Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

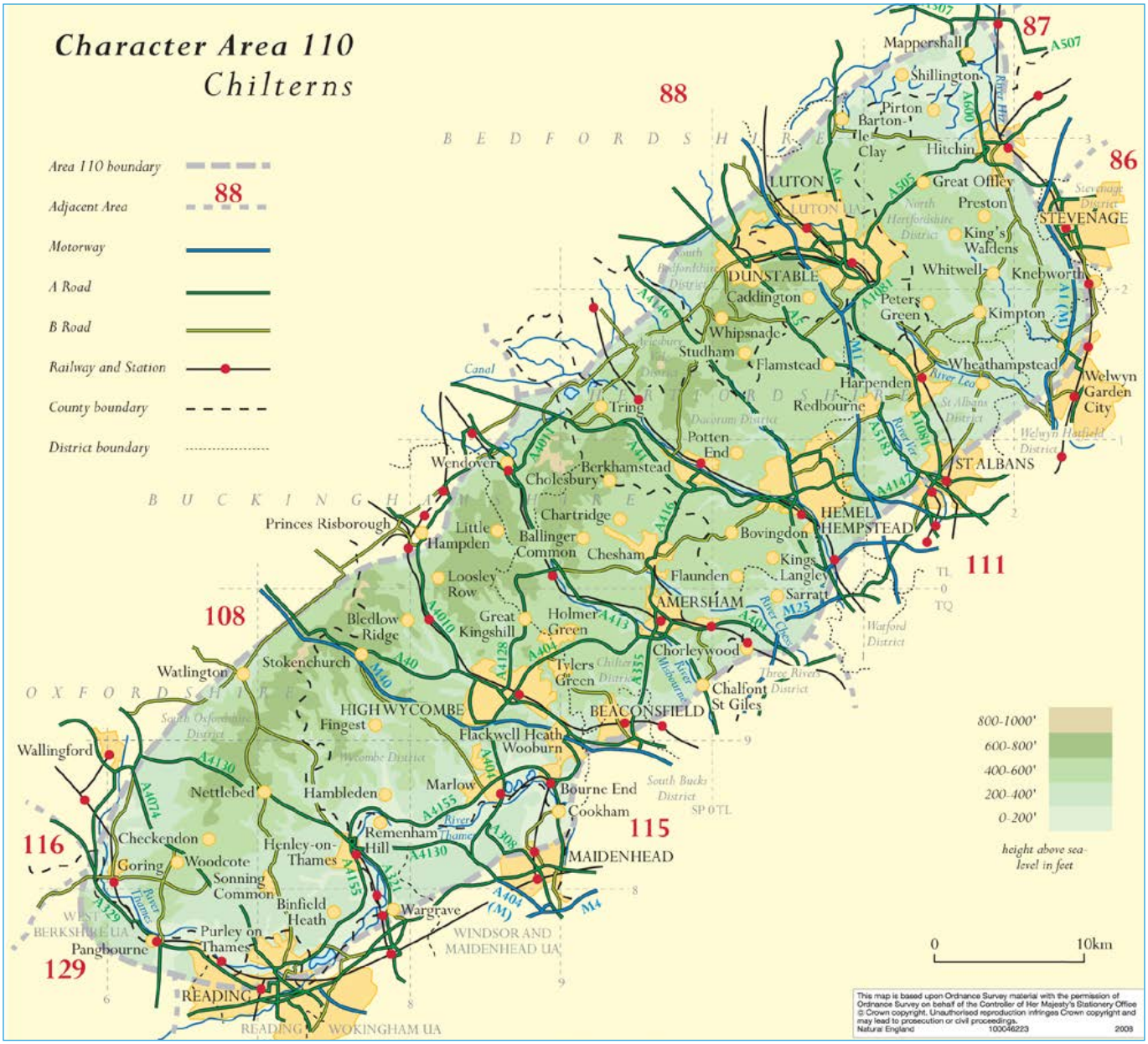
Chilterns

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 110

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).

Front cover: This farmstead at Dennerhill, near Great Missenden, has a late 17th-century, timber-framed and aisled barn with two threshing floors, all that remains from the farmyard buildings associated with its 17th-century house. Both were later reclad in flint with brick quoins, and also in the image is another key characteristic of the Chilterns – 20th-century, roadside ribbon development. Photo © Historic England 29169/033



This map shows the Chilterns, with the numbers of 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 Chilterns rise to just over 900 feet and stretch from the Thames in Oxfordshire across Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire to Bedfordshire. The hills are formed by an outcrop of chalk, overlain by clay with flints, and comprise a steep scarp slope south and east of Aylesbury and a gradual dip slope falling towards the Thames valley. The plateau is cut by a series of through valleys that divide it into roughly rectangular blocks, to create a varied mix of landscapes. Approximately half of the land (52%) within the Character Area falls within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Of the Character Area, 85.1% is open countryside, of which 69.3% is cultivated, whilst 14.9% is urban.

