

WEST MIDLANDS FARMSTEADS & LANDSCAPES PROJECT

Summary Report



Acknowledgements

July 2010

This publication summarises the results of a collaborative project, based upon the mapping of farmsteads by local authorities in the West Midlands. It was written by Jeremy Lake and Amanda Smith of English Heritage and Peter Bibby of the University of Sheffield, with contributions from Bob Edwards of Forum Heritage Services. We are particularly grateful to Claire Robinson and Sam Holder of Advantage West Midlands for their support and guidance. We would also like to acknowledge the contribution Paul Brindley of the University of Sheffield for his assistance in producing the maps, which was in turn based upon the mapping of farmsteads for each county. We would specifically like to thank Bob Edwards of Forum Heritage Services (for Staffordshire and the central conurbation authorities), Charlotte Baxter and Andy Wigley of the Archaeology and Records Team at Shropshire Council, Ben Morton and Ben Wallace of Warwickshire County Council's Museum Service, Emily Gough and Adam Mindykowski of Worcestershire County Council's Historic Environment and Archaeology Service and Natalie Preece and Neil Rimmington of Herefordshire County Council's Archaeology Service.

The front cover shows a farmstead in the Teme Valley (© Sam Hale).

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Executive Summary

This report summarises the results of the West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project. It is a collaborative project, led by English Heritage in partnership with the region's county and metropolitan 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 and economic development

Historic farmsteads, where the farmhouse and some or all of the working buildings are located, 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 throughout the West Midlands. 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.

The Project has established that:

Historic farmsteads are assets which make a significant and highly varied contribution to the rural building stock, landscape character and local distinctiveness of the West Midlands

- Approximately 17,000 (82%) of historic farmsteads, as recorded from late 19th century maps, have retained some or all of their traditional working buildings. 65% of these have fallen out of agricultural use. The survival and densities of historic farmsteads are lowest in the south east of the region and some arable areas, and highest in upland or pastoral farming landscapes.

- Nearly 88% of historic farmsteads are sited away from villages and large settlements, and developed within small hamlets or as isolated individual sites or clusters. They are an integral part of an historic pattern of dispersed (as opposed to village-based) settlement across most of the region.
- Local and regional variations in the form and scale of historic farmsteads reflect centuries of landscape change.
- Along the Welsh borders and in the uplands of the north east there are large numbers of surviving, small-scale farmsteads in agricultural use associated with land of high amenity and landscape value

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

- 31% of historic farmsteads remain in agricultural use with minimal diversification. This use is most strongly associated with the largest farmstead types. There are also high numbers of medium to small-scale farmsteads in agricultural use across the uplands of the Welsh Borders and in north-east Staffordshire (including the Peak District). Other research outlined in this report has indicated that on working farms there are high numbers of traditional buildings without a use which are in significant decline.
- Historic farmsteads that combine significant diversification (requiring planning permission) with continued agricultural use (3%) are concentrated towards the west of the region, particularly in Herefordshire where large-scale farmsteads developed.
- The incidence of farmsteads providing industrial, commercial or retail facilities is very small (5%) and most strongly associated with the largest farmstead types. An additional 5% combine residential use with industrial, commercial or retail facilities.
- Residential use, including sites where some or all of the working buildings have been converted into housing, accounts for the remainder (56%). Small-scale farmsteads are the most likely to have passed into residential use, but otherwise this type of use is evenly distributed across all types and scales of historic farmsteads.
- The extent of business activity associated with farmsteads in residential use, as indicated by their role as bases of limited companies and substantial directorships, is higher in historic farmsteads than in other dwellings *regardless of location*.

This evidence base can be used to inform positive approaches to shaping the character and economy of places, which are tailored to the future conservation and use of historic farmsteads

- Policy and delivery programmes should recognise the continuing need of farmers to introduce new infrastructure, and the declining condition of historic farm buildings. Planning policies should address all end uses and facilitate the sustainable re-use of the resource, including in those areas where farmsteads are located outside villages. Environmental and economic benefits can be delivered through a diversity of uses for historic farm buildings. Where change is fully informed new uses can make a positive contribution to landscape character, inspire appropriate high-quality new development and reveal the distinctive quality and character of historic farmsteads.
- Approaches to the future change of historic farmsteads should be based on appraisal of the historic character and significance of the whole site, and its sensitivity to the type of change being considered. This includes identification of opportunities as well as constraints, from the most adaptable to those significant but least adaptable buildings where low-key and ancillary uses are most appropriate.
- Agri-environment schemes and other grant programmes can best be targeted towards supporting the maintenance of traditional farm buildings in areas of high amenity and landscape value with high densities of surviving historic farmsteads in continuing agricultural use, and towards the most significant but least adaptable buildings.

