



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

Cheshire Sandstone Ridge

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 62



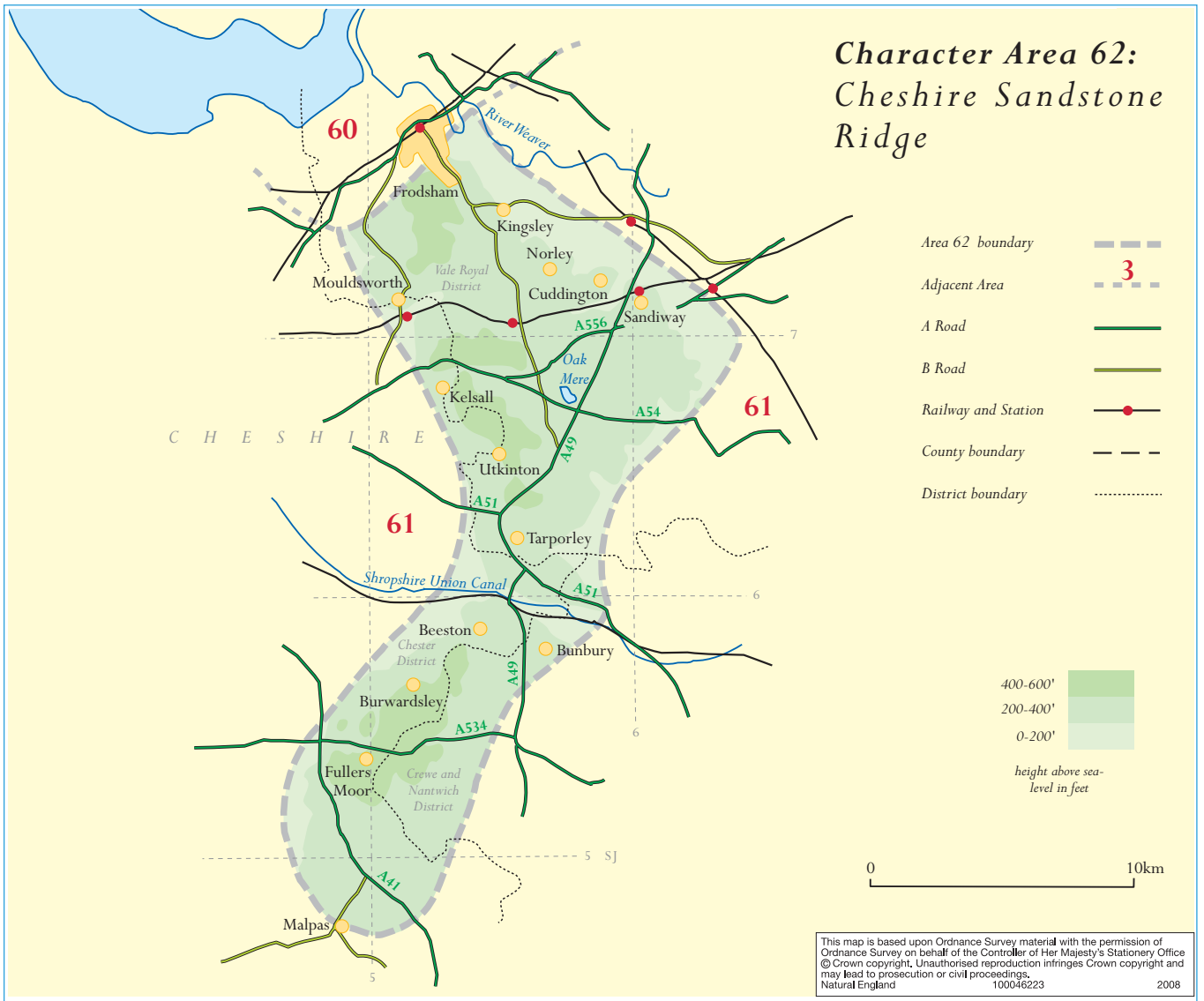
Introduction

This document sets out the historic character and significance of traditional farmsteads and buildings in their landscape context, and is one of a series produced for all of England's National Character Areas as produced by Natural England (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-character-area-profiles-data-for-local-decision-making/national-character-area-profiles>). It complements Historic England's advice and research on farm buildings (<https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/caring-for-heritage/rural-heritage/farm-buildings/>), which provides links to the *National Farmsteads Character Statement*, in the same format as this document, guidance on *National Farm Building Types* and a fully-sourced summary in the *Historic Farmsteads: Preliminary Character Statements*. [Historic Farm Buildings: Extending the Evidence Base](#) (2009) provided a summary of techniques for developing the evidence base, including the Photo Image Project (referred to in the Summary below) which compared 1980s to recent photographs of listed buildings in order to identify trends in conversion and dereliction.



