



**Shropshire Historic Farmsteads Characterisation Project (5560 MAIN)  
THE WEST MIDLANDS FARMSTEADS AND LANDSCAPES PROJECT**



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# THE WEST MIDLANDS FARMSTEADS AND LANDSCAPES PROJECT: SHROPSHIRE

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## County Executive Summary

### 1 Background

This county report focuses on the results of the mapping of farmsteads across Shropshire, which comprises the first step in the construction of an evidence base across the county. This Report is part of the West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscape Project, led by English Heritage in partnership with the region's county, metropolitan and unitary councils and with the support of Advantage West Midlands. The Project has:

1. Mapped and described the locations and characteristics of over 22,000 historic farmsteads, how they have changed over time and how they relate to the landscape.
2. Described the present use of historic farmsteads and their role in the economy of the West Midlands.
3. Developed a set of planning tools to inform spatial planning, land management, planning applications and economic development

The key products of the West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscape Project are:

**GUIDANCE** aimed at planners, historic environment professionals, architects and surveyors, and applicants.

**A Planning Tools Report:** Tools for informing change at an area and site-based scale, in the form of an *Area Assessment Framework* for use in the development of planning guidance and land management, and a *Site Assessment Framework* for identifying key issues at the earliest possible stage when adaptive reuse or new build are being considered in the context of a historic farmstead.

**Farmstead Character Statements:** These comprise illustrated guidance in the form of:

- A *West Midlands Farmsteads Character Statement* which outlines the character of farmsteads across the West Midlands, summarising their historical development, landscape and settlement context, the key farmstead and building types, and use of materials. It is followed by summaries of the key findings of the overall project outlining the scale, survival and use of farmsteads for individual county and local authorities as well as the National Character Areas which fall within the West Midlands.
- *Area Farmsteads Character Statements* which deepen this guidance and help the reader identify the key characteristics for the 23 National Character Areas that fall within or astride the West Midlands.

**AN EVIDENCE BASE** in the form of:

- *County Reports* which analyse the results of the farmsteads mapping held on each county and (within the Central Conurbation) Historic Environment Record, against the results where available of Landscape Character Assessment and Historic Landscape Characterisation.
- A *Technical Report* which provides a detailed statistical analysis of the patterns of farmstead use across the West Midlands, and their social and economic role.

The future of historic farm buildings is increasingly dependent on finding a use for which they were not originally intended. Solutions to finding a future sustainable use require an integrated approach, considering their merits as heritage assets, their role in the wider landscape and the changing structure of rural communities and economies. Research at a national level – see [www.helm.org.uk/farmbuildings](http://www.helm.org.uk/farmbuildings) for work by English Heritage and its partners on farmsteads – has examined the drivers for change and the effectiveness of policy at national and international level. This has emphasised the need to develop an evidence base, and for future strategies and approaches towards the re-use of historic farmsteads and their buildings to be based upon an understanding their sensitivity to and potential for change.

Historic farmsteads are integral to the rural landscape, communities and economy of the West Midlands. Through understanding the character, condition and present day role of historic farmsteads and their traditional working buildings, policy and delivery programmes can respond appropriately in supporting their sustainable use, conserving landscape character and realising economic benefits. This informed approach responds to the structural changes in the farming industry which have hastened the redundancy of traditional farm buildings. Planning policy and guidance at a national level emphasises the importance of a positive and evidence-based approach to future change informed by a clear understanding of local needs and circumstances. This also heightens the need to:

- develop an understanding of the potential for and sensitivity to change of farmsteads in order to inform and guide future change in the form of land management and planning policy and guidance;
- help those considering adaptive reuse and new build to consider and, where relevant, capitalise upon the distinctive quality of traditional farmsteads and buildings;
- consider historic farmsteads as part of the wider landscape and in the context of the changing structure of rural communities and economies;
- use the understanding of inherited character to inform opportunities for future sustainable development and new architecture that either reinforces the existing settlement pattern or creates new settlement with a strong sense of identity.

Future change in historic farmsteads is inevitable if they are to be retained as a distinctive part of the rural landscape. The mapping and interpretation of historic farmsteads across the West Midlands offers for the first time a framework for informing this change. The context it provides will help decision-makers to evaluate what the future uses should be and how they can be achieved in ways which are based on an understanding of variations in the character and significance of farmsteads, and their sensitivity to and potential for change.