Historic development

- There is a low density of prominent isolated farmsteads in the landscape, but with a higher proportion of small to medium-scale farmsteads than in other chalk landscapes in southern England.
- Medium to large-scale, loose courtyard plans are predominant, often with a long history of development that is reflected in the piecemeal patterns of enclosure to the landscape.
- Barns are typically of five bays or more, are occasionally aisled, and can be extended to form overall L-plans. Some farmsteads have two barns.
- Shelter sheds for cattle are either free-standing or built against barns.
- Stables are common, and often have granaries to the upper floor.
- There are outfarms and field barns of 19th-century date.

Significance

- Fine, timber-framed houses and large barns testify to a first phase of rebuilding sustained by corn production (particularly barley for malt) in the 15th to 17th centuries. The higher levels of woodland in the Chilterns resulted in a different system of agriculture and enclosure to the other chalk areas, with smaller, ancient enclosures and some areas of common-edge as well as dispersed medieval settlement. Small farmsteads are more typical of the north-east than the south-west, with its easy access to London markets.
- Many farmsteads date from the medieval period.
- Some rare examples survive, of farmsteads that developed in association with the designated parkland and fine gentry houses that make an important contribution to the landscape, including many built with mercantile and industrial wealth from London.

- There are some extremely rare, surviving examples of small farmsteads including smallholdings.
- Surviving outfarms and field barns are now rare.
- The area's domestic and church architecture is distinguished by some very early (15th and 16th-century) use of brick, but its use before the 19th century on farm buildings is rare.

Present and future issues

- Large, corn-growing farms dominate the agricultural industry in this area, but there are also large numbers of 'hobby farms' where the buildings survive in low-key use.
- In this National Character Area, the Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a medium proportion of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use (32.7%, the national average being 32%).
- Widespread clearance took place in the Neolithic period, and there is abundant evidence for Iron Age or Romano-British farmsteads and Roman villa estates. During the Roman period, the area supported an iron industry.
- The proximity of the area to London fostered the development of gentry estates, and both vernacular and gentry architecture – as well as the area's historic parks – have reflected metropolitan influences from the 16th century.
- Many of the towns expanded greatly in the 19th and 20th centuries, with towns like Luton and Hemel Hempstead developing into major conurbations. Large-scale development along major road and rail corridors in the 20th century has been matched by the growth of most Chiltern villages in the same period.
- Arable farming with sheep grazing on the improved chalk grasslands was predominant with major differences between:
- the more arable-based economy of the south-west, which experienced a considerable reduction in woodland between 1600 and 1800 and had good access to London via waterways
- the more pastoral economy of the north-east, which – in part due to poorer transport links – concentrated on fattening stock that could be driven to market.
- The clay capping the chalk meant that the area was heavily wooded and pig keeping was a speciality in the beech forests. Woodland industries and furniture making became a significant feature of the area – High Wycombe developed as a major centre of chair making.

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View towards a cluster of farmsteads, a distinctive settlement type in the Chilterns, showing the importance of woodland in the Chilterns landscape. Photo © Chilterns Conservation Board

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Landscape and settlement

- The settlement pattern of the Chilterns mainly consists of dispersed farmsteads and hamlets, mostly established by the 14th century. Most of the larger settlements developed in the 19th and 20th centuries from loose clusters or rows of houses and farmsteads. In all these areas, farmsteads related to a complex mix of anciently enclosed fields and communal open fields subject to later enclosure, both dating from the medieval period.
- Large numbers of medium to small-scale farmsteads are often found associated with smaller-scale fields. The extent of the woodland (14% of the area) also enabled smallholding to survive to a far greater extent than is typical across other chalk landscapes in southern England.
- Towards the south-west and north-eastern parts of the Chilterns there are medium to large fields with generally irregular boundaries that probably represent enclosure by agreement dating from the 16th century onwards. In the central part of the area, between High Wycombe and Hemel Hempstead, the fields are considerably smaller and are either rectilinear or small squares. The rectilinear fields follow a definite 'grain' in the landscape with long, continuous boundary lines running north-west to south-east.
- There were large areas of commons, heaths and downland which, from the medieval period and earlier, were used as communal grazing land and a source of fuel and building supplies. More than 80% of this has been lost in the last 200 years, but cottages and small farmsteads (including smallholdings) can survive around the fringes of commons or greens.

View towards an isolated farmstead, its buildings in a loose courtyard arrangement, below the downland ridge near Mapledurham. The late 19th-century workers' cottages (to the right) are another distinctive feature. Photo © Chilterns Conservation Board

- Nucleated villages are concentrated along the northern fringe that borders the clay vales, where fields were enclosed from large open fields around these areas.

