



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

# Northamptonshire Vales

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 89



## 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>).

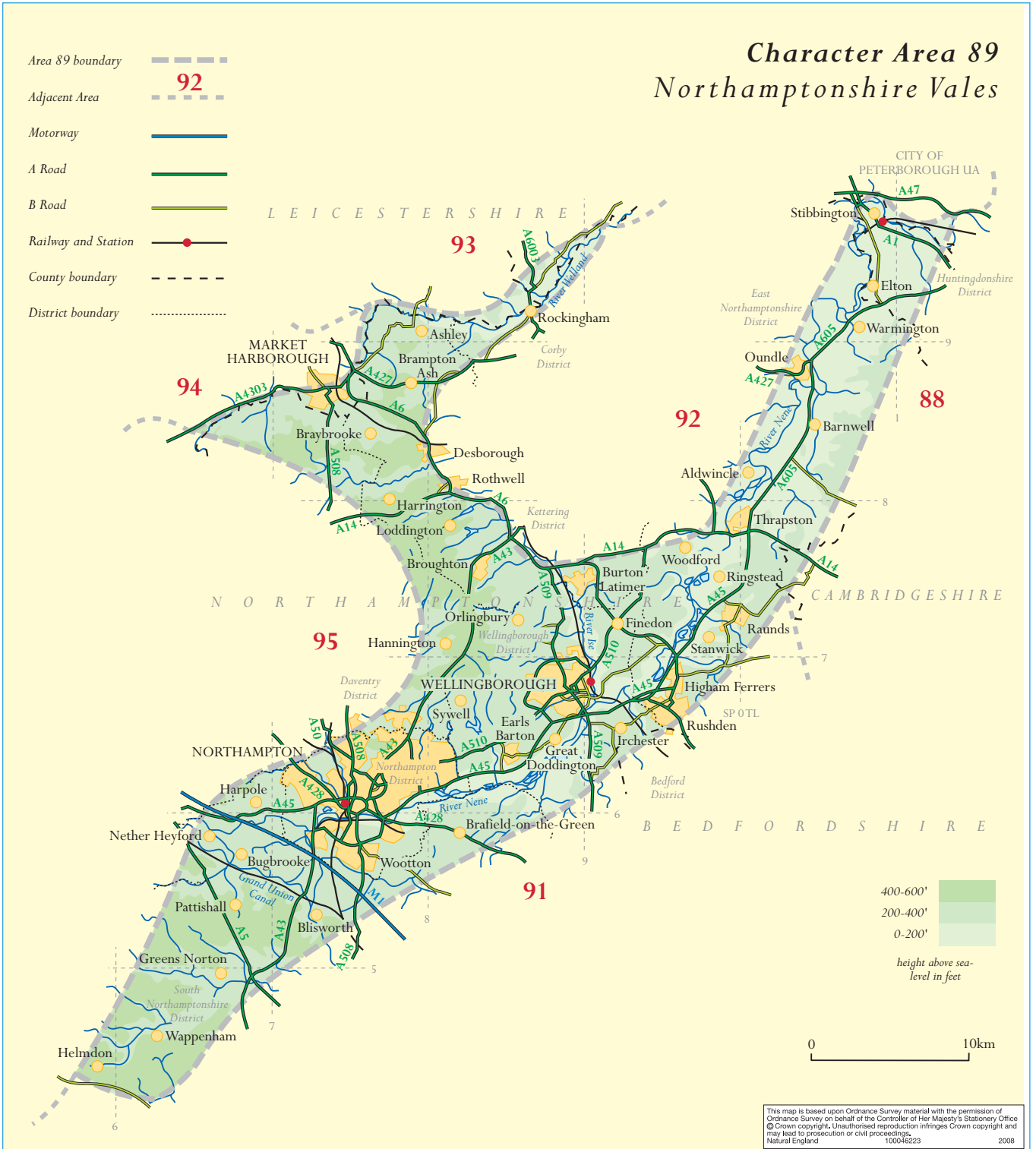


Farmsteads developed within the village of Orlingbury, working fields enclosed on a piecemeal basis – with the exception of the survey-planned fields set out the straight road extending to the top of the image. A small number of barns dating from the 18th century remain, but most houses have been decoupled from farms since the early 19th century. Apart from two moated sites set within land enclosed from woodland by the 14th century, the few farmsteads set away from the village date from the mid-18th century, with their formally designed houses and yards (such as Pytchley Grange, dated 1768). The image shows, to bottom left, the park to Orlingbury Hall. Photo © Historic England 29179/033

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**Front cover:** Two farmsteads and the medieval church are set within the shrunken medieval village of Strixton. Both the farms had developed as regular multi-yard layouts with large barns, stables, cart sheds, granaries and cattle yards by the end of the 19th century. The presence of substantial, late 17th-century farmhouses suggests that many of the smaller holdings had been absorbed by these two farms by this period. Photo © Historic England 23762/018

# Character Area 89 Northamptonshire Vales



This map shows the Northamptonshire 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.

The Northamptonshire Vales consists of a series of low-lying clay vales and river valleys including the valleys of the Rivers Nene and Welland and their tributaries. The area is 10% urban.

## Historic character

- There is a strong pattern of nucleated settlement, traditional farmsteads within or on the edge of villages relating to early patterns of piecemeal enclosure. Smaller historic farmsteads mostly survive within the villages.
- Isolated farmsteads relate to the piecemeal enclosure of medieval open fields, and to the abandonment or shrinkage of settlements into single or grouped farmsteads. Many isolated farmsteads were established after the enclosure of open fields and commons, and the further reorganisation of farmland into larger holdings with enlarged fields and straight field boundaries.
- Medium to large-scale courtyard farmsteads are characteristic of this area, mostly with working buildings to three sides of the yard and with U-shaped, full regular courtyard and multi-yard plans.
- There are some threshing barns, mostly surviving within villages. Most farmstead buildings comprise 19th-century cattle housing.

