Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

High Leicestershire

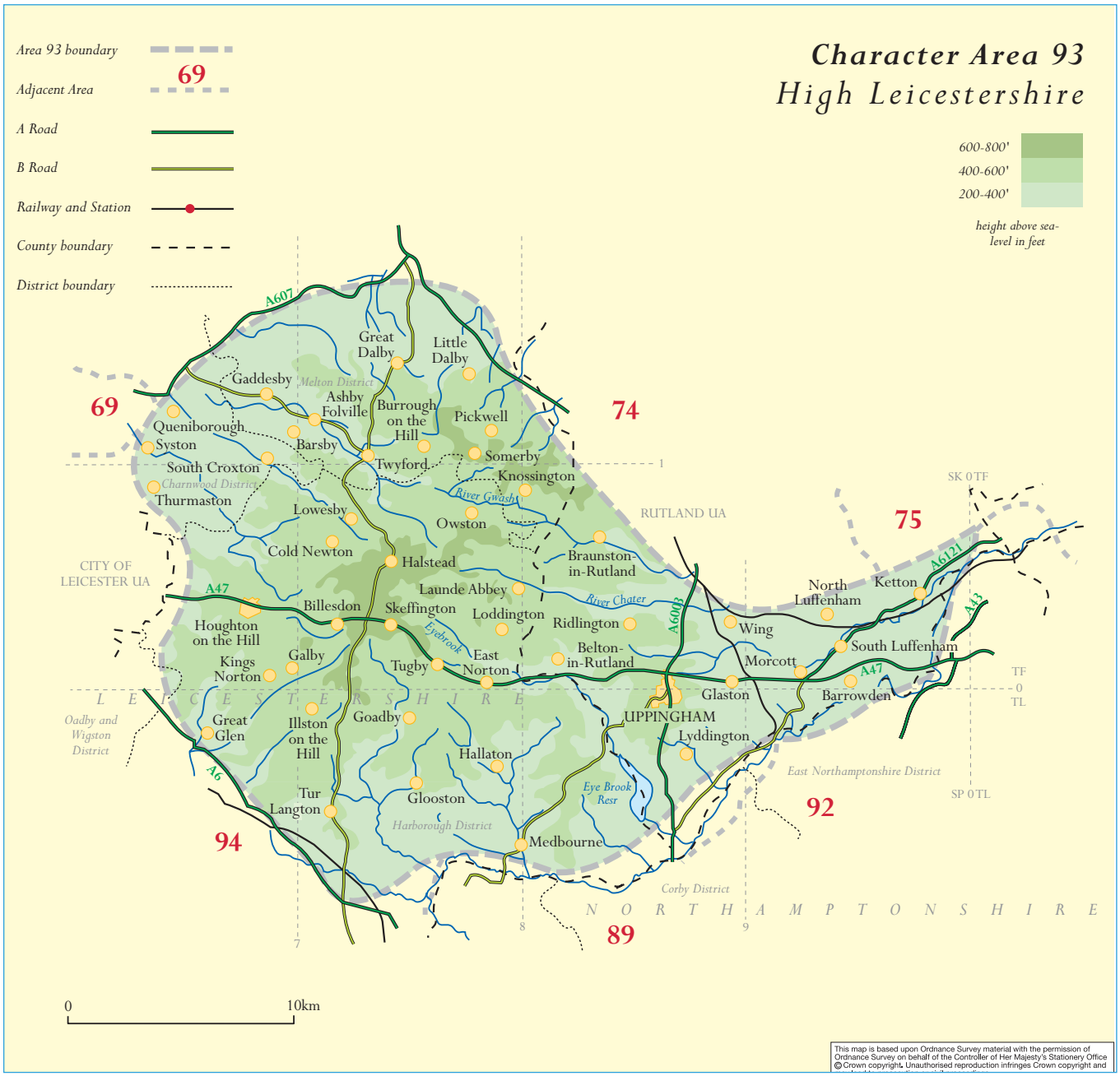
NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 93

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).

Much of the farmland around Hungarton continued to be farmed from the village after the enclosure of the farmland around it. The farmhouse at Hope Farm, for example, is dated 1772 and has a threshing barn attached to it. Pastoral land use has conserved medieval ridge and furrow around the village. Surrounding the village are deserted medieval villages at Ingarsby, Baggrave and Quenby, the land around them converted into pastures for sheep and cattle and the land belonging to the halls at Ingarsby (a moated medieval grange farm belonging to Leicester Abbey) and Quenby converted to parkland. Photo © Historic England 29339/061

Front cover: The deserted medieval village of Cold Newton (see map on page 5), showing ridge and furrow set around the earthwork remains of the settlement and the farmstead that developed within it. Photo © Historic England 29339/030



This map shows the High Leicestershire 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.

