



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

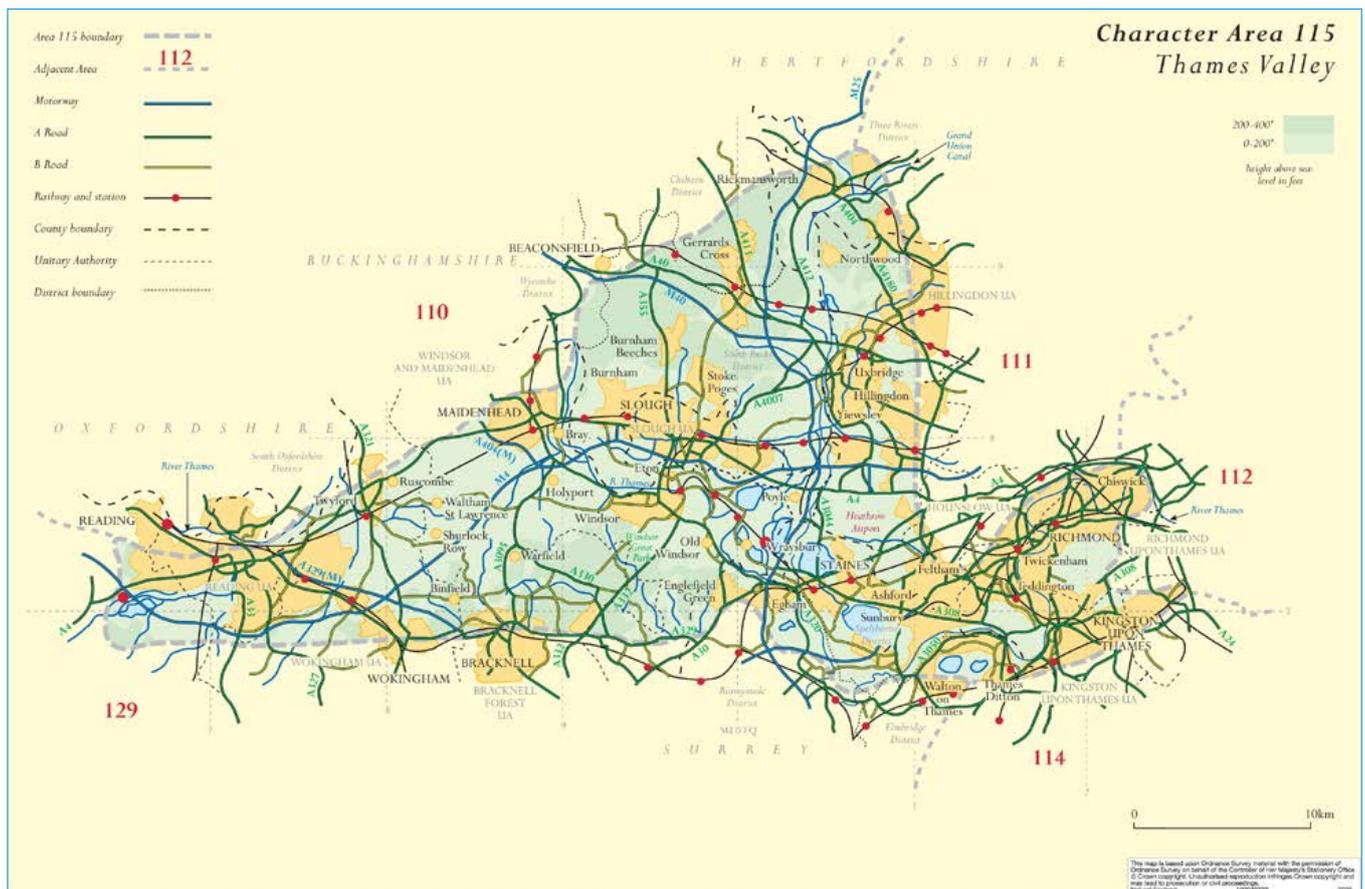
Thames Valley

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 115



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>).



This map shows the Thames Valley, with the numbers of neighbouring National Character Areas around it.