## Significance

- Whilst many farmhouses date from phases of rebuilding commencing in the in the later 16th century, it is rare to find working buildings that are of pre-19th century date.
- Some farmsteads retain a clear visual relationship to the significant survival of medieval ridge and furrow and settlement earthworks.

## 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 (28.6%, the national average being 32%).
- Very few village-based farmsteads have survived in agricultural use. A high proportion of isolated farmsteads remained as the foci of enlarged agricultural holdings over the 20th century, and remain in farming use.

## Historic development

- The river valleys, and the Welland and Nene terraces in particular, contain a dense range of sites representing land use and settlement in the prehistoric period which altered the landscape both here and, through increased slopewash and alluviation, contributed to the development of the fens to the east.
- Romano-British settlement, including villas and hamlets, was equally dense, if not denser. The network of Roman roads still influences the character of the area.
- Anglo-Saxon settlements colonised the post-Roman landscapes within the valleys, evidence (including from the excavations at Raunds) indicating that they had established estates which exploited a range of land uses from valley-meadows to woodland.
- Village-based settlements with their manors and surrounding open fields had become established by the 11th century, and developed in tandem with the growth of Oundle, Market Harborough and Northampton as market centres.
- The elaboration of medieval manors developed as a particular feature of the area from the later medieval period. The development from the 16th century of country houses reflected agricultural, industrial and commercial wealth. Parkland remains a significant component of the valley landscapes.
- Agricultural production developed in relation to the expanding markets of the industrial towns, and was heavily biased towards livestock for meat and dairy produce. The livestock industry also supplied the local boot and shoe industry.
- The principal towns and some villages also developed as stopovers on the Great North Road, the A1 corridor providing a focus for much 20th-century settlement; the settlements expanded rapidly as industrial centres in the late 18th and 19th centuries, centred around boot and shoe manufacture in Northampton and ironworks in Kettering. Textiles, engineering and brickworks transformed settlements in the eastern part of the area, spurred by the development firstly of the Grand Union Canal, then the railways. There has been intensive mineral and gravel extraction in the Welland and Nene valleys since the late 19th century. Twentieth-century development is a major factor along the main transport routes, especially in the vicinity of the major urban settlements.

