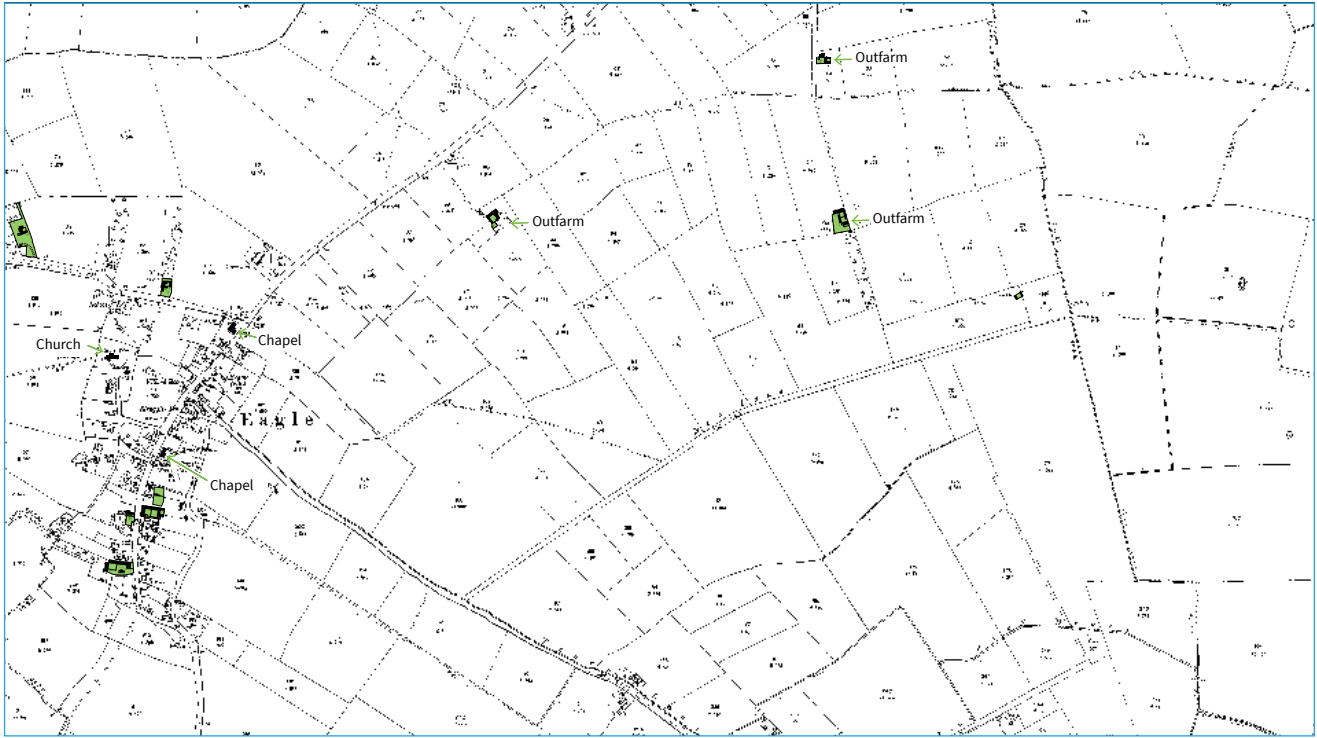
- Farmsteads in this area are a mixture of linear types clustered in and around villages (9.5% of those recorded), for example at East Markham, and more isolated courtyard farms of either loose (8.6%) or regular (82%) plan in planned enclosure landscapes.
- Most loose courtyards have detached buildings to three or four sides of the yard, and regular plans include a high proportion of U and multi-yard plans and also much more (21% of recorded farmsteads) than the Lincolnshire county average (12.8%).

Building types

- A key farm building type of this area is 18th-century and earlier threshing barns concentrated in settlements, some examples of which are re-clad or timber-framed. Most agricultural buildings are more reflective of the 18th- and 19th-century mixed farming regimes, such as combination barns, stable or granary ranges, shelter sheds and cart sheds.
- Many farmsteads have also been added to in the 20th century, with corrugated iron and breezeblock buildings standing adjacent to brick-built historical examples.



