



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 90



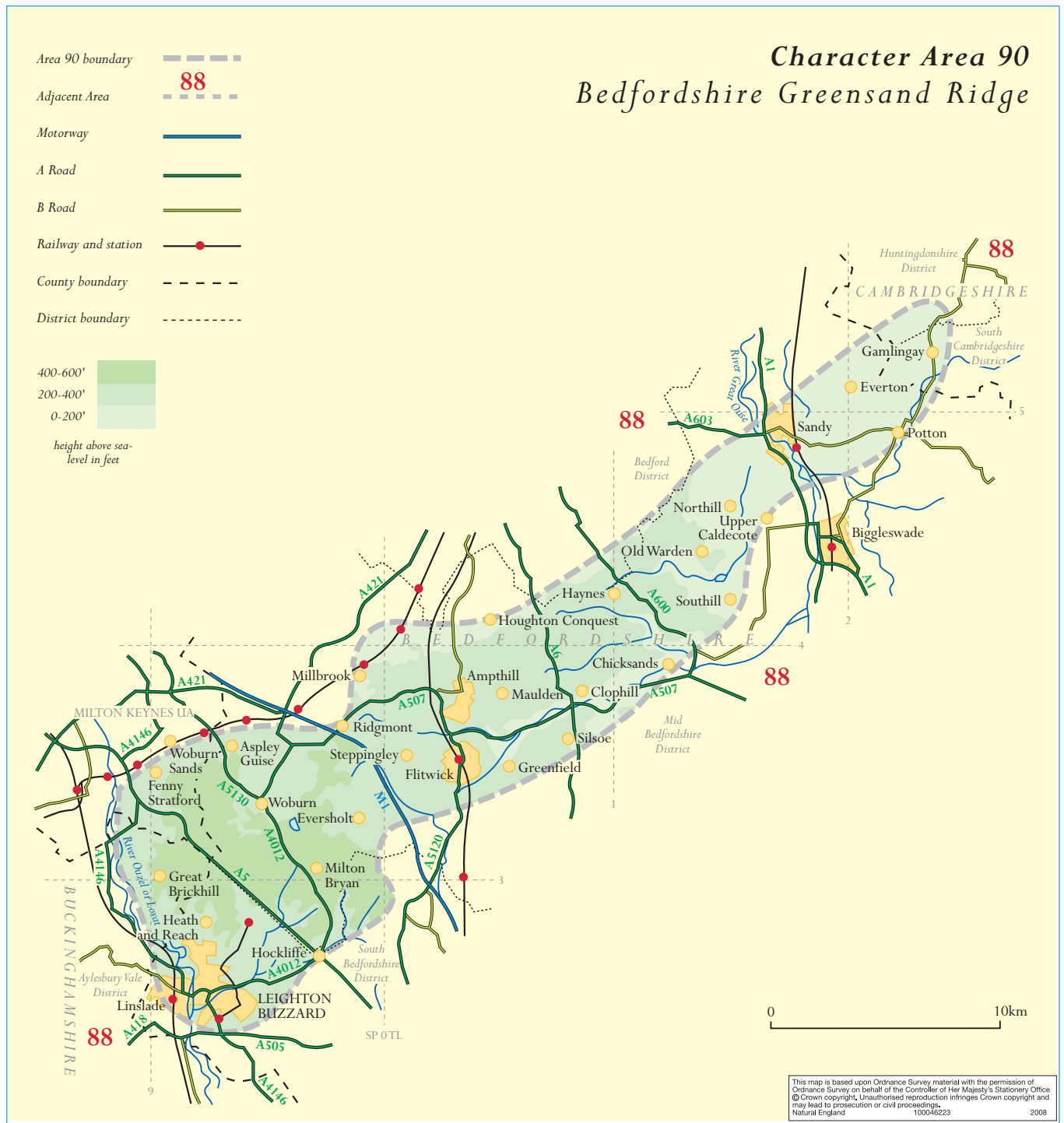
Introduction

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 layout at Park Farm, Steppingley, is dominated by its two-storey barn range which comprises a granary over cart sheds and a barn for processing harvested corn and preparing feed, above and positioned to one side of the cattle yards and horse yard. The range with a chimney stack projecting from the barn has a large entrance which would admit a mobile steam engine for powering the threshing and feed-processing machinery. Photo © Historic England 28182/017

Front cover: This shows one of the steam-powered farmsteads (Park Farm, Steppingley) that were built in around 1860 by the seventh Duke of Bedford, and which were set within designed landscapes with fields large enough to enable steam-powered ploughing. Photo © Historic England 28182/017



This map shows the Bedfordshire Greensand 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.

The Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge is a narrow, elongated area which lies south of Bedford. It occurs over a band of Lower Greensand geology that stretches in a north-east—south-west orientation between Leighton Buzzard and Gamlingay, forming a prominent ridge and a marked contrast with the surrounding Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands (NCA 88). Of the Character Area, 92% is open countryside of which 61% is farmland. The landscape contains a considerable amount of woodland, covering over 15% of the Character Area.

Historic character

- This is an area dominated by large estates from the medieval period, in which large arable-based farms developed over the 18th and 19th centuries.
 - Very large, 19th-century courtyard farms in fields reorganised as planned enclosures, or
- reorganised from earlier piecemeal enclosure, contrast with the smaller and older farmsteads within medieval villages and hamlets, where barns and houses date from the later 16th century.

Significance

- There is a low survival of traditional farmsteads and of pre-1750 farm buildings in a national context.
 - This area includes some of the largest 19th-century courtyard farms in England, with evidence for steam power, set within landscapes whose fields and archaeological
- remains testify to the emergence of estates and larger farms from the late medieval period.
- Intact and small-scale traditional farmsteads, with pre-19th-century working buildings, are very rare.

