



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

# New Forest

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 131



# 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>).

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**Front cover:** A planned, full regular courtyard plan farmstead built on the Beaulieu estate in the characteristic yellow Beaulieu brick. The model farm stands adjacent to the ruins of the massive grange barn of St. Leonard's. Within the west end of the medieval barn is a large, 17th-century barn. Photo © Bob Edwards



This map shows the New Forest, with the numbers of neighbouring National Character Areas around it. The key sub-areas are:

1. New Forest Lowland and Heath
2. New Forest Coast
3. Avon Valley

# Summary

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

This is an elevated plateau that lies between the Avon Valley (to the west) and the Test Valley and Southampton Water (to the east). Its southern boundary is bounded by the Solent and its northern boundary extends into Wiltshire. The area is a mosaic of ancient woodland, wood pasture, heath, grassland, pasture and arable farmland. Of the area, 29% is in agricultural use and 31% is woodland. There is a surprising amount of built development, particularly around the edges of the area: 9.5% is urban. The remainder of the Character Area is defined as upland, semi-natural or coastal land. The majority (85.9%) is in the New Forest National Park.

## Historic character

- There is a predominantly dispersed settlement pattern with small villages along the Avon Valley. Common edge settlement is found on the fringes of heathland.
- Medium and occasionally large-scale courtyard farmsteads are found on the coastal plain and in the Avon Valley. There are small, loose courtyard plans, dispersed cluster plans and smallholdings within and around the heathland of the Forest.
- Some large threshing barns of late medieval to 18th-century date but barns are mostly three to five bays in length. Stables, granaries and shelter sheds for cattle are another distinctive feature.
- Buildings on smallholdings are small-scale and are often crudely built structures for stock.

## Significance

- Of recorded farmsteads, 66% retain some traditional farmstead character whilst 50% retain more than 50% of their historic form.
- Eleven percent of farmsteads retain a farmhouse of pre-1700 date but there are few pre-1700 working buildings. Farmsteads with early buildings are concentrated along the south coast fringe and the Avon Valley.
- Farm buildings associated with smallholders in the Forest are rare survivals and few are listed. They are typically small, poorly built structures that are highly vulnerable to loss but they represent an important element of the social history of the area, significant in a national context as a survival of smallholdings with their landscapes.
- There are some examples of planned, mid- to late 19th-century estate farmsteads, notably on the Beaulieu estate; these are generally rare in central southern England.

## Present and future issues

- In this National Character Area, the Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a low proportion of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use (13.8%, the national average being 32%). The project also

noted just above-average percentage (8.1%, the national average being 7.5%) of listed working buildings showing obvious signs of structural disrepair.

## Historic development

- The New Forest consists largely of acidic sands, clays, gravels and waterlogged bogs and mires. Some parts are too poor to support even woodland. The New Forest is famous as being a hunting ground created by William the Conqueror but it is possible that it was a royal hunting forest in the Saxon period. Domesday Book suggests that the Royal Forest was at least enlarged after 1066 with references to many settlements being lost to create the forest.
- Stock rearing was most important in and around the heaths, with pigs being the most numerous animals; the New Forest was the prime bacon producing part of Hampshire. Additionally, beef cattle and horses and ponies were reared for market. Sheep were traditionally excluded from the Forest because they would compete with the deer for grazing.
- Larger, arable-based farms developed in the Avon Valley where the flood plain of the river provided fertile soils for corn crops.
- Beaulieu Abbey, a Cistercian house, was founded by King John in the early 13th century.

The Cistercians usually built their abbeys in remote locations. The abbey grew into a rich house primarily on the profits of wool and corn. The remains of its massive barn at one of its grange farms, St Leonard's, stand as a testament of its wealth.