Next Steps

The next steps for English Heritage are outlined below.

- Use the evidence to inform spatial planning and delivery with local planning authorities and other stakeholders with an interest and involvement in land management and change in rural areas.
- Inform the targeting of Environmental Stewardship and other agri-environment schemes and land management programmes in liaison with Natural England and other partners, and the development of landscape objectives through the West Midlands Landscape Partnership.
- Work with local planning authorities and their historic environment teams on the preparation of Local Development Frameworks, including the policy approach for rural areas, its implementation, and delivery through development management.
- Work with local authorities in utilising the evidence base to inform the preparation of local economic assessments and regeneration strategies.
- Develop for further dissemination case studies demonstrating how the evidence base stored in Local Authority Historic Environment Records can be used and how the planning tools can be applied.
- Work with local authorities and local groups in using the evidence base and guidance to inform community and area based planning initiatives, such as Parish Plans, Village Design Statements and the preparation of local lists of heritage assets.

Further Information

Together with this Report, the Project has delivered the following information:

- **Planning Tools** for informing change at an area and site-based scale
- **Farmstead Character Statements** for the whole West Midlands and the 23 National Character Areas within it.
- **County-based Reports** which summarise the results of the mapping for each county and the central conurbation.
- 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.

1 Introduction

1.1 The Scope of the Project

The West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project is a collaborative project, led by English Heritage in partnership with the Region's county and metropolitan councils and with the support of Advantage West Midlands. The Project has:

- Mapped and described the locations and characteristics of all farmsteads based on Ordnance Survey 2nd edition maps of c 1890–1900. These were published after the final significant period of development of traditional farmsteads and the general use of vernacular materials. Modern maps were then used to identify the rates of survival to the present day.
- Compared this information against a wide range of address and economic data to understand the role that historic farmsteads play in the economy of the West Midlands.
- Developed guidance and a set of planning tools to help apply and make use of this evidence base, to inform spatial planning, land management and economic development at all levels.

1.2 Historic Farmsteads and Drivers for Change

Historic farmsteads, where the farmhouse and some or all of the working buildings are located, reflect the development of their surrounding landscapes over centuries. Historic farmsteads and their buildings display an immense diversity in their type, scale, form and use of materials, as well as differences in their survival as traditional groups. As a result they make a varied contribution to the character of the landscape and to local distinctiveness (Figure 1).

The Project responds to the need to inform and manage future change. As a result of changes in agricultural practices, particularly from the 1950s, the future of historic farm buildings is increasingly dependent on finding a use for which they were not originally intended. Structural changes in the farming industry have required farmers to construct new buildings that economise on labour and conform to animal welfare regulations. These changes have combined with the increased size of farms to hasten the redundancy of traditional farm buildings and remove entire farmsteads from agricultural production. In response to these changes English Heritage and the Countryside Agency commissioned research to

examine in more depth the drivers for change and the effectiveness of policy at the national and local level for listed farm buildings. This research also provided for the first time statistically robust national and regional estimates of the structural condition and adaptive reuse of listed farm buildings. It demonstrated that:

- a significant proportion of redundant listed farm buildings are in an advanced state of structural decay, and over half of all listed farm buildings have been subject to planning applications for development;
- the overwhelming majority of conversions are for residential use (70-80%), despite planning policies that favour employment and business uses;
- pressures for change will continue and accelerate in some areas, as farmers seek to rationalise their businesses and construct new infrastructure;
- the majority of local planning guidance, whilst focusing on the issue of reuse, reflects limited knowledge of the character of historic farmsteads and how this has changed over time;
- the evidence base for historic farmsteads in Historic Environment Records is weak, and almost exclusively confined to individual listed buildings. This does not provide a full or general understanding of the character and survival of farmsteads and their buildings, and how they contribute to landscape character and local distinctiveness.