High Leicestershire is a landscape of broad, rolling ridges and secluded valleys with a quiet, rural character. To the south and east are the limestone lowlands of the Northamptonshire and Leicestershire vales and to the north and east the area abuts the Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire Wolds. This is an open landscape which is only 3% wooded – the majority of the area is arable land. It is also deeply rural with only 2.5% of the Character Area classified as 'urban'.

Historic character

- This area is one of the heartlands of village-based settlement in England.
- From the 15th century, farms focused on the grazing of cattle and sheep, intermixed with arable production which has shaped the character of the area's surviving farmsteads: threshing barns, stables, cart sheds and granaries, with shelter sheds and loose boxes for cattle arranged around yards.

Significance

- Farmsteads can relate to some of the best-preserved evidence for ridge and furrow cultivation and medieval settlement earthworks in England.
- Most surviving farmsteads illustrate the development of larger farms from around the 17th century, but the evidence for small clayland farms that remained based within villages is rare.
- There is some evidence for construction in earth and timber frame, predating the rebuilding in stone and brick that now characterises the area.

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 (36.4%, the national average being 32%).
- The Photo Image Project also recorded an above-average percentage (10%, the national average being 7.5%) of listed working farm buildings that show obvious signs of structural disrepair.

Historic development

- With some notable exceptions (i.e. the Borough Hill Iron Age hillfort on the elevated plateau), evidence for prehistoric and Roman settlement in this area remains slight but is subject to new discovery.

- The late Saxon and medieval pattern of settlement (established by the 11th century) conformed to the dominant trends across the midland claylands – reaching a peak of woodland clearance and almost total exploitation of the landscape for open arable fields in the early 14th century, worked from nucleated villages and hamlets.

- Depopulation in the 14th and 15th centuries and conversion to a pastoral economy provided ideal conditions for the development of substantial estates, which in turn provided the basis of the mansions of the 17th and 18th centuries. The parkland settings of such country houses as Quenby Hall and Lowesby, complete with earthwork evidence of villages and ridge and furrow, are a significant characteristic of the rolling farmlands. Smaller manor houses and gentry houses, some of 16th-century date, are another distinctive feature.

- The area's emphasis on pastoral husbandry with some arable farming shifted to a greater emphasis on arable farming, particularly in the High Farming years of the mid 19th century, when many farmsteads were rebuilt for crop processing and fatstock. The late 19th century saw an increase again in pastoral farming, mostly for liquid milk production.

Landscape and settlement

- The area is marked by a predominant pattern of nucleated settlement, with farmsteads historically located in villages. Earthworks and isolated churches mark the sites of villages lost to later episodes of enclosure and depopulation. Isolated farmsteads either stand on or next to the sites of shrunken settlements or were built after 1750, as post-enclosure farms moved away from the villages. Holdings prior to enclosure were small (the average clayland farmer in 1700 not working more than 20 acres); as a result, small village-based farmsteads have rarely survived. Many villages have workers' housing built for estates.

- There are fragments of ancient woodland, remnants of the once extensive Leighfield Forest, clustered around Owston. The pattern of fields is dominated by piecemeal and regular enclosure, most of the latter completed under parliamentary act (in order to reorganise the more tenacious and complicated open field holdings) in the period 1790-1830. The development of hunting and shooting also drove the planting of copses and spinneys.

- Post-medieval pastoral farming conserved medieval ridge and furrow around many villages, such as Owston and Newbold, Hungarton, Braunston-in-Rutland, Belton-in-Rutland, Stoke Dry, Hallaton and Welham. Former village earthworks are frequently sited within the parklands of 17th- and 18th-century mansions.

- Extensive patterns of field ponds also result from the former extent of animal husbandry.

Farmstead and building types

There is evidence across the area for the rebuilding of houses and barns in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, and then for extensive rebuilding in the late 18th and 19th centuries in settlements and on farmsteads in newly enclosed land. Very few of the small farmsteads that characterised the claylands until the later 18th century have survived, the present-day farmsteads representing the emergence into the 19th century of the large farms which worked much of the farmland in this area.