- After the Dissolution of the Monasteries several large estates developed on the south coastal fringe. This was an area of corn production combined with cattle rearing from the 17th century, although the availability of pasture on the heaths close-by would have also supported pigs turned out in the autumn to feed on the beech mast, giving a truly mixed character to the farming of the area.
- Within and around the heathland in the central part of the area there were generally very small land holdings, some as little as one acre. Commoning – using the resources of the Forest for stock grazing in particular – reduced the amount of land required to practise subsistence farming often undertaken with part-time working in woodland industries.

## Landscape and settlement

### New Forest Lowland and Heath

- A generally undulating landform varies from steep to almost flat with plateaux and ridges overlooking both broad and steep-sided valleys. The open forest consists of open heaths, ancient woodlands with small clearings, valley mires, bogs and streams. Around and within the open forest is enclosed

forest with small fields of unintensively grazed pasture, some created from before the 14th century.

- Historic settlement is generally dispersed, with many small cottages and farmsteads, and, along the southern edge of the Forest, some loosely clustered settlements. Development within the area in the 20th century has often

resulted in strings of infill alongside some of the roads linking once isolated properties, or the development of open spaces within the loose clusters of settlement, creating large nucleations.

- Ringwood developed as a medieval market town from a Saxon royal estate centre whilst Lyndhurst grew up around a medieval hunting lodge, although its major period of growth was in the 19th century when it became the focus for large houses set within small parks.
- This area was characterised by generally very small land holdings, some as little as one acre.
- Along the western edge of the Forest farmsteads are often hidden from view in the thickly wooded, undulating landscape. Elsewhere farmsteads are often seen alongside the roads.

### **New Forest Coast**

- A very gently undulating coastal plain, with a gradual slope to the coastline, becomes increasingly open towards the coast cut by the wooded valleys of small streams.
- Good quality loamy soils afforded intensive arable production, but there are some small areas of wood pasture. This is a landscape of medium sized enclosures, mostly the result of enclosure by agreement from the 17th century, although there are some areas of smaller, irregular fields which are of medieval origin created through assarting. There is generally little evidence for formal Parliamentary enclosure.

- The area has a dispersed settlement pattern of scattered farmsteads with a few historically small villages that have often been greatly expanded through 20th-century development. Some of the isolated farmsteads are of medieval origin. Lymington developed as a medieval new town in the 13th century.
- There are a number of large estates concentrated in the south-east of the area, including the Beaulieu Estate which originated as a Cistercian Abbey in the 13th century and the Exbury, Cadland and Pylewell estates.

### **Avon Valley**

- This is a broad, generally open river valley with a rich flood plain and open arable fields on the well-drained gravel terrace. Extensive water meadow systems developed from the 17th century supported and improved a sheep-corn system of agriculture that had been practised from the 13th century, particularly in the northern part of the area. Mixed farmland and woodland is found along the southern part of the area where it borders the New Forest.
- Dispersed settlement with a few small, nucleated, medieval villages and hamlets interspersed with farmsteads, many of which were established by the 17th century.
- Along the eastern edge are dispersed and roadside settlements reflecting wood pasture agriculture, with some areas of encroachment into the Forest.

## **Farmstead and building types**

- By the mid-19th century, most of the few farmsteads that existed in this area had a loose courtyard plan or consisted of two or three linked ranges around a yard.
- There are occasional examples of small dispersed cluster and linear plans.
- Where barns were provided, they tended to be small, usually of just three bays, and date from the 18th or early 19th century.
- Most buildings seen on larger farmsteads are associated with the housing of stock and are usually of 19th-century date.
- Farm buildings associated with the smallholdings of commoners are largely

unrepresented in current knowledge and designation of historic farm buildings.

- Buildings on smallholdings are small-scale and often crudely built structures for stock.
- Although some timber-framed barns are found around the area most farm buildings of 18th or 19th-century date are brick-built with plain tile or slate half-hipped or gabled roofs.
- The buildings associated with smallholdings display a range of walling materials including earth (often left unrendered), brick, rough boarding and corrugated tin. Roofing is usually slate or tile. Thatch is rarely seen on farm buildings. Historically, materials such as gorse, heather and turves would have been used to roof buildings.
- Methods of reducing the quantity of a building material used include using rat-trap brickwork (laying bricks on their edge) and laying slates economically (leaving a gap between slates).