## Landscape and settlement

- As in the neighbouring Leicestershire Vales (NCA 94), the pattern of nucleated medieval settlement has remained as a dominant characteristic. With the exception of woodland and seasonal wetlands, the medieval open field system was extensive in this area, and although significant enclosure had certainly taken place before 1750, many open fields remained and the dominant settlement type was the linear village with farms concentrated within it.
- Enclosure across this area displays a mix of regular and piecemeal patterns, and was usually linked to the conversion, from at least the 15th century, of ploughland to pasture. Extensive enclosure of much of this area was not formalised by parliamentary acts until the late 18th and 19th centuries. Landscapes of 19th-century parliamentary enclosure, and the reorganisation of farmland with larger and straight-sided fields in the 18th and 19th centuries was often accompanied by the establishment of plantations and coverts for fox hunting and rural sports.
- Ancient woodland is scattered and fragmentary, and often relates to the boundaries and margins of medieval and, later, open-field townships. Large wooded

areas are principally those maintained in parkland either by the estates or by civil authorities for public recreation.

## Farmstead and building types

The area contains a much modified, but still highly significant, legacy of pre-1750 farm buildings within the villages.

### Farmstead types

- The dominant pattern is of medium to large-scale loose and regular courtyard plans, the latter mostly comprising full courtyard, multi-yard and U-plan steadings. There are also significant numbers incorporating L-plan ranges with additional buildings to the third or (more rarely) fourth sides of the yard.
- Smaller loose courtyards, with working buildings to two or three sides of the yard, are mostly found within villages.

### Building types

There are threshing barns, mostly five-bay, as well as some larger and high-status barns of 16th- to 18th-century date. Many barns have integral stables.

- Farm buildings from the 19th century often illustrate successive phases of development and an increased emphasis on arable production (combination barns, granaries, cart sheds and stables) and the housing of cattle in shelter sheds and often in single-storey cow houses and loose boxes.
- Field barns were a distinctive feature of the area but have rarely survived. They developed in relation to village-based farms in landscapes of piecemeal enclosure. Outfarms, often developing into U-plans and sited next to workers' housing, are concentrated in landscapes of regular enclosure.



The entrance to the home farm at Castle Ashby, where many of the houses and farms serving the estate of the Marquess of Northampton were rebuilt from the 1860s. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Whilst many farmhouses – long decoupled from agricultural use – remain within villages, surviving farm buildings are rare. These also can include, albeit surviving in a fragmentary state as here at Whiston, late 17th-century and even earlier fabric which indicates the growing property of farms which were subject to later programmes of rebuilding, as farms moved out of villages into enclosed fields. Photo © Jeremy Lake



The rear of early to mid-19th-century cattle housing on a village street in Whiston. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Early to mid-19th-century cow houses and loose boxes at Gayton. Photo © Jeremy Lake



A large, mid-19th-century combination barn, with two threshing floors and a granary sited over a cart shed. This arrangement, with a combination barn sited to one side of a cattle yard, is found in the larger farmsteads established from the late 18th century. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Three-bay threshing barns continued to be built, as here, on smaller farms into the mid-19th century. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Large cart sheds, as here, illustrate the importance of arable farming in this area. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Brick was increasingly used in this area from the mid-19th century, the use of diaper patterns being an unusually decorative feature. Photo © Jeremy Lake

## Materials and detail

- The area is distinguished by the use of local limestone for walling and stone slates from many local quarries as well as the famous quarries at Barnack and Collyweston. Ironstone is concentrated to the west of the area, along the Welland valley.
- Brick and Welsh slate was increasingly used over the 19th century.



# Historic England

This guidance has been prepared by  
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