



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

North Norfolk Coast

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 77



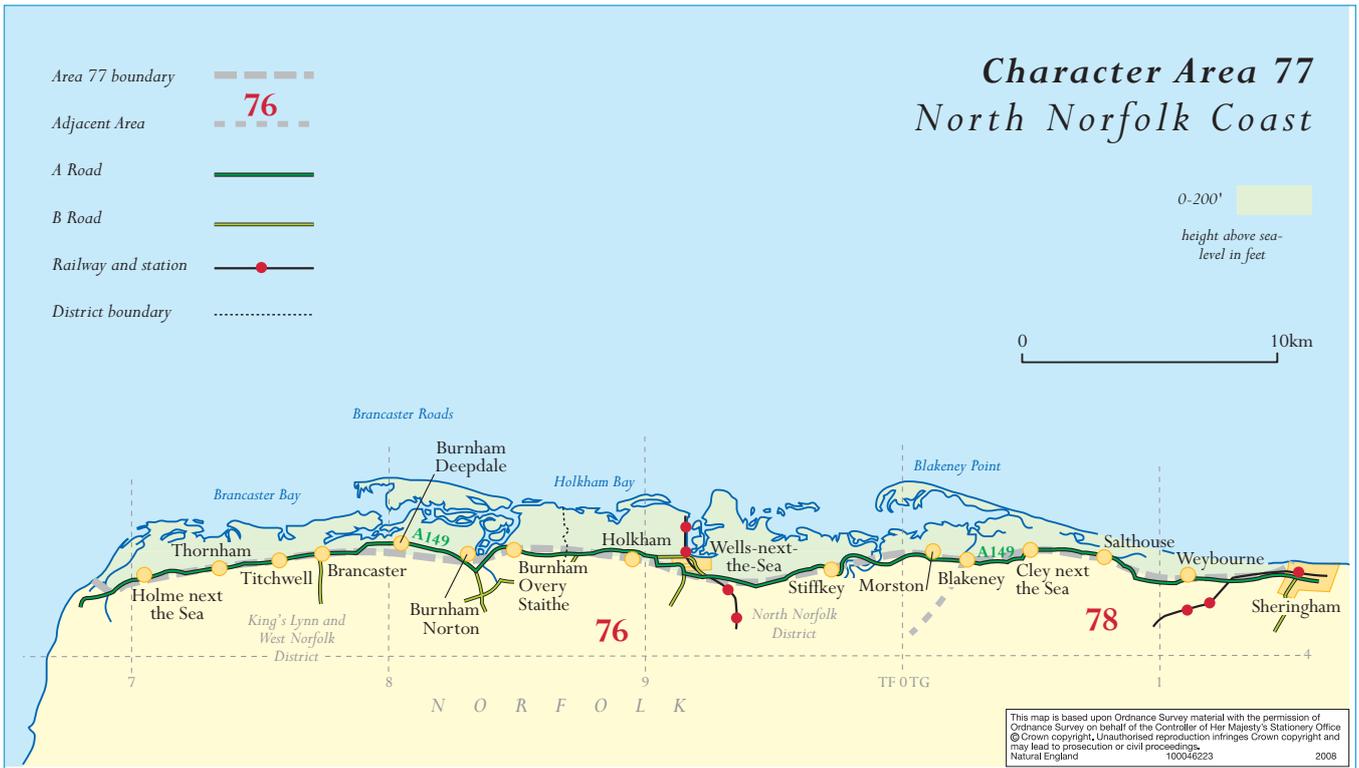
Introduction

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>).



The five-bay, late 18th-century barn roofed in pantiles makes this farmstead a prominent feature in the landscape. Photo © Bob Edwards

Front cover: This farmstead on the edge of the marshes at Burnham Overy testifies to a long development of the farming landscape from the medieval period, and is now sited between the irregular drainage of the marshland and drained land with regular planned enclosures. Photo © Historic England 29330/033



This map shows the North Norfolk Coast with the numbers of the neighbouring National Character Areas around it.



Marshland-edge farmstead. Photo © Bob Edwards

Summary

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

This Character Area occupies a narrow band running from the north-eastern edge of the Wash (England's largest tidal estuary) to Sheringham, and is defined inland by the A149 coastal road and the northern edge of the Cromer Ridge. It is a remote, rural landscape – 97% being open countryside with almost 27% of that land in active

cultivation. Of the area, 45% is classified as non-agricultural. Almost 100% of this Character Area falls within the Norfolk Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Less than 1% of the area is classified as urban. Woodland covers just over 2% of the total area.