Farmstead types

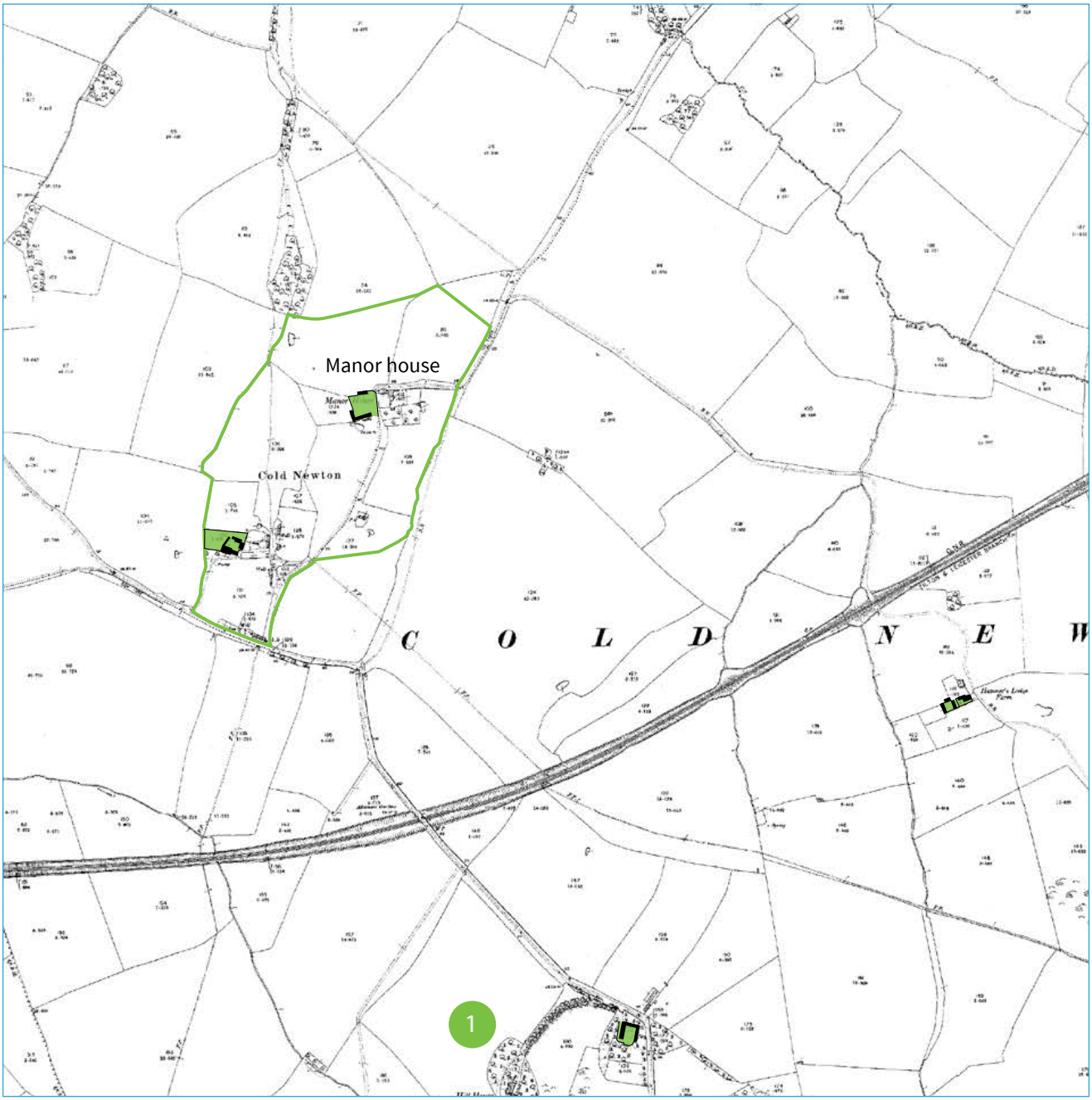
- Farmsteads within villages have typically developed on a piecemeal basis, with working buildings including L-plan ranges to three or four sides of cattle yards. Houses – but rarely farm buildings – have survived from the smaller farms that worked the land around villages. Houses are often found attached to working buildings. Multi-yard plans developed on the edge of villages, including on sites named as 'manor' and 'home' farms, and on isolated farms where many farmsteads also developed as regular courtyard plans with working buildings to three or four sides of yards.

Building types

- Threshing barns are often attached to the farmhouse. Some combination barns incorporate animal housing at one end. Many barns dating from the 18th and 19th centuries are of five or more bays. Small barns (three or four bays) survive in villages.