### **New Forest Coast**

- Nearer the New Forest, heath farms are smaller and typically provided with 19th-century, brick buildings.
- Elsewhere, most of the larger farms had developed loose courtyard plans by the 19th century. On the larger estates, 19th-century, planned regular courtyards can be found including a model farm complex on the Beaulieu Estate.
- There are few pre-18th-century farm buildings. Most barns date from the 18th century and early 19th centuries. Increasing numbers of buildings from the 18th century were built in brick with plain tile or slate half-hipped or gabled roofs.
- Granaries are typically of 18th or 19th-century date, timber-framed and set on staddle stones. Mid to late 19th-century planned farmsteads often a building or part of a range with a granary sited over a cart shed.
- Buildings for cattle are found on most farms, typically consisting of single-storey cow

houses or open-fronted cattle shelters of 19th-century date.

- Stables, dating from the 18th or 19th century, are found on most farms.

### **Avon Valley**

- This is an area of farmsteads of widely differing size, from large estates holding land in the valley to the many smallholdings of only a few acres held by commoners utilising the New Forest for pasture. Farmsteads are very prominent features in both the small villages and in the open valley, with buildings often adjacent to the lanes running along the valley and valley sides. Loose courtyard plans were established by the 19th century on many of the larger farmsteads, often as a result of incremental growth in the number of farm buildings, reflecting the increasing extent and intensity of arable production.
- Many farmsteads in the valley are dominated by one or more timber-framed threshing barns commonly of five bays dating from the 18th or early 19th centuries. Barns of only three bays are sometimes associated with properties now removed from agricultural activity.
- Free-standing timber-framed granaries set on staddle stones of 18th or 19th-century date are predominantly found in the north.
- Buildings for cattle are found on many farms. Cattle housing usually consists of single-storey, open-fronted shelter sheds or lean-tos built against the barn facing into the yard. Buildings for cattle are normally of 19th-century date, either as additions to earlier complexes or part of planned farmsteads of the 19th century.
- Farm buildings associated with the smallholdings of New Forest commoners, found along the eastern edge of the area, are often the first buildings to be demolished when the smallholdings change ownership. Little is known about them, but they represent a rare survival of smallholdings in their landscape in a national context.

## New Forest Coast and Avon Valley

- Most barns dating between the 16th and 18th century are timber-framed and are similar in construction and size to the barns found across much of the county.
- This area, that stretches into the downland areas to the north, west and, to a lesser extent, to the south, lies within one of the main concentrations of timber-framed, aisled barns in the country. Barns are typically of five bays, sometimes being the result of the enlargement of three-bay barns.
- The eastern end of the area also has a significant concentration of pre-1550 barns.
- Free-standing staddle granaries are also characteristic.
- Staddle barns, a late 18th-century variation on the threshing barn, are occasionally found in the adjacent downland Character Areas.
- There are some examples of timber-framed hay barns, usually of 19th-century date, which reflect the greater emphasis on pastoral farming than in the Hampshire Downs to the south. These buildings, partly open-sided, can be set upon staddle stones.



A regular L-plan created by the linking of a 19th-century shelter shed and an earlier timber-framed barn. Photo © Bob Edwards