Historic Character

- Saltings and grazing marsh dominate the farmed area.
- Much of the marshland was drained in the 18th century.
- The area represents the northern fringe of some of the large estates, for example Holkham.
- Some outfarms survive on the grazing marshes, but there are few actual farmsteads.

Significance

- Substantially intact, pre-1750 farmsteads and buildings in the earlier enclosed marshland areas, and in the context of remnant heath, will be highly significant. Coherent survivals of later farmsteads in the context of enclosed and designed landscapes are also significant.
- Surviving outfarms and field barns, which nationally tend to have very high rates of loss, will be significant.

Present and future issues

- In this National Character Area, the Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a high proportion of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use (71.4%, the national average being 32%).
- Storms and rising sea levels are likely to have an effect on this NCA, especially if coastal defences are abandoned. This could, in turn, affect the surviving field barns on the marshes.

Historic development

- The coastal nature of this area meant that it was for centuries an attractive area for settlement. The Romans settled here extensively, the fort at Brancaster being an important strategic focus.
- The small settlements and ports such as Brancaster Staithe, Burnham Overy Staithe and Holme-next-the-Sea, which developed along the coast, were affected in time by the constant westward longshore drift which deposits silt from further east, creating the mud flats and saltings which effectively marooned the medieval quays and ports inland. Wells is now the only settlement used by commercial shipping.
- Some of the coastal wetlands have been reclaimed for grazing. The narrow strip of land rising from the coast is characterised by drainage ditches and boundaries dating from 18th- and 19th-century enclosure.