## **2 Results: The Historic Character of Farmsteads in Shropshire**

*Historic farmsteads are Heritage Assets which make a significant and highly varied contribution to the county's rural building stock, landscape character and local distinctiveness*

The mapping of farmsteads across the county of Shropshire recorded 6194 farmsteads and 1764 outfarms and field barns. Of the farmsteads that survive to the present day 75.5% do not include a listed building. In view of their predominant 19<sup>th</sup> century date few are likely to meet current criteria for listing. These farmsteads will largely be unrecorded in the Historic Environment Record and their contribution to the character of the landscape and local distinctiveness has largely been over-looked. This understanding has now been deepened by interpretation of the farmsteads data against the

National Character Areas (NCAs), the Shropshire Historic Landscape Character assessment (HLC) and the Shropshire Landscape Character Assessment (LCA). The Annexe to this summary provides a short introduction to the key area distinctions within the county, and the text below summarises the key results:

*Historic Farmstead and Landscape Character*

- 11.5% of farmsteads are located within villages (regional average 12.6%)
- 18.9% are located within hamlets (regional average 12.2%)
- The remainder (69.6%) are isolated (regional average 75.2%).

Comparisons with both the HLC and LCA found that the density of farmsteads is intricately related to the development of the landscape over time.

- Areas with the highest densities of farmsteads typically include smaller-scale enclosed fields with large numbers of small-medium-scale farmstead types,
- Areas with lower densities of farmsteads typically include larger-scale enclosed fields with lower numbers of large-scale farmstead types.
- As time passed, fields increased in size, and where they did, holdings were amalgamated or enlarged and farmsteads became more and more spread out. The farmsteads themselves also increased in size along with their surrounding fieldscapes.

Villages, and lower densities of isolated farmsteads, are concentrated across the central Shropshire Plain, Corve Dale and the other dales in the Shropshire Hills. The highest densities of isolated farmsteads are located in the Oswestry Hills, the southern uplands and the mosslands and heaths in parts of the north of the county. In contrast the main landscape types with large-scale regular plan farmsteads and fields, mostly resulting from 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century farm amalgamation and improvement, are in the Estate Farmlands in north Shropshire and the broad valleys to the south, the Sandstone Estatelands to the east and the High Enclosed Plateau of the Clun, Shropshire Hills and Oswestry Uplands. In between and across most of the county are landscapes and their farmsteads that reflect a piecemeal process of development from the medieval period, with different degrees of 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century farm amalgamation and improvement.

This process of development is reflected in the evident and potential dates of surviving buildings:

1. Recorded Buildings. These are mostly based on the descriptions of houses and working buildings that have been listed, although in Shropshire additional dating information was provided by the 1981-82 Farm Building Survey of north Shropshire which identified 330 farmsteads associated with over 2100 farm buildings, and farmsteads previously recorded on the Historic Environment Record (HER) collated from unpublished grey literature reports.
2. The main concentrations of listed 18<sup>th</sup> century houses and working buildings are in the sandstone plateau and the central plain, where estates were most active and large farms developed in this period. 17<sup>th</sup> century and earlier buildings are concentrated around Shrewsbury, where large farms developed to supply its market, and across large areas of the southern hills and pastures.
3. Potential. Older farmhouses are often found in association with newer farm buildings and in some cases older working farm buildings have been encased in later brick and stone walling:

- Buildings of late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century appearance within settlements, and those in landscapes enclosed at an early date, are likely to include earlier timber-framed and stone cores.
- Landscapes affected by the reorganisation and enlargement of fields (reorganised piecemeal enclosure) and large-scale regular enclosure of earlier farmland are also likely to retain early buildings. Thirty-two farmsteads have working buildings that are older than their farmhouse, and on these sites the vast majority of farmhouses have been replaced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Of the listed 19<sup>th</sup> century farmhouses in this category, two are associated with pre-1600 farm buildings, seven with 17<sup>th</sup> century farm buildings and seventeen with 18<sup>th</sup> century farm buildings. These farmsteads are concentrated in landscapes of large-scale capital investment in the 1840-70 period, such as Area 4 (see Area Subdivisions) where the results of extensive survey on the Attingham Estate and elsewhere shows that in some cases the principal agricultural range is a recladding of an earlier timber-framed barn or animal housing.

*Smallholdings* are concentrated in the lowland areas of reclaimed moss and heath (in north Shropshire in particular) and in the upland areas with access to industrial by-employment in the southern Oswestry Uplands, the Clee Hills and the Western Uplands (including the Stiperstones). Small pockets of smallholding survive across the Shropshire Plain; a distribution which may once have been more extensive prior to the reorganisation and amalgamation of the landscape. Surviving examples are very rare.