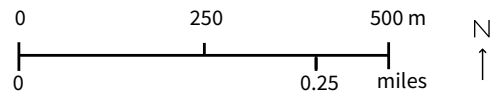
Dutch influence in building design is evident in the small hamlets and villages located close to the navigable river Trent. The manor house at Bole, dated to the 17th century, boasts Dutch gables set against a steeply pitched pantile roof. Brick-built yard buildings are of the late 18th and early 19th century with characteristic hipped roofs of red pantiles. 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. © Crown Copyright [and database rights] 2020. OS 100024900



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



Eagle

Parliamentary enclosure of former open arable fields and moorland around Eagle, Lincolnshire, retaining earlier routeways and some wavy-edged boundaries. Note how the farmsteads that remained in use continued to be sited within the village, some with access to outfarms. This landscape is typical of the Trent Valley, where open-field farming around a central village was the norm.



A regular courtyard plan farmstead in the north of the area. It comprises linked ranges set around two unconnected yards. Buildings are of brick with pantiled roofs. A date of 1832 is picked out in black headers on the gable end of the combination barn, which incorporates stables and is attached to a single-storey cow house. Photo © Jen Deadman



Regular courtyard farmstead in the village of Askham. It comprises linked ranges, within which the most prominent building is a two-storey combination barn with a large cart entry facing into the yard on the east side. The diamond-shaped design of the air vents is common to 19th-century agricultural buildings of the area. To the north and west are single-storey ranges of cattle housing. Photo © Jen Deadman



Village-based farmsteads – as at Tuxford to the left and Egmonton to the right – typically developed as loose courtyard arrangements within amalgamated village plots, with their houses facing the village street and orchards to the rear. Most were rebuilt in the 19th century, but they also hold potential for evidence of earlier origins. Photos © Jen Deadman



This group has mid-19th-century loose boxes attached to the early 19th-century house with its dairy, and a hay barn and more loose boxes (evidence of the need to fatten cattle) extending further to the rear of the plot. Photos © Jen Deadman



This U-plan farmstead at Laxton is dominated by its farmhouse (an early 19th-century rebuilding of an earlier structure) which faces the village street and is an integral part of the group. To the east (right) is a large combination barn which includes housing for cattle and to the west (left) is a three-bay barn attached to stables with a dovecote. Photos © Jen Deadman



Asymmetrical barns, such as this example of c 1840 to the left and the early 19th-century example to the right, illustrate the need to store less straw after threshing, as it was taken straight to the cattle yards. The offset cart entry to the left with a smaller, opposed winnowing door opens onto the threshing bay. To the left is a former byre with a loft over open to the threshing floor, above which is a hay loft. This building has a profusion of narrow vents to all elevations. Photos © Jen Deadman



An early 19th-century regular courtyard farmstead with a threshing barn, shelter shed, stables and cart shed at Ragnall, one of the boundaries retaining the curved form of a medieval strip field. The Late Georgian style of the house, with its smaller windows to servants' accommodation on the upper floor, is typical of this area.



A large combination barn with integral outshot and deep, catslide roof. The barn is dated 1868 and has fine dentilled moulding to the eaves. Photo © Jen Deadman



Successive additions to this early 19th-century cart shed, with doors to the left-hand implement shed, illustrate the growing size and capacity of arable-based farms in this area in the 19th century. Photo © Jen Deadman



Belle Vue Farm, Springthorpe. A covered, regular courtyard farmstead initially designed for mixed farming techniques. The area is now predominantly arable with many large modern farm sheds for crop storage and processing. Photo © Historic England 28594/021



Remnants of a minor timber-framed outbuilding incorporated within later brickwork. Photo © Jen Deadman

Materials and detail

- Farm buildings are typically constructed in local red brick and pantile, reflecting the availability of quality clays in the river valleys.
- Bottesford Blue pantiles are used in the south of the Trent Valley around Bottesford and Grantham
- Where other materials are easily available, such as Ironstone in North Lincolnshire or Limestone in the Vale of Belvoir or the Till Valley, these are used both decoratively and as a primary building material.
- Older farmsteads and ancillary buildings survive, occasionally incorporating timber frames or other rarer and historic building methods and materials, but are often rendered or otherwise obscured.



Historic England

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