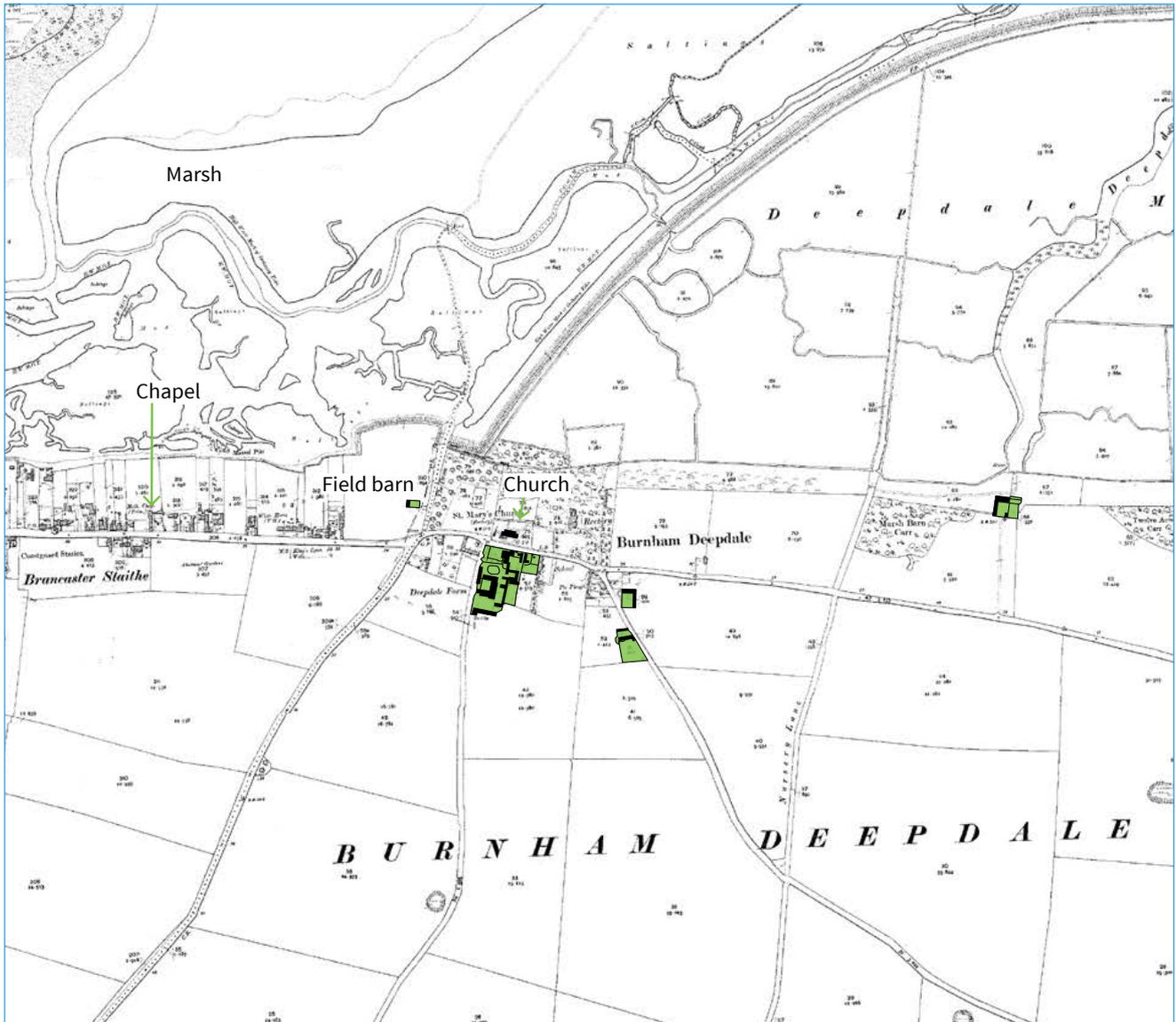
Landscape and settlement

- The small, well-separated coastal villages are now generally set back from the sea, isolated by coastal accretion.
- Strong, nucleated pattern of settlement – open fields surviving around villages into the 18th century – was intermixed in the medieval period with some isolated farmsteads and hamlets associated with earlier patterns of piecemeal enclosure. Otherwise the low density of dispersed settlement mostly comprises farmsteads related to post-1750 enclosure.
- There are few farmsteads within the coastal strip, much of it being in the hands of large estates; Holkham lies right on the edge of the NCA. Most farmsteads are further inland, on the ‘upland’, but with a share of the grazing marsh.
- The extensive and near continuous band of reclaimed grazing marsh and saltings dominate; these were, and still are, extensively used for grazing sheep. The ditched and drained enclosures are mainly of 18th-century date.
- Boundaries are defined by low, gappy hawthorn hedges and drainage ditches (with their associated reeds).

Farmstead and building types

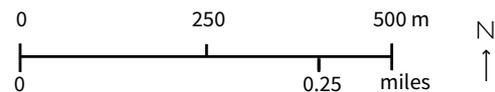
There is a very low survival of farm buildings of pre-1750 date in this area, and virtually no survival of earlier farmsteads.

- Farmsteads in areas of early enclosure and within villages were commonly built to loose courtyard plans with barns and cattle ranges to two or three sides of the yard.
- Farmsteads in areas of regular enclosure, commonly built to regular courtyard plans, are smaller in scale than in North West Norfolk (NCA 76) from the mid-18th century, and progressively transformed into U- or E-plan steadings with large barns, combined cart shed/granary ranges and south-facing cattle yards.
- Barns of the 18th century and earlier mostly comprise threshing barns of three to five bays. Some barns have integral stables at one end.
- Barns on farmsteads rebuilt in the 19th century are commonly of five bays and have later cattle accommodation added in the form of outshots.
- Large cart shed/granary ranges and stables testify to the importance of improved arable husbandry in the 19th century.



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.



Burnham Deepdale

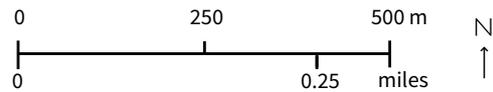
The map illustrates well the dual landscape along the coast – grazing marshes to the north, geometric fields rising up the scarp to the ‘uplands’ to the south. Behind the sea wall to the north-east are fields reclaimed from the sea, drained by sluices and sinuous ditches. ‘The Drove’, to the west of the church and vicarage, would have been used by graziers fattening their animals on the saltings and marshes. Apart from Deepdale Farm – a large-scale regular multi-yard plan – and the outlying Marsh Barn to the east, there is little sign of farmsteads; most of the economic activity is focused on the neighbouring Brancaster Staithe, which obviously developed because of its access to the sea.



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



Holme-next-the-Sea

As at Burnham Deepdale, there is a sudden transition from coastal marshes to geometric 'upland' fields. Farmsteads were redeveloped or newly constructed in the early to mid-19th century as regular courtyard plans. The former range from saltings to reclaimed marsh grazing, drained by sinuous channels and more regular man-made drains. A sea wall protects the 'upland' to the east of the village, which, apart from the Manor House complex, lies strung out along a single street. Drove roads lead onto the marshes, while to the south, a solitary field-barn complex lies next to the Peddars Way Roman road.



This farmstead on the edge of the marshes at Burnham Overy (see front cover) had developed into a large farmstead by the mid-19th century, with a row of houses for farm workers on this remote site and a succession of three barns – the first of which is attached to the 17th-century house – for storing and processing the harvested corn and hay crop. Photo © Historic England 2933/042

Materials and detail

- Flint and brick characterise the coastal villages.
- Carstone is found at the western end of the NCA, close to the Greensand Ridge.
- Roofs are generally of pantile or slate.



Historic England

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