As in the Cheshire Plain, 19th-century farmsteads became increasingly focused on the housing of dairy cattle, the storage of hay and also of roots which were chopped up as feed for livestock. The metal windows were introduced in the inter-war period to comply with hygiene regulations for dairies. Photo © Jeremy Lake

Front cover: Yew Tree Farm, Peckforton, one of the fine dairy farmsteads built in Domestic Revival style for the Peckforton estate. Photo © Jeremy Lake



This map shows the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge with the numbers of the neighbouring National Character Areas around it (© Natural England).

Summary

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

This area contains a broken, wooded sandstone ridge that is flanked by glacial sands and gravels. The area lies between Chester and Northwich and is surrounded by the Cheshire plain, except to the north, where the ridge drops into the Mersey Valley. Of the area, 2% is urban, while 10% is woodland.

Historic character

- This area stands within the Cheshire Plain (NCA 61) and has much in common with it – in particular, the rebuilding of many farms for dairying in the mid- to late 19th century, driven by estates set within landscapes reorganised in this period, with irregular field boundaries often resulting from medieval patterns of individual fields relating to dispersed settlement.

Significance

- Some rare surviving timber-framed buildings. architect-designed steadings comparable to those of the Cheshire Plain.
- Estate farms, particularly those of the later 19th century, can comprise fine examples of

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 (25%, the national average being 32%).

Historic development

- Through the medieval period, a prehistoric landscape of hillforts and ancient field systems developed into a landscape of dispersed settlement, including deer parks, part of Delamere Forest and moated sites.
- This area shared in the development of the dairying industry on the Cheshire Plain (see NCA 61). The enlargement of farms is documented from the late 17th century in Cheshire, in tandem with the development of the dairying industry. The rebuilding of farmsteads in the mid- to late 19th century was being driven by estates, the most notable of them being the Peckforton estate in the 1860s and 1870s, after its acquisition by Lord Tollemache in 1840 and his commissioning of the architect Anthony Salvin to design Peckforton Castle.

- Common-edge settlement, benefitting from access to rough grazing and other resources on heathland, enabled the survival of some

small farms with stone quarrying, the mining from the 17th century of copper at Bickerton Hill and other semi-industrial activities.

Landscape and settlement

- The area has a dispersed settlement pattern of mostly medieval origin, intermixed with some villages. As in the Cheshire Plain, the patterns of enclosure in the present landscape mostly date from reorganisation in the 18th and 19th centuries (with straight boundaries), including the final phase of enclosing Delamere Forest, but within a broad framework inherited from earlier phases of enclosure, including some ancient irregular fields. Abundant pits result from the extraction of lime-based marl which helped to fertilise clay and acidic soils.
- Surviving heathland, as at Bickerton Hill, is now very rare. Broadleaf woodland is found on the steeper slopes, but generally very little ancient woodland survives. There are extensive hedgerow trees.

Farmstead and building types

There is low to medium survival of pre-1750 farmstead buildings, these being primarily timber-frame farmhouses (predominantly of late-16th or 17th-century date). It is possible that rebuilding in brick has hidden surviving elements of rare surviving timber-framed barns and cow houses.