- Surviving buildings illustrate the emergence of larger farms and the requirements of arable rather than pastoral husbandry: large granaries over stables and cart sheds, and cattle yards flanked by shelter sheds and looseboxes for fatstock and producing farmyard manure. Field barns and outfarms were a common feature, but are now increasingly rare.

Most isolated farmsteads date from the mid-18th century and are built to regular courtyard plans. Farmhouses are usually treated with mid- to late Georgian facades that face away from the working buildings and yards. Photos © 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.

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Cold Newton

The deserted medieval village of Cold Newton, including the earthworks of medieval steadings, a moated manorial site and a windmill tower, lies eight miles east of Leicester, located on the clay uplands around Tilton, overlooking the Wreake valley. The village core was gradually abandoned after the enclosure of arable land for pasture in the 16th century, followed by the amalgamation and movement of farms to new sites within land that continued to be enclosed and reorganised into the 19th century. The two remaining farmsteads developed in a similar piecemeal fashion into loose courtyard plans, Manor House to the north having a late 16th-century house illustrating a substantial farm focused on this site which adjoins a moat with the earthworks of medieval buildings and yards. The parklands of Lowesby Hall (with another deserted medieval village) and Quenby Hall (a fine country house built c 1620–30). The U-shaped, regular courtyard at Sludge Hall to the south (1) was built in association with the reorganisation of this area with coverts and plantations for field sports.

Within villages, farmsteads generally take the form of a loose courtyard arrangement, accessed from the street. Here in North Luffenham in the east of the area, two farmsteads – one large, one small – rub shoulders on the main street. Buildings are of coursed rubble limestone, a standard building stone for the east of the area, with dressed corner quoins. To the left is a rare surviving example of a 17th-century stable. To the right is the farmyard to a late 17th-century farmhouse. A tall, 18th-century or earlier threshing barn adjoins the house with a single-storey range for housing cattle to the west. A long range comprising an assortment of single-storey buildings, of which only one remains today, formerly bounded the yard to the west. Photo © Jen Deadman

A late 18th- or early 19th-century cart shed and stable, with triangular air vents in the gable. Photo © Jen Deadman

Loose courtyard plans with a mix of detached and linked buildings set around a yard are more likely than regular plans to have buildings dating from before the 18th century. These buildings are in the setting of a 17th-century house. The large combination barn to the right is of two phases extended by two bays one of which provides a covered entry to the yard. Photo © Jen Deadman

This mid-19th-century farmstead at Cranoe, with a large threshing barn and a through-entry to the farmyards fronting the road, dates from after the land around the hamlet was enclosed and reorganised in 1828. The tall house is typical of large farms in this area and period. Photo © Jen Deadman

Manor Farm at Rearsby, located in the extreme west of the area, is now the only remaining working farm in the village. It is spread over a large site, set on high ground close to the church and bounded by a cob wall (in part replaced with cobble) which is visible to the south and west. A small watercourse runs east–west immediately south of the farm which can only be accessed from Church Lane via a ford. The farmhouse is dated 1755. Photo © Jen Deadman

The early 19th-century combination barn at Manor Farm is built on a cobble plinth. Note the dentilled moulding at eaves level and the crane to the first-floor granary. Photo © Jen Deadman

Cattle housing and dairy with louvred vents, and a farmhouse with an attached granary/stable range, forming part of a large, mid-19th-century farmstead. The farmstead is of a regular courtyard plan form as are many of this period and is built of brick. The design and the strong orange brick work of these outlying farms is a distinctive feature of the landscape and particularly noticeable in the west and towards the centre of the area. Photo © Jen Deadman

South of the farmhouse in the group above is a loose box and pigsties adjoining a lofted chaff or meal house, at the north end of which is a small, lean-to engine house with fly wheel for driving machinery. Photo © Jen Deadman

Mid-19th-century pigsties. Photo © Jen Deadman

A U-shaped steading built between 1885 and 1904 located to the west of South Luffenham and set in large, regular-shaped fields enclosed earlier in the century. Photo © Jen Deadman

A cob farmyard wall. Photo © Jen Deadman

Materials and detail

- Limestone is concentrated in the eastern lowlands, with ironstone being increasingly common towards the centre of the area.
- Whilst stone was used for farmhouses and some agricultural buildings, particularly barns, construction in timber frame and earth is documented across the area. These materials, and thatch, were almost universally replaced by stone, brick, Welsh slate and tile in the 18th and 19th centuries. Brick now dominates the building stock to the west of the area, and was commonly used for the construction of farmsteads in the 19th century.
- Some mud walls survive, most noticeably around historic farms within villages.

Historic England

This guidance has been prepared by
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