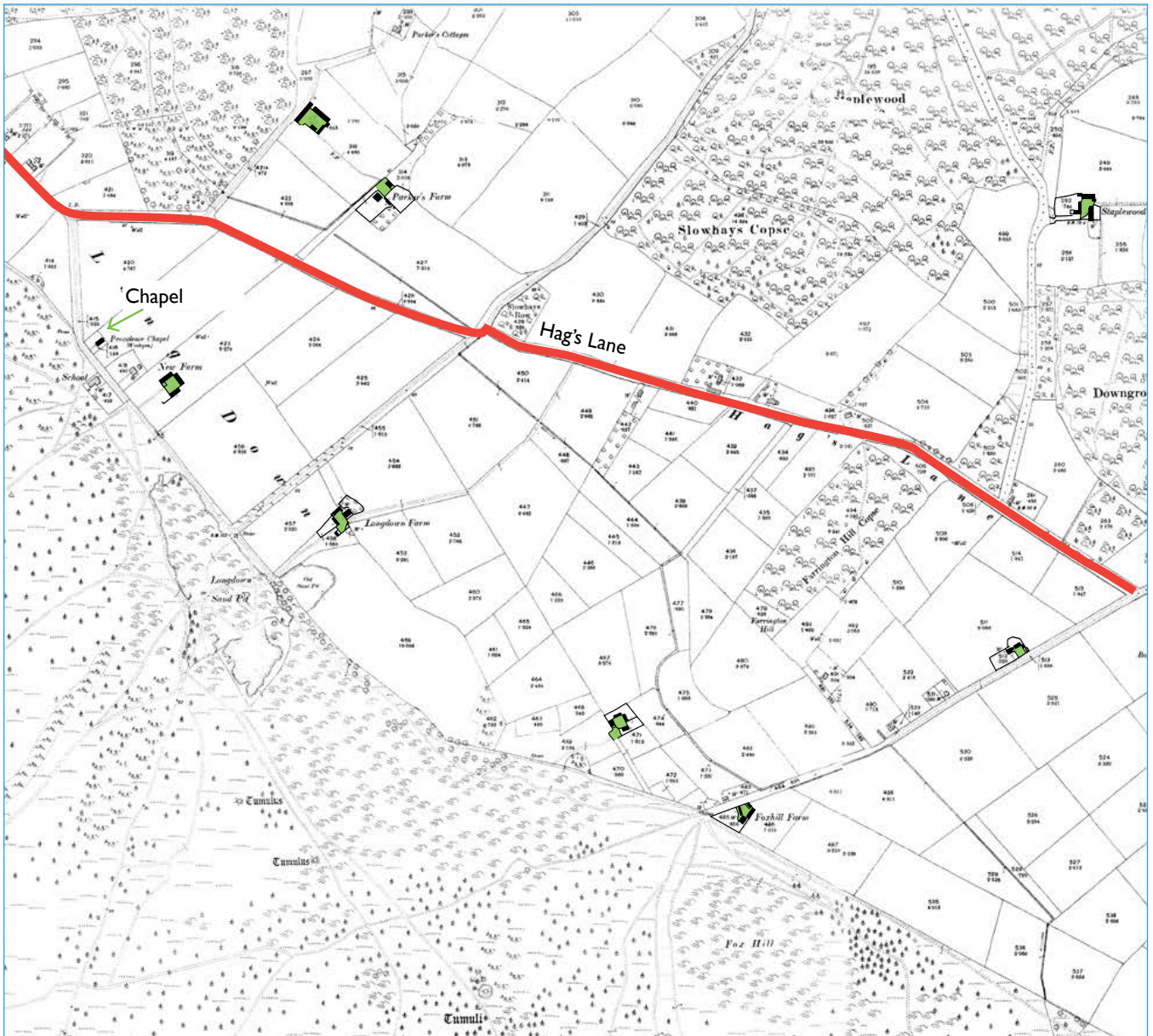
Typical small-scale, ad hoc buildings on a smallholding of the New Forest Commoner. Such buildings, whilst they are usually of mid- to late 19th-century date, are highly characteristic and also extremely vulnerable to change. Photo © Bob Edwards




A five-bay threshing barn, probably of 17th-century date within the agriculturally fertile southern part of the Character Area. The Beaulieu estate added further ranges to enclose the yard beyond the barn in the late 19th century. Photo © Bob Edwards