Farmstead and building types

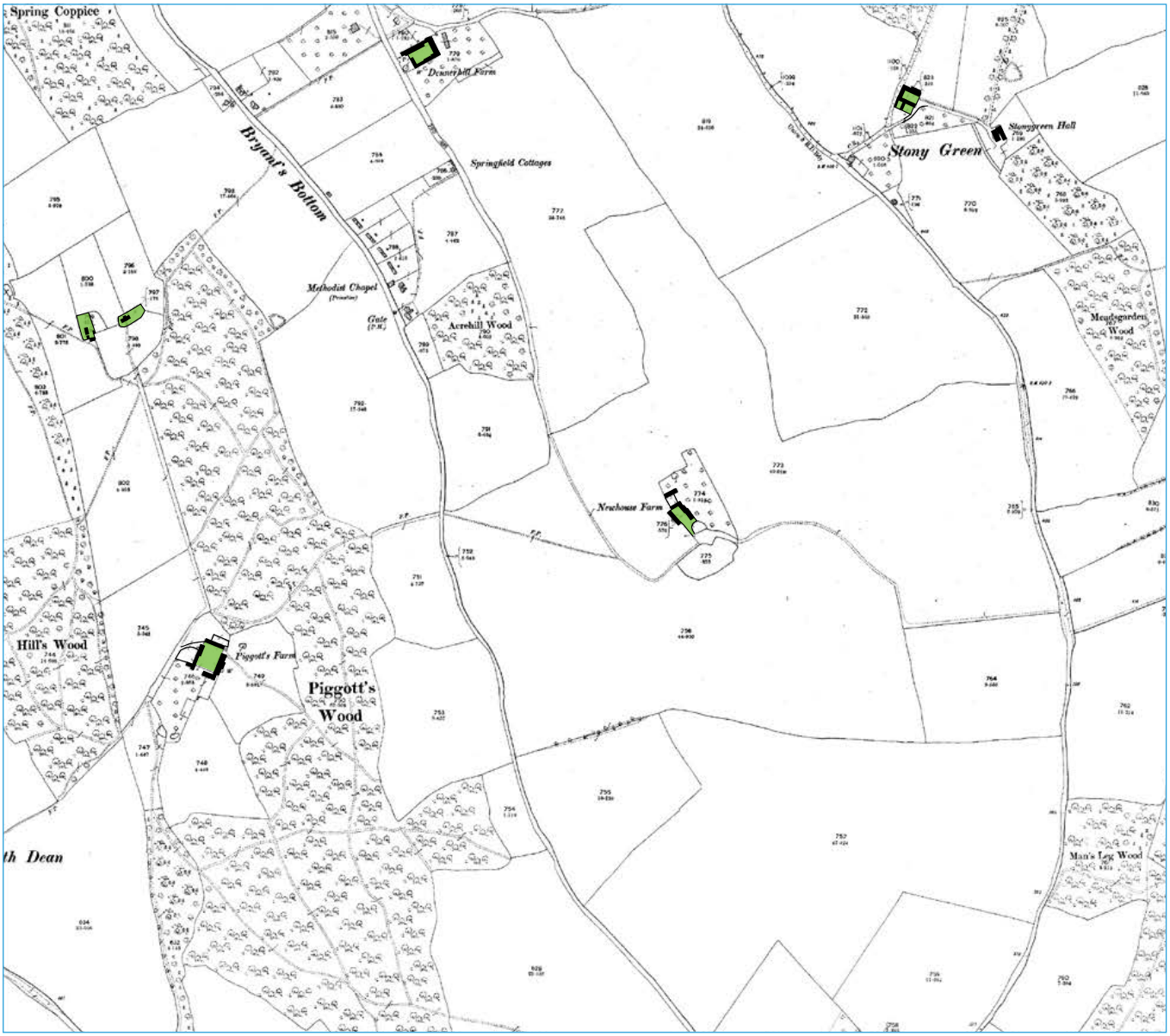
There are medium to high concentrations of 18th- century and earlier working farmstead buildings, mostly barns.

Farmstead types

- As with much of the downland of southern England where large farms developed from the medieval period, medium to large-scale, loose courtyard plans are the most common plan form. Farms are typically smaller than in many other chalk land areas, but they typically have the building types associated with arable agriculture: barns, including aisled barns, granaries, cart sheds and stables.
- There are comparatively few regular courtyard plans: they are concentrated in areas of late 18th- and 19th-century regular enclosure and on some estates.
- Smaller farmsteads remained as a distinctive feature of the Chilterns into the 20th century, but have only rarely survived.