*Outfarms and field barns* display strong localised patterns. Large outfarms are concentrated within the zones of large-scale farms, and field barns are apparent across the county but tend to cluster around the main settlement centres, with denser concentrations in the north of the county particularly in the dairying region, perhaps for sheltering cattle. These are generally not suitable for alternative use, and have been subject to high rates of loss.

#### *Historic Farmstead Survival and Change*

Across the county the rates of survival of historic farmsteads are slightly higher than the average across the West Midlands region:

- 32.7% of farmsteads have retained all of their working buildings (regional average 26.2%)
- 36.8% of farmsteads have had some loss but retained more than 50% of their historic footprint (regional average 39.6%)
- 17.6% of farmsteads have retained some working buildings but with more than 50% loss of their historic footprint (regional average 15.8%)

Across Shropshire 4.5% of farmsteads have been lost (below the regional average of 9.9%), these being concentrated in areas of 20<sup>th</sup> century settlement expansion. On 7.1% of recorded sites the house survives but the working buildings have been demolished (exceeding the regional average of 6.4%), and all the buildings on 1.9% of sites (regional average of 1.9%) have been demolished and completely rebuilt. In areas of settlement development 41.2% of the farmsteads have been lost or remain as a house only. Those that are set away from settlements have much better survival rates with only 14.2% lost or remaining just as a house. Fewer farmsteads are located in villages in the northern half of Shropshire and in most cases only the farmhouse survives or indeed the farmsteads have been lost altogether.

### **3 Results: Current Use of Farmsteads**

*Historic farmsteads are Heritage Assets which, through continued agricultural use and new uses, have significant potential to make an important contribution to the rural economy and communities away from market towns and other rural centres.*

Professor Peter Bibby and Paul Brindley of the Department for Town and Regional Planning at the University of Sheffield used the data collected for Shropshire, matched against postal and business information, to reveal the present social and economic role of historic farmsteads. This is fully reported on in the Technical Report cited above. These show how, through continued agricultural and new uses, farmsteads have significant potential to make an important contribution to Shropshire's rural economy and communities away from market towns and other rural centres.

- The greatest proportion of farmsteads which remain in agricultural use are in the north western and south western parts of the county.
- The greatest proportion which have fallen out of agricultural use are situated in eastern Shropshire and within a part of southern Shropshire in a zone centred on Craven Arms.
- The greatest numbers of registered offices based within historic farmsteads are located in eastern Shropshire to the south and east of Telford.
- A broad East-West divide is apparent across the county:
  - Along the Welsh borders are large numbers of surviving farmsteads in agricultural use associated with land of high amenity and landscape value. Condition and use surveys of listed and unlisted farmsteads using the farmstead data have deepened our understanding of the high rates of structural disrepair found on listed buildings: around 30% of farm buildings require long-term or urgent maintenance to prevent decline.
  - In the southeast of the county, access to the West Midlands conurbation appears to have increased the numbers of residential conversions of traditional farm buildings.
- It is also clear that changing farming economies are leading to an accelerating demand for new working sheds whilst traditional buildings, where not in low key uses, are being considered as tools for diversifying farm businesses and in some cases disposal onto the property market.

### **4 Additional Issues in Shropshire**

#### *The Agricultural Industry*

A number of county level studies have shown how the drivers for change are operating within Shropshire. For example, the Shropshire Farming Study of 2002 found that, despite a 14.6% decline in the number of workers between 1981 and 2001, 2.2% of the county's workforce is employed within the agricultural sector compared to the national average of 1%. Traditional medium sized family farms of 20-99ha are currently experiencing a variety of pressures and decreased in number by 17% between 1981 and 2001. Within the same time period the number of small farms of under 20 hectares have risen by 20%. 28.5% of respondents questioned as part of this study cited the desire to increase holding size or expand farm enterprise as anticipated reasons for change to their farm businesses. In a survey of historic farmsteads on the Attingham Estate, where the mean holding size is 127.5ha, 18% of farmers viewed their traditional farm buildings as a liability as opposed the 73%

who viewed them as an asset.<sup>1</sup> This work also showed their increased rates of redundancy and use for general storage from 1984. A survey of historic farmsteads in the Wem area found that a greater proportion of working buildings were used for animal housing on the smaller dairy farms, but that an increasing number of farmsteads have been thrown onto the property market. Particularly vulnerable to redundancy are those farmsteads located in areas with poorly-drained soils (the Pastoral Farmlands) in contrast to the Principal Settled Farmlands with its larger farms and varied soil types. Commuters live in most of those farmsteads converted to residential use.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Farmstead Condition and the Agri-Environment Issues*