Farmstead types

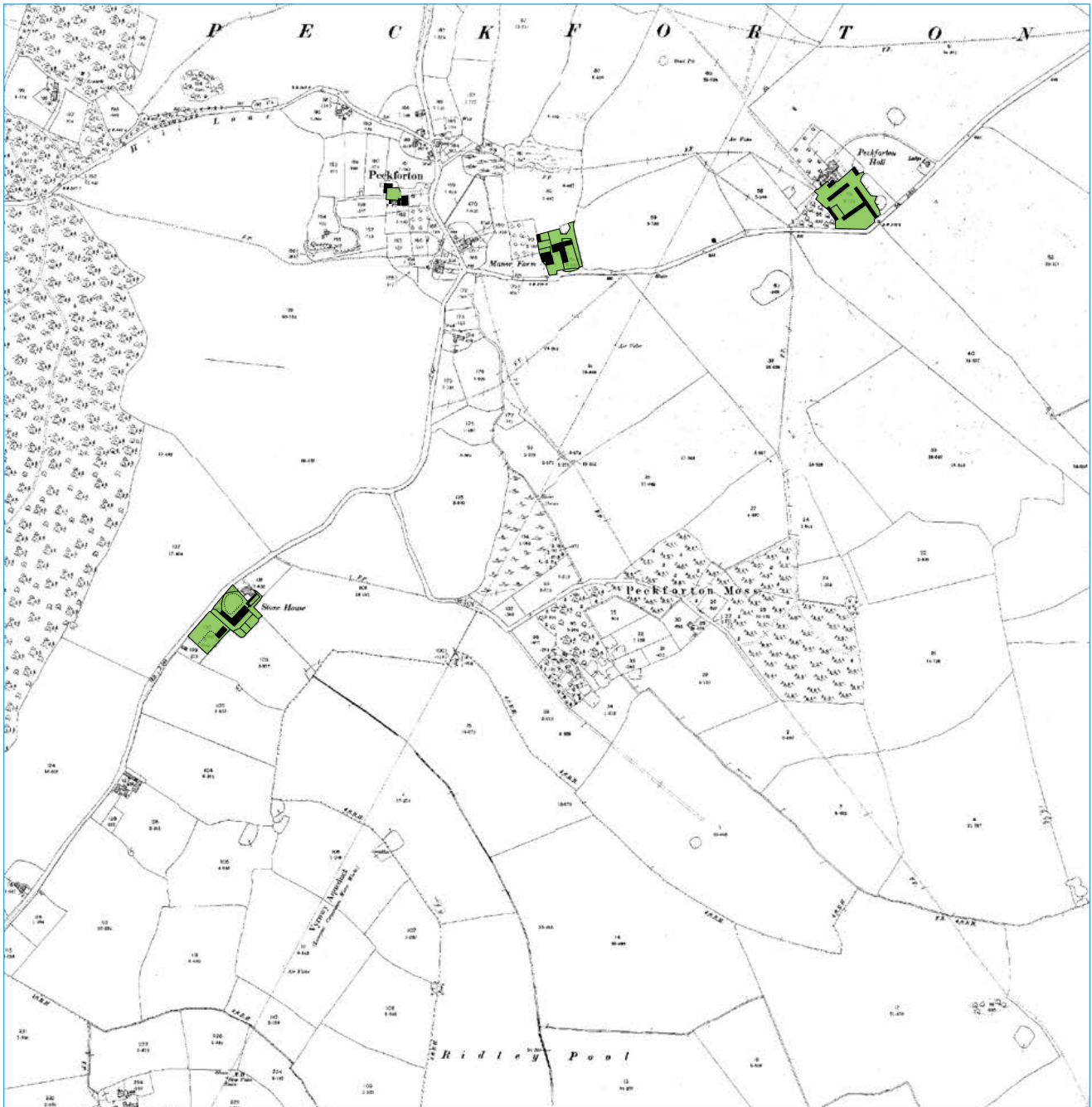
- Farmsteads mostly result from mid- to late 19th-century, estate-driven improvements – mostly L- and T-shaped plans with ‘drifthouses’ (throughways and areas for unloading hay) separating two-storey cow houses found on dairy farms.

Building types


- Two-storey, multifunctional ranges of the mid- to late 19th century are characteristic, providing cow houses, stables and crop storage and processing areas. These are marked by large cart entries and smaller flanking doors (sometimes to gable end) for cattle, and pitching holes set in the gable or sides to allow hay to be thrown into the upper floor for storage. (for example around Wem and Prees in Shropshire).
- Pigsties were a feature of most farms.
- Hay barns were built on many farms.
- There are single-storey cow houses and ranges. Two-storey cow houses include examples concentrated in areas of assartment

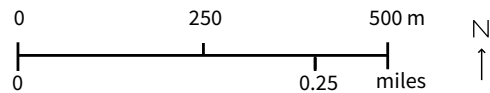
An early 19th-century, multifunctional range near Beeston, with steps to a first-floor loft above housing for cattle. Photo © Jeremy Lake





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.



Peckforton

The dairy farmsteads around Peckforton were built or rebuilt in c 1870 as part of a huge programme of improvements undertaken for the Tollemache estate, its seat being at Peckforton Castle – a Gothic fantasy, built in 1844–50 to the designs of Anthony Salvin. The estate enlarged some fields and straightened boundaries, leaving substantially intact the pattern of early irregular enclosure that characterises much of this area.



An early 17th-century, timber-framed linear farmstead in Beeston. Photo © Jeremy Lake



This group to the west of Tarvin illustrates the range of materials available in this area – timber-frame, as commonly used into the early 18th century for farm buildings, coursed and dressed sandstone and brick which was used for high-status houses from the 17th century. Photo © Jeremy Lake



The gable end of a late 17th-century cow house to the north of Beeston, set on a stone plinth and with straight wall-bracing typical of this period. Photo © Jeremy Lake



An early 19th-century courtyard farmstead at Great Barrow, the house facing the village street Photo © Jeremy Lake



This farmhouse with its attached combination barn, at Great Barrow, is dated 1718 and comprises an early example of brick construction. Photo © Jeremy Lake

Materials and detail

- Red brick and plain clay tiles or Welsh slate are the dominant building materials for farm houses and farm buildings.
- Red sandstone rubble walling is often used in boundary walls. Dressed sandstone is used for window and door openings on some buildings and occasionally for whole buildings, particularly in the west of the area.
- Timber-frame is regularly seen in farmhouses and cottages, and appears to survive in a fragmentary form in farm buildings.



Historic England

This guidance has been prepared by
Jeremy Lake.

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