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 (21.4%, the national average being 32%).

Historic development

- The acidic, sandy soils of the ridge were extensively settled and cleared in the prehistoric period. Small towns were attached to the major Roman roads and there were many small farming settlements and villas (for example Shefford).
- Large estates have been based in this area, making use of its sandlands and heaths and farming the Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands (NCA 88) either side, from the medieval period. Arable farming on these soils required large quantities of manure from sheep, and dairying also developed as an important component of farming on the dip slopes and river-valley pastures into the early 20th century. Away from the villages, large estate farms grew in size in the 18th and 19th centuries. These often moved to new locations in order to manage newly-reorganised fields, and fields newly-enclosed from heaths and sandlands.
- Horticulture, based on the light and fertile soils of the Ivel Valley, developed in the later 19th century and remained a major element of the landscape until the later 20th century. This industry is in decline along the Ivel Valley and around Potton.
- The proximity of the area to major communications routes has led to the expansion of modern settlement around all the towns and most of the former village nucleations in the area.

Landscape and settlement

- This area has the highest surviving percentage of historic parkland of any National Character Area in England. Estates have strongly influenced the architecture of individual late 18th- and 19th-century farmsteads and entire villages and towns as at Woburn, Old Warden and Southill. These developed from monastic institutions including the large Cistercian abbeys at Warden and Woburn and smaller priories at Chicksands, Beadlow and Millbrook. They controlled a large proportion of the farmland and heaths, managing woodland, developing extensive warrens and then undertaking large-scale enclosure and the reorganisation of farmland with farmsteads sited to manage their land most effectively. Low thorn hedgerows and plantations dominate these areas, with some notable areas of wood pasture associated with parkland.
- The larger villages developed along the river valleys such as the Flit at the foot of the dip slope and in the Ouse valley, which cuts through the ridge. On the poorer soils of the ridge are smaller settlements, many having 'End' place names indicative of their development as secondary settlements, usually by the 14th century. Mixed farming including dairying was practised in these areas, where surviving pre-18th-century, potentially medieval, irregular enclosures are frequently defined by mature and woody thorn hedgerows. A slight concentration in the survival of these patterns can be seen around the centre of the area, the Maulden–Clophill dip slope. Significant examples of remnant ridge and furrow landscapes (notably Hockliffe and Potsgrove) survive along the southern dip slopes.
- Areas of boundary loss as a result of arable expansion are concentrated on the dip slopes and on parts of the northern scarp, but are most noticeable within the corridors of the A5/M1 and A1. The area also exhibits a lot of post 1950s sub-divisions of pasture for paddocks and stabling, which are widespread but more concentrated around the larger villages and towns.
- Woodland is a characteristic feature of the area. As well as the numerous hedgerow trees, copses and shelter belts associated with the estate farmland, there are substantial blocks of ancient woodland crowning the Greensand

Ridge and covering the steeper slopes, augmented by equally substantial areas of 19th- and 20th-century coniferous plantation

managed for sport, timber and increasingly for recreation.

Farmstead and building types

Very few pre-1750 farmstead buildings survive in this area, other than farmhouses and barns within villages and secondary 'End' settlements. Intact and small-scale traditional farmsteads, with pre-19th-century working buildings, are very rare.

Farmstead types

- A highly distinctive feature of the farming landscape is 19th-century, U- or E-plan steadings, with large barns, combined cart shed and granary ranges and south-facing cattle courts. These include some of the most notable examples of planned industrial farmsteads in England, with provision for steam power and agricultural workers'

cottages, which illustrate the rationalisation of farmland as led by great estates in the late 18th and 19th centuries. This was marked by very high levels of capital investment in areas such as here, where soils needed constant manuring and the application of rotations using roots and fertilisers to keep them productive.

Building types

- There are some (mostly five-bay) timber-framed barns of the early 18th century or earlier. The great majority of building types otherwise illustrate the scale of arable-based mechanised farming as it developed in the

mid-19th century, with shelter sheds and loose boxes for fatstock, large stable and cart shed ranges, granaries and mixing barns for processing harvested grain and feed.



A 17th-century farmhouse at Potsgrove, with later extensions and set to one side of the mid 19th-century regular U-plan arrangement of farm buildings, including a threshing barn along the top of the yard. Photo © Historic England 29187/005



A landscape of shrunken medieval settlements, post-medieval enclosure and farmsteads developing into their present substantial courtyard forms from at least the 17th-century. In the foreground are remnants of ridge and furrow at Hill Farm, Potsgrove, and the photograph looks towards Manor Farm, the medieval church and the park at Battlesden, given its first license to impark in 1334. Photo © Historic England 29187/010



Large-scale regular courtyard groups with houses set to one side, chimneys marking the original installation of steam engines and at least three yards for cattle are a typical feature of the Duke of Bedford estates. The top image shows Lower Farm, Millbrook, set in its regular planned fields and built in 1863. Cattle yards with raised ridge ventilators are another characteristic feature. Photos © Historic England/ Mike Williams



Farmsteads on the Bedford estate were built to regular courtyard E-plan layouts, with housing for cattle projecting into cattle and horse yards (top). The outer faces of these farmsteads typically present blank elevations, except where cartsheds were needed facing tracks, as in this example where it is located below the granary and to one end of the mixing barn: the entry under the projection (bottom right) housed a mobile steam engine that powered the threshing and feed-preparation machinery in the far-end mixing barn. Photos © Mike Williams/Historic England

Materials and detail

- Major constructional materials are red brick with some stone, and plain tile and Welsh slate roofs. Surviving traces of timber-frame and

thatch, dominant until the later 18th century, are now rare.



Historic England

This guidance has been prepared by
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