Work using the early results of farmsteads mapping show its potential to understand change, and inform future adaptation and grant strategies by Natural England and others. This has included an evaluation, carried out by a student from Harper Adams College, of the levels of change, conversion and condition farmsteads across North Shropshire that were surveyed by Shropshire County Council in the early 1980s. This showed that coherent and unconverted farmstead groups were concentrated to the west, in the Oswestry Hills, but were in poor condition.<sup>3</sup> A field-based condition survey of the Shropshire Hills National Character Area (NCA) was also commissioned by Natural England and carried out by Mercian Archaeology over Easter 2008 (Mercian Archaeology), assessing 85 farmsteads selected from 4 representative areas of the NCA's varied landscape. Combining analysis of preliminary results from Shropshire's Historic Farmstead Characterisation against this condition survey sample area data, it has been possible to extrapolate the survey results up to NCA level. While the Photo Image Survey conducted by English Heritage (see above) reported that below 39% of listed farm buildings had been converted to residential or non-farming use in the NCA, whilst between 21-35% were derelict, this survey indicates a higher conversion rate and towards the higher end rate of dereliction. Of the working buildings surveyed, most were in a condition requiring some restoration and maintenance to ensure their survival, with some in a very poor condition. Some farm building types, especially those associated with the common-edge settlements, seem to have experienced the highest rates of conversion.

#### *Historic Building and Designation/ Management Issues*

Over 75% of the recorded farmsteads include a listed farmhouse or listed farm building. There is a high potential across the county for 18<sup>th</sup> century and earlier cores to remain behind later facades (see 2, Historic Farmstead and Landscape Character, above).

## **5 Area Subdivisions**

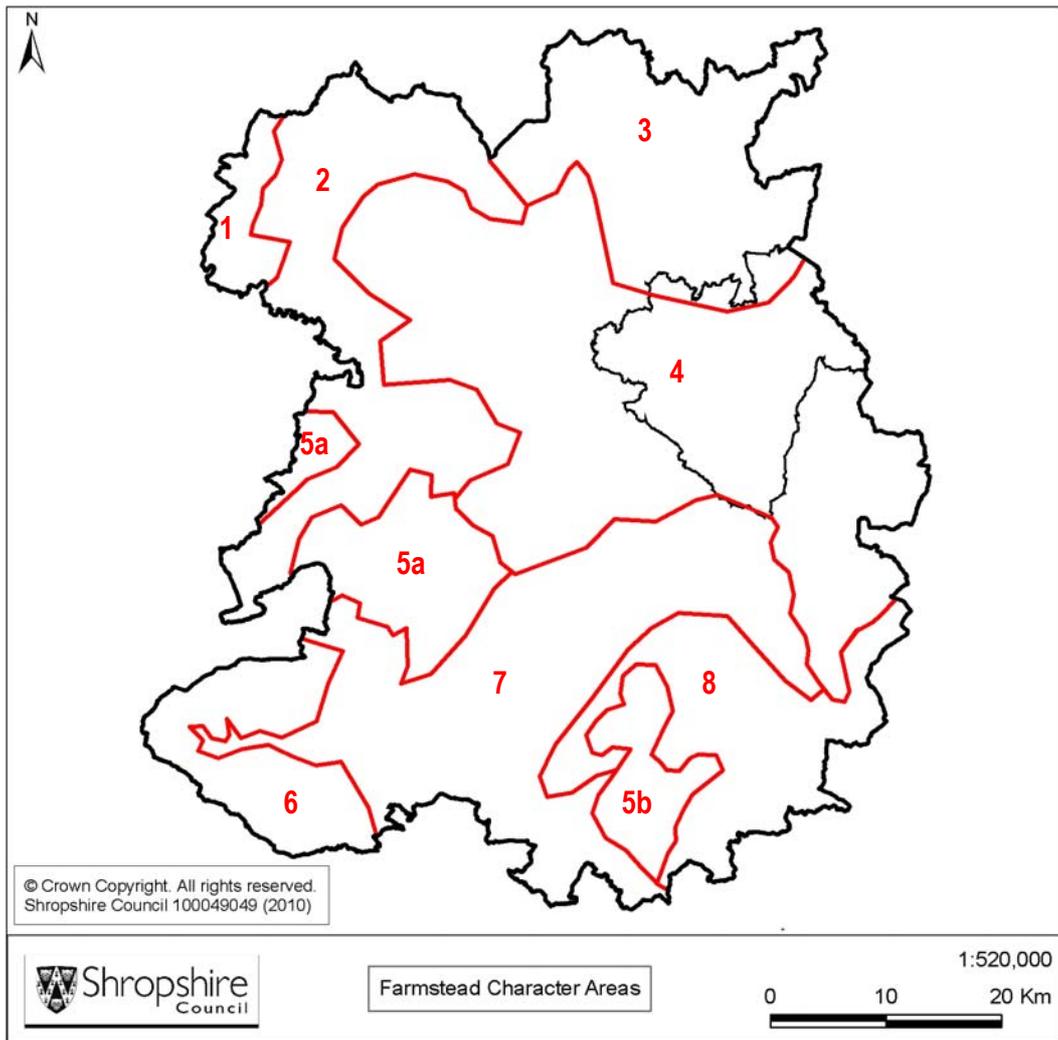
The county can be further divided into **Farmstead Character Areas** according to the results of the farmstead data:

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<sup>1</sup> Robinson, J. (2009) *Using the English Heritage Assessment Framework for Examining the Options for Changing the Use of Farm Buildings on Attingham Park Estate*, BSc thesis, Harper Adams University College.

<sup>2</sup> Griffiths, P. (2010) *Can Traditional Farm Buildings Help Regenerate the Market Town of Wem, Shropshire*, BSc thesis, Harper Adams University College.

<sup>3</sup> Holliday, M. (2008) *Changes in Use of Traditional Farm Buildings in Shropshire*, BSc thesis, Harper Adams University College.



### 1. Oswestry Uplands

- High density of dispersed very small hamlets and isolated small to medium-scale farmsteads, set within an ancient pattern of irregular enclosed fields.
- Small to medium-scale farmsteads and fields on the High Enclosed Plateau (mostly small - scale planned late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century enclosure).
- Smallholding landscapes to south, with very low survival of smallholding buildings.

### 2. North Western Shropshire

- High density of dispersed small hamlets and isolated farmsteads, particularly to the north where dairying survived longest. Irregular fields dating from the medieval period with some reorganised piecemeal and planned enclosure, associated with the larger farmsteads. Medium-scale farmsteads are concentrated within the former dairying area to the north east.

### 3. North East Shropshire Plain

- High density of dispersed small hamlets and isolated farmsteads, set within fields dating from the medieval clearance of woodland, marsh and heath and the later enclosure of common. There are very high densities of farmsteads in the areas of heath and former wetland such as Whixhall Moss.

- Some large nucleated settlements where survival of historic farmsteads is low and some larger farmsteads
- Planned enclosures (mostly 19<sup>th</sup> century) on heath, which has dense clusters of small farmsteads and smallholdings with some medium to large farms.
- Medium-scale farmsteads concentrated to north east dairying and stock-rearing area.

#### **4. South/Central Shropshire Plain & Sandstone Estates**

- Medium density of dispersed small hamlets and isolated farmsteads. Small-scale nucleated settlements on Shropshire Plain, with smaller number of larger nucleated settlements on Mid-Severn Sandstone Plateau
- Reorganised piecemeal and planned enclosure reflects the development of estates and large farms across this area, continuing into Ape Dale and Corve Dale. There are pockets of irregular fields, such as around former areas of common land. Includes parkland and industrialised landscapes.
- Large-scale farms reflect the reorganisation and amalgamation in the 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> centuries

#### **5a. & 5b. Shropshire Hills Western Uplands & the Cleve Hills**

- High density of dispersed small hamlets, isolated farms and smallholdings set within regular and irregular fields, interspersed with medium and large-scale farmsteads which also fringe the lower edges of these areas.
- Small farmsteads and smallholdings are concentrated in areas of common-edge squatter settlement, with access to by-employment in industry.

#### **6. Clun Uplands**

- Low density of isolated farmsteads, very small scatter of hamlets.
- Small-scale and irregular enclosures associated with small to medium-scale farmsteads. Large farmsteads set within regular enclosures dating from 19<sup>th</sup> century on high plateau.

#### **7. Central Shropshire Hills, Clun Lowlands & Northern Severn Gorge**

- Large farmsteads are concentrated around the valley-bottoms where larger farms developed within fields enclosed from open fields around villages. These fields were subject to later boundary removal and reorganisation.
- Increased densities of smaller-scale farmsteads in isolated farms and hamlets with fewer villages in hills and valley sides, which have smaller-scale fields with some later boundary removal.
- Small pockets of smallholdings.

#### **8. Cleve Hills Plateau and South Severn Gorge**

- Medium to high density of dispersed small hamlets and isolated farms.
- Piecemeal enclosure intermixed with small irregular fields, and late regular enclosure. Teme Valley characterised by fruit growing and hopyards.
- Medium-scale farmsteads, strong underpinning of small farms and limited large farms.