1a



1b



1c



1d

Figure 1 Farmsteads in the Landscape

Historic farmsteads can be defined as the homestead of a farm where the farmhouse and some or all of the working farm buildings are located. They are an integral part of how landscapes across the West Midlands have developed. Farmsteads across the region show great variation from farmsteads with timber-framed barns and cow houses to formally planned, brick-built farmsteads completely built or re-built in the 19th century and often associated with re-organised landscapes.

- 1a. A roadside farmstead in Worcestershire. In the anciently-enclosed landscapes of the West Midlands, isolated farms typically developed along the sides of routeways.
- 1b. A farmstead in the hills of south Herefordshire, where many isolated farmsteads were built after the abandonment of farming settlements from the 14th century.
- 1c. A farmstead sited off its own track in the south east of Warwickshire, where many isolated farmsteads were not built until the enclosure of medieval open fields and common land in the later 18th and early 19th centuries.
- 1d. Two farmsteads in the lowlands of Herefordshire, with the remains of a shrunken medieval settlement around them. The modern agricultural sheds, in the foreground, typify change in the modern agricultural industry and the displacement of agricultural use from the more specialised, earlier traditional buildings.

2 National and Regional Context

2.1 National Context

In 2006 English Heritage and the Countryside Agency published a policy statement for traditional farm buildings, *Living Buildings in a Living Landscape: Finding a Future for Traditional Farm Buildings*. This recommended that 'the starting point for future policy must be an understanding of the character, condition and sensitivity to change of farm buildings and the relationship of farm steadings to the wider landscape. Character-based frameworks, which develop an understanding of the resource within its broadest possible context, should provide the context for future decision making'. It was accompanied by *Preliminary Regional Character Statements*, and guidance that promoted high standards in the conversion of traditional farm buildings to new uses. Work conducted since then has:

- explored how agri-environment scheme grants for historic buildings benefit rural economies and communities;
- deepened understanding of the rates of conversion and dereliction;
- piloted the mapping of *all* historic farmsteads, in order to understand how

they contribute to landscape character and determine their present social and economic role; and

- piloted tools for land management and planning, including the identification of key planning and design issues at the earliest stage of the development process.

This expanding body of work has emphasised the need to better understand the social, economic and environmental value of historic farmsteads and their buildings. This, combined with awareness of the drivers for change and their impact, can then help to realise opportunities for spatial planning, land management and economic development. This approach is consistent with national planning policy and guidance (see text box), which encourages local authorities to develop flexible and positive approaches towards rural development, including the sustainable re-use of rural buildings, which are fully informed and reflect local circumstances and needs.

Besides the importance of agriculture as the dominant land use in rural areas, there is now little difference in the employment profiles of different sectors between rural and urban areas. Recent work by rural economists has demonstrated

Key Messages in National Planning Policy and Guidance

National planning policy stresses the importance of:

- An evidence-based approach to future change, requiring 'a vision for the future of places that responds to the local challenges and opportunities, and is based on evidence, a sense of local distinctiveness and community derived objectives, within the overall framework of national policy' (PPS 12, *Local Spatial Planning*, 2008, 2.1).
- Not repeating national policy, but having greater detail and a local interpretation of higher-level policy if evidence based and justified by local circumstances (PPS 12, *Local Spatial Planning*, 2008, 4.32).
- Ensuring that 'All development in rural areas should be well-designed and inclusive, in keeping and scale with its location, and sensitive to the character of the countryside and local distinctiveness' (PPS 7, *Sustainable Development in Rural Areas*, 2004, para. 1) and ensuring that developments 'respond to their local context and create or reinforce local distinctiveness' (PPS1, *Delivering Sustainable Development*, 2005, para. 36).
- A positive and proactive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment which is evidence based and takes 'into account the variations in type and distribution of heritage assets, as well as the contribution made by the historic environment by virtue of: its influence on the character of the environment and an area's sense of place; its potential to be a catalyst for regeneration....' (PPS 5, *Planning for the Historic Environment*, 2010, HE3).
- Identifying and assessing the significance of heritage assets (as identified by local planning authorities as well as designated assets that meet national criteria). Using this to inform place-shaping, conservation and new development so that it makes 'a positive contribution to the character and local distinctiveness of the historic environment'. Identifying 'opportunities for changes in the setting to enhance or better reveal the significance of a heritage asset' (PPS 5, *Planning for the Historic Environment*, 2010, HE 7 and 10.2).
- Achieving sustainable economic growth by promoting thriving, inclusive and locally distinctive rural communities whilst continuing to protect the open countryside (PPS 4, *Planning for Sustainable Economic Development*, 2009). It emphasises the importance of all types of business and enterprise, and the conversion and reuse of appropriately located and suitably constructed buildings for economic development (EC6.2c), noting that 'residential conversions may be more appropriate in some locations and for some types of building' (EC12.1).

how hitherto hidden patterns of home-working, partly enabled by access to broadband, are contributing to the economic and social health of rural economies and communities. In its response to the *Matthew Taylor Review of the Rural Economy and Affordable Housing*, the Government accepted a number of key recommendations including:

- ‘the adaptive reuse of otherwise redundant historic buildings could and should play a significant role in delivering’ additional small-scale business, workspace and residential developments’ (Recommendation 29);
- a positive approach to such development which is not linked to public transport ‘would help remove a significant barrier to rural economic development, including the reuse of disused farms or farm buildings, subject to proper assessment of the impact on economic, social and environmental sustainability’ (Recommendation 24).

2.2 West Midlands Context

The drivers for change (see p.3) pose challenges to policies and implementation programmes that seek to promote the growth of sustainable rural economies and communities whilst also protecting and enhancing local character and distinctiveness. In the West Midlands the pressures for conversion on the one hand and dereliction on the other, as measured by statistics gathered for listed farm buildings, are particularly marked. Around 3,400 farm buildings are listed as buildings of special architectural or historic interest and are represented on around 16% of historic farmstead sites. At least 30-40% of these listed buildings have been converted to other uses, over 90% to housing. However, this varies across the region, with the peripheral areas to the north east and especially the west having the lowest rates of conversion and markedly above-average levels of disrepair (Figure 2). Without a use, or support for their maintenance and repair from the agri-environment schemes, they will eventually be lost from the landscape.

Long-term planning that meets the needs and aspirations of local communities and economies will require an understanding of the character and function of rural areas in their entirety, including their relationship to urban areas. This is relevant for the West Midlands where 70% of the land is in agricultural production, contributing 1.2% of the value of goods and services produced as indicated by the Gross Value Added measurement (GVA). Despite the broad diversity of land use and agricultural production, farm incomes are volatile and employment in agriculture continues to decline. By contrast the non-agricultural rural economy

annually contributes 36% of regional GVA. Small-scale businesses and self-employment form a significant part of the rural economy in remote rural areas, particularly in north-east Staffordshire, most of Herefordshire and Shropshire west of the Severn. The highest carbon emissions are associated with those accessible rural areas with good connections to larger urban centres, and thus better access to services, transport and the distribution of goods. Despite limited access to second generation bandwidth, there is considerable evidence from national and regional research that home-working is growing in terms of its potential for rural communities and economies.

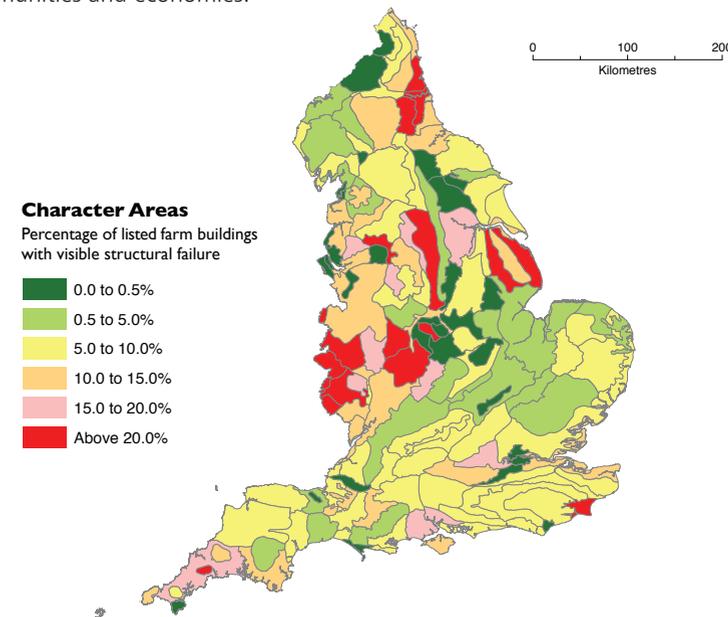


Figure 2: Patterns of Dereliction across England

This national map shows the percentage of listed farm buildings with visible structural failure across the National Character Areas in England (see Figure 14 for a map of these areas). The West Midlands has the highest percentage (19%) of listed buildings in disrepair of any region in England, which hides a larger proportion in significant but less evident decline.

3 The Historic Character of Farmsteads in the West Midlands

Patterns inherited from the past remain legible to different degrees in the present day landscape. The historic character of farmsteads, and their location and density in the landscape, results from hundreds of years of change and the influence of a diversity of factors. Farmsteads form part of a general pattern of dispersed rural settlement across the West Midlands, where villages were historically low in number and concentrated in particular areas. Their form and scale is subject to a considerable degree of local variation, which relates to the size of fields and other elements of the landscape

3.1 Farmsteads and Change

Over 22,000 farmstead sites have been identified from late 19th century maps across the region, and then compared to current maps. This has enabled the degree of change for each farmstead to be measured, enabling a regional as well as local assessment of the degree to which historic farmsteads have retained their traditional character [Figure 3]. This shows that nearly 17,000 (82%) of these farmsteads have retained some or all of their traditional working buildings, the highest rates of survival (shown in red on Figure 3b) being concentrated in the north and west of the region. The highest rates of survival are typically associated with farmsteads located within historic parks, where 91% of sites retain some or all of their working buildings, followed by hamlets (86%), isolated locations (81%) and villages (79%). Only 10% of historic farmstead sites have been completely lost since the late 19th century. Over 80% of this loss is the result of urban expansion rather than the abandonment of the site.

Figure 3a: Farmstead Change in the West Midlands.

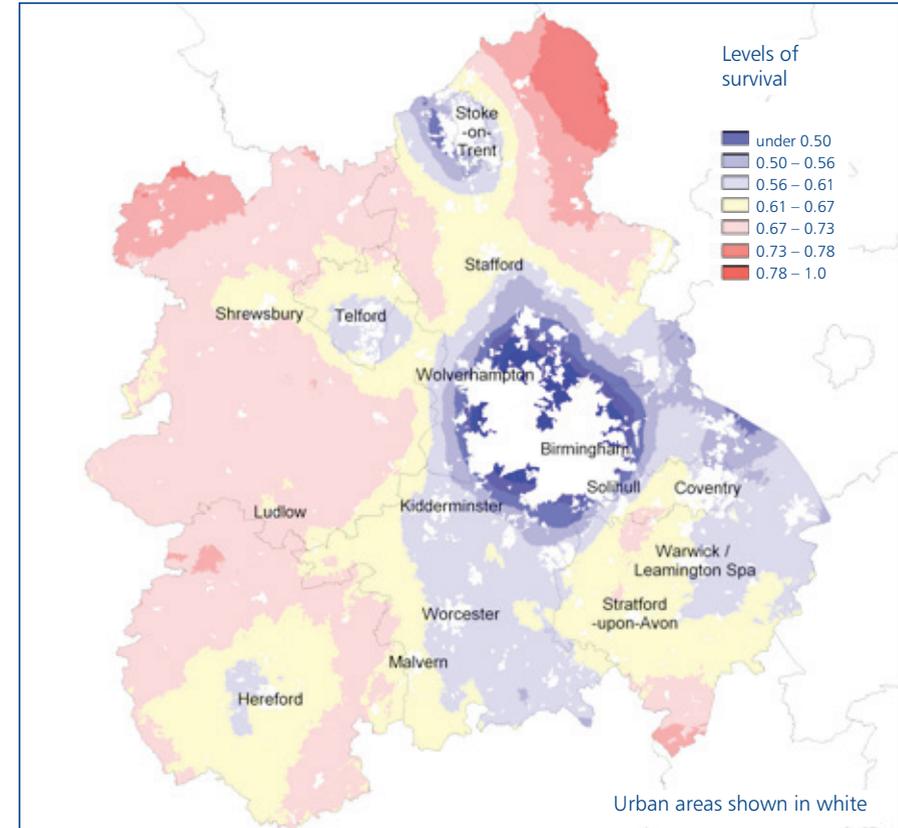