Front cover: Landscape at White Waltham, showing fields largely enclosed by the 17th century and a farmstead rebuilt in phases from the late medieval period. Photo © Historic England 27945/035

Summary

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

The Thames Valley Character Area is a wedge-shaped area widening from Reading to include Bracknell, Slough and Windsor areas, the Colne Valley and the south-west London fringes. It contains the open Thames floodplain surrounded by rolling, clay farmland. Of the Character Area, 24% is in agricultural use and almost 10% is woodland. To the north is an area of chalk where the rolling landscape reflects that of the nearby Chilterns landscape to the north. Urban influences increase to the east where there is a large amount of built development; 45% of the Character Area is classified as urban. The remainder of the Character Area is semi-natural or open water, largely due to extensive gravel workings.

Historic character

- There are high densities of pre-1750 farmstead buildings in a national context, but within an area subject to a high degree of late 19th- and 20th-century rural development.
- Farmsteads with pre-19th-century buildings are typically of loose courtyard plan with large barns (including aisled barns), stables, granaries and cattle housing (often a later addition).
- Planned, regular courtyard farmsteads, built as home and estate farms, are an important feature of this area.
- A relatively large number of small-scale farmsteads were established in the late 19th and 20th centuries.

Significance

- There are high densities of pre-1750 farmstead buildings by national standards, but within an area subject to a high degree of late 19th and 20th-century rural development.
- This area has some exceptionally large barns, testifying to its importance for corn production and access to the London market.
- Some important examples of planned and model farms are set within historic parks and are also influenced by the royal farmsteads built within Windsor Great Park.
- Traditional farmsteads which retain most or all of their working buildings are very rare. Most smaller-scale farmsteads passed into domestic use in the 20th century, if they survived, and any coherent examples are extremely rare.

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 (45.2%, the national average being 32%). The project also noted an above-average percentage (17.5%, the national average being 7.5%) of listed working farm buildings showing obvious signs of structural disrepair.

Historic development

- This was an area of intensive Romano-British and earlier settlement, and its agricultural development was heavily influenced by its proximity to London.
- Easy access to the London market meant that this area continued to focus on corn production, often with sheep farming, in periods when pastoral farming was more profitable elsewhere in the country.
- Market gardening also developed as a specialisation in parts of the area, supplying fruit and vegetables to London and there are some small areas of orchard surviving.
- On some heavier, poorly-drained land, dairy farming was also practised – again the supply of fresh milk to London being an important factor.
- Large parkland estates developed in parts of this area, most famously Windsor Great Park where the Royal family played a prominent role in the drainage and improvement of land and farmsteads in the 18th and 19th centuries, as well as a concentration to the north of Bracknell.
- The influence of London has also had a marked effect on the area, both through the development of estates by London merchants and the spread of outer London and growth of its towns (the medieval market centre of Reading, and Bracknell and Slough) in the late 19th and 20th centuries. As a result there are only remnants of farming and market gardening within the M25.
- Historically, this area was characterised by a high density of dispersed settlement, much



Foliejon Park, shown in the map overleaf. Photo © Bob Edwards

of it dating from the medieval period and relating to a complex mix of open-field strips, ancient enclosure from woodland and the planned enclosure of heathland in the late 18th and 19th centuries. There are also many polyfocal 'end' settlements, some of which developed as nucleated rural settlements in the late 19th and 20th centuries when there was a sharp increase in housing across the area. The use of 'End' in place-names is often associated with settlements that had developed by the 14th century as secondary settlements on or near marginal lands.

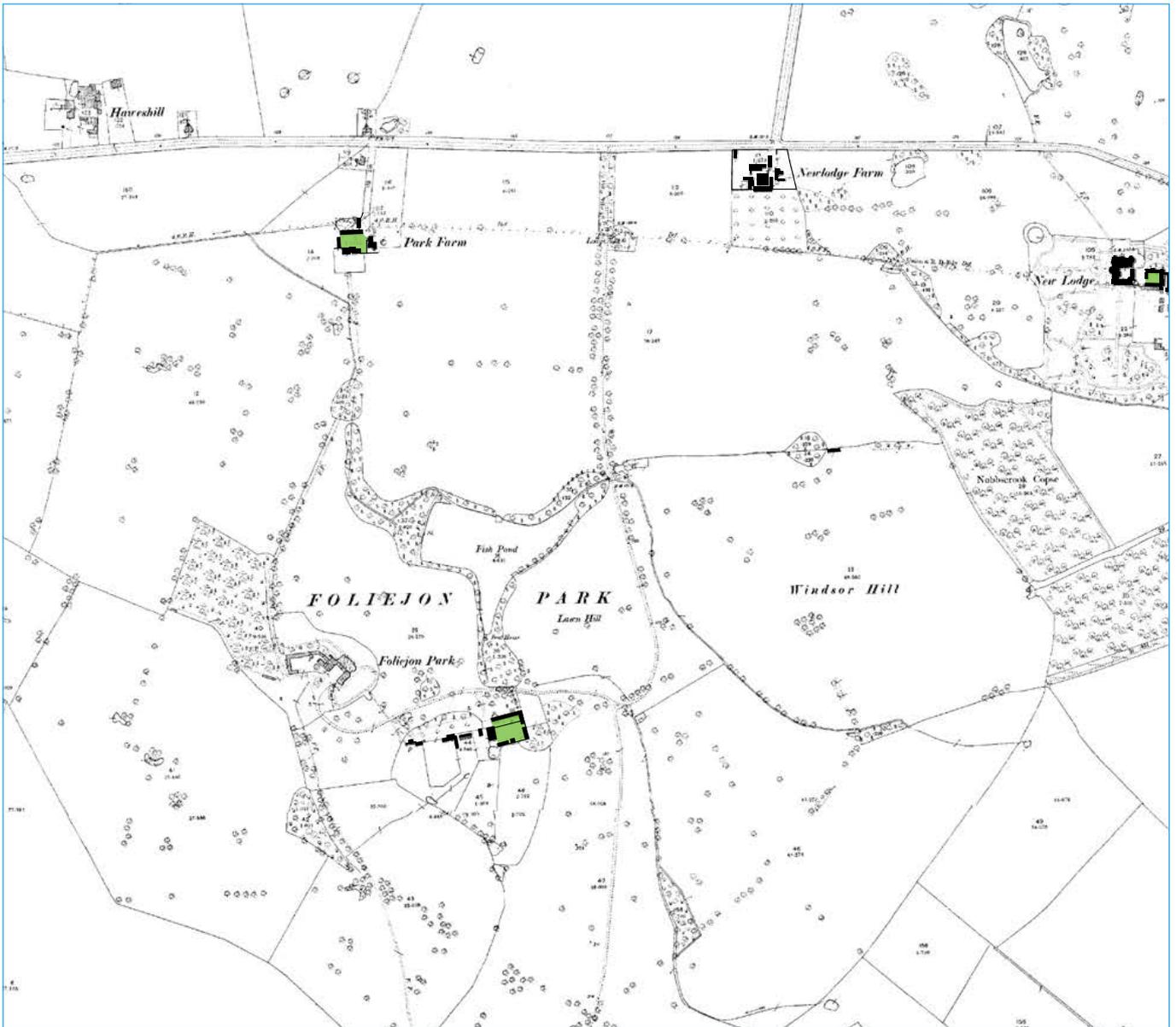
- There is considerable diversity in the types and sizes of fields across this area, overlain in turn by a large degree of 19th and 20th-century field enlargement and reorganisation. There are areas of small to medium irregular fields resulting from medieval woodland clearance, frequently with well-wooded boundaries. Piecemeal enclosure, with slightly curving boundaries relating to former arable strips, is concentrated on the edge of settlements (where fields have usually remained smaller in scale) and to the west of the area where woodland tends to form relatively small blocks set within the field pattern.

Landscape and settlement

- Historically, this area was characterised by a high density of dispersed settlement, much of it dating from the medieval period and relating to a complex mix of open-field strips, ancient enclosure from woodland and the planned enclosure of heathland in the late 18th and 19th centuries. There are also many polyfocal 'end' settlements, some of which developed as nucleated rural settlements in the late 19th and 20th centuries when there was a sharp increase in housing across the area. The use of 'End' in place-names is often associated with settlements that had developed by the 14th century as secondary settlements on or near marginal lands.
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Farmstead and building types

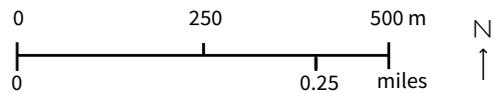
- The oldest, often timber-framed, farm buildings survive on the larger, loose courtyard farmsteads.
- Farmsteads with pre-19th-century buildings are typically of loose courtyard plan with large barns (including aisled barns), stables, granaries and cattle housing (often a later addition). There are also some large, 'multi-yard' farmsteads.
- There are many farmsteads with buildings principally of 19th-century date and built in brick with Welsh slate or plain clay tile roofs, often arranged in regular courtyard complexes. Some of these represent farmsteads built for non-farming mercantile owners in the mid 19th century, sometimes with decorative fronts. These include some early (1850s–70s) examples of covered yards.



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.



Foliejon Park

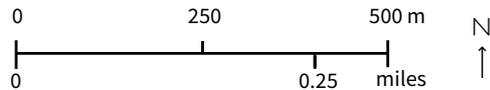
This area, west of London, attracted wealthy landowners who developed estates with landscaped parks surrounding their large houses. The presence of these landscaped parks is a major characteristic of the area. Probably the most famous of all is Windsor Great Park where George III and Prince Albert both developed farmsteads which illustrated the ideals of agricultural improvement and efficiency in process whilst being architecturally pleasing. The landed gentry often followed these examples when they built or rebuilt farmsteads on their estates. The most advanced designs were usually applied to the Home Farms where architect or surveyor-designed buildings could be seen within the setting of the park.



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



Touchen-end

Settlement in this Character Area consists of villages inter-mixed with hamlets and isolated farmsteads. These hamlets often have 'End' place-names and often seem to have developed between the 12th and 14th centuries. Around these settlements is a landscape that was largely created through piecemeal enclosure, including the clearance of woodland, resulting in small to medium-scale, irregular fields with blocks of woodland. The larger fields at the south of the map extract are probably the result of the amalgamation of smaller fields through boundary removal. Farmsteads in this landscape are predominantly of medium-scale, loose courtyard plan – some having an L-plan element – with some farmsteads having more than one yard, forming regular multi-yard plans.



This late 19th-century, regular courtyard farmstead displays the Domestic Revival style of architecture that was particularly popular in the south-east. Photo © Susanna Wade Martins



Loose courtyards are the predominant plan type across the Character Area. Larger examples can have two barns, stables and shelter sheds for cattle. Photo © Bob Edwards



A regular L-plan range consisting of a timber-framed threshing barn and an attached, probably later single-storey range. Photo © Bob Edwards



A 19th-century, regular U-plan farmstead built in brick. Photo © Bob Edwards



A late 19th-century stable of a home farm employing some Domestic Revival architectural features, this style being particularly influential in this area in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Photo © Susanna Wade Martins



Timber-framed threshing barns, typically of five-bays, are characteristic of the traditional farmsteads of the area. Barns typically have gabled or half-hipped roofs. Photo © Bob Edwards



A timber-framed barn partly rebuilt in brick. Photo © Bob Edwards



A threshing barn within a home farm within a parkland. This unusual barn is of three bays with open-sided hay barns to either end. Photo © Bob Edwards



A single-storey, timber-framed stable. Early examples of stables are rare. Photo © Bob Edwards



A large, early 19th-century brick stable with a hay loft over. Photo © Bob Edwards



This late 19th-century, two-storey cow house and loft lay on the edge of the expanding urban area of London. Photo © Bob Edwards

Materials and detail

- There was extensive use of timber-frame and thatch for working buildings prior to the 19th century.
- Brick with plain clay tile or Welsh slate roofs became more common in the 19th century.
- Chalk block is occasionally found in farm buildings: the use of this material in southern England is rare.



The use of chalk block is rare in southern England.
Photo © Bob Edwards



This farmstead at White Waltham (see front cover) dates from the 12th to 13th centuries, the 15th-century house being set in a moated site. It has two yards, one with a threshing barn (to the left) dating from the late 16th century and the other with an 18th-century hay barn. Photo © Historic England 27945/029



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