Building types

- Large barns, typically of five or more bays, were often aisled with hipped roofs resulting in low eaves-lines, emphasising the mass of the roof over walling.
- Barns were often extended in length, sometimes creating an L-range to two sides of the yard. The re-use of timbers from earlier buildings was commonplace making the dating of some barns particularly difficult.
- These larger farmsteads with large barns usually had large stables for working horses, granaries (detached or incorporated into



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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0 0.25 miles

N

Piggott's Wood

Settlement in the Chilterns is often dispersed, with scattered farmsteads set within a landscape of piecemeal enclosures. Some of these fields were created through the assarting of the extensive woodland that survived on the downs, producing small, irregular fields such as those cut into Piggott's Wood. Larger, regular fields are usually the result of enclosure by agreement of open fields or the reorganisation of earlier field systems. Some areas were enclosed in the 19th century which created small and medium-scale regular fields with straight boundaries. These are often associated with smallholdings and squatters' cottages whose owners would supplement an income from farming with employment in woodland industries or as farm labourers. Farmsteads are typically medium in scale and of courtyard form, often with linked ranges built in flint and brick added to an earlier barn.

another building such as a loft in a barn or above a cart shed) and cart sheds.

- Buildings for cattle typically date from the 19th century and include open-fronted shelter sheds and cow houses arranged around yards and often connected to earlier barns.
- Outfarms and field barns associated with enclosure of higher downland were once common but many have now been demolished or are derelict.

A 17th- to 18th-century courtyard farmstead at Piggots Wood within its early enclosure landscape and woodland, as illustrated on the previous page. Photo © Historic England 29110/001

The loose courtyard of detached buildings to two or more sides of the yard is a typical arrangement for the area. The example above is bounded by a flint wall, and that below has two threshing barns, stables and a shelter shed for cattle built around the yard. Photos © Chilterns Conservation Board

Large-scale, regular layout such as this F-plan arrangement are rare and concentrated along the northern fringe. Photo © Chilterns Conservation Board

Small houses and cottages of 15th to 19th-century date commonly border areas of historic common land, but those associated with surviving farm buildings are extremely rare. Photo © Chilterns Conservation Board

Although five-bay threshing barns are the most common form in the area, smaller barns, such as this three-bay barn, and four-bay barns are also found. Photo © Chilterns Conservation Board

A typical threshing barn, with side aisles flanking the porch. Note the gap below the porch doors, into which would have fitted removable boards for use during threshing. Photo © Chilterns Conservation Board

Piecemeal development of barns, as in other downland areas reflecting the need to house more corn as farms expanded in size, is another distinctive feature. At the far end is a barn built in timber frame with brick infill, with an outshot clad with weatherboarding for housing farm animals (probably a bull). The late 18th- and early 19th-century barns in the foreground used another commonly found combination of flint with brick dressings and timber-frame with weatherboard for the side walls. The clay tile roofs are another highly distinctive feature of the Chilterns. Photo © Chilterns Conservation Board

The largest barns developed along the southern fringe of the Chilterns, with ready access to the brewing towns along the Thames and river transport to London. The massive, L-shaped, 18th-century barn at Ipsden is one of the largest in England.
Photo © Chilterns Conservation Board

A granary on staddle stones. These were built in great numbers in the later 18th and early to mid-19th centuries, but have been vulnerable to change.
Photo © Chilterns Conservation Board

A single-storey cart shed. Cart sheds typically face into routeways, and open-fronted shelter sheds for cattle into cattle yards. Some were built with first-floor granaries. Photo © Chilterns Conservation Board

Most stables are 19th century and were built in flint and/or brick, sometimes with lofts for hay and storing grain.
Photo © Bob Edwards

Materials and detail

- Timber-framing continued in use for farm buildings until the 19th century, often combined with solid masonry or brick gable ends with the framing typically clad in weatherboarding.
- Brick was used from the 15th century for houses, and more commonly from the 18th century when, often in combination with flint, it began to be used for farm buildings. Flint was typically uncoursed, and could also be mixed with chalk block.
- Plain clay tile is the most widespread roofing material. Tile probably often replaced thatch.
- There is a concentration of thatch in the Oxfordshire part of the Chilterns.

Most housing for cattle was in the form of open-fronted shelter sheds for cattle, or lean-tos (also known as outshots) attached to barns. Cow houses with doors, for milk cows or for rearing calfs, are not a common feature. Photo © Chilterns Conservation Board

A typical feature is the contrast between the use of timber-frame clad with weatherboarding and clay tile roof, and attached or associated buildings for horses or cattle, which were often built in brick with Welsh slate roofs. Photo © Chilterns Conservation Board

Uncoursed flint with brick quoins and dressings. Photo © Chilterns Conservation Board

Chalk block is combined here with patching in roughly-knapped flint, the bricks having the thick mortar joints and long, thin dimensions typical of pre-19th-century brickwork in the Chilterns. Photo © Chilterns Conservation Board

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