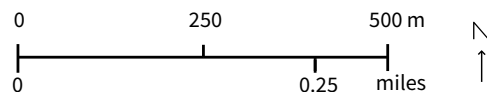


A small, earth-built, stable or cow shed, typical of the small-scale farm buildings that would have been seen on many New Forest small-holdings. Such survivals are now very rare. Photo © Bob Edwards



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



## New Forest Heath

Historically, the heathland of the New Forest was protected from enclosure to protect the deer and, later, the woodland for shipbuilding. Despite this, there were frequent attempts to create smallholdings by enclosing usually irregularly shaped closes throughout the medieval period. The fields to the north of Hag's Lane generally appear to have some irregularity in their form, are larger and are associated with larger farmsteads. They result from piecemeal enclosure undertaken before the 19th century. Hag's Lane probably represents a former edge of the heathland. There was more extensive enclosure during the 19th century, when the New Forest was no longer a royal hunting ground and was important as a source of timber. These enclosures, especially visible to the south of Hag's Lane, typically have straight boundaries creating small to medium-scale fields with new farmsteads of loose courtyard form.

A small-scale, roadside farmstead consisting of a farmhouse and a small, loose courtyard with buildings to three sides located within an area of enclosed heathland. Photo © Bob Edwards

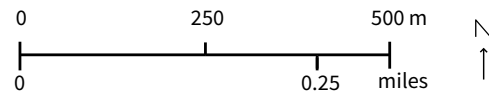




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Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.



## Coastal Plain

The coastal plain offered fertile soils which supported arable farming. After the Dissolution of the Monasteries a number of large estates developed in this part of the New Forest. The farmland was subject to piecemeal enclosure, creating medium to large-scale fields, and later reorganisation and enlargement of farms has resulted in some large fields and regular boundaries seen on the map. Some of the farmsteads in this area developed from medieval estate farms (granges) of Beaulieu Abbey and include 16th-century barns. Many also reflect their estate ownership in the use of regular courtyard plans, often utilising red brick or the local yellow Beaulieu brick, and large 19th-century farmhouses.



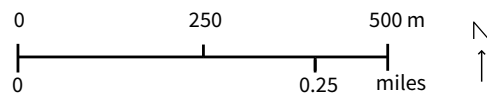
The southern part of the Character Area consists of a belt of fertile arable land with large farmsteads, some belonging to estates, set within a landscape of large fields created through piecemeal enclosure. Photo © Bob Edwards



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



## Avon Valley

The Avon Valley forms the western boundary of the New Forest. The wide, flat floodplain of the river provided fertile, alluvial soils which supported arable farming. Along the valley there were small villages and isolated farmsteads, the farmsteads typically being medium to large-scale courtyard plan types. The farmsteads on the map are sited along the valley-edge terrace, with water meadows along the river and arable fields on the flood plain. They include some multi-yard farmsteads and include a range of building types similar to those seen in the downland areas of Hampshire; barns are five bays or more, and other characteristic buildings are granaries, stables, cart sheds and shelter sheds to cattle which were grazed on the water meadows of the valley floor. To the right of the map are the heaths of the New Forest, which these farms occasionally used for grazing.





Shelter shed with plain clay tile roof. Photo © Bob Edwards



An ornate dairy built as part of one of the Beaulieu estate's model farms. Photo © Bob Edwards  
Photo © Bob Edwards



Piggeries built in mass concrete with vaulted roofs built c.1880 for A.T.T. Peterson who made important experiments in the use of this material.  
Photo © Bob Edwards

## Materials and detail

- From the 18th century, brick became more common and replaced timber-framing by the 19th century. In the Beaulieu area, a distinctive yellow brick is characteristic.
- Slate and plain tile roofs are typical, although pantile is used on some buildings. Straw thatch is now rarely seen on farm buildings in the area, but it is seen on cottages.
- Earth walling is occasionally seen in small buildings nearing the heathland areas.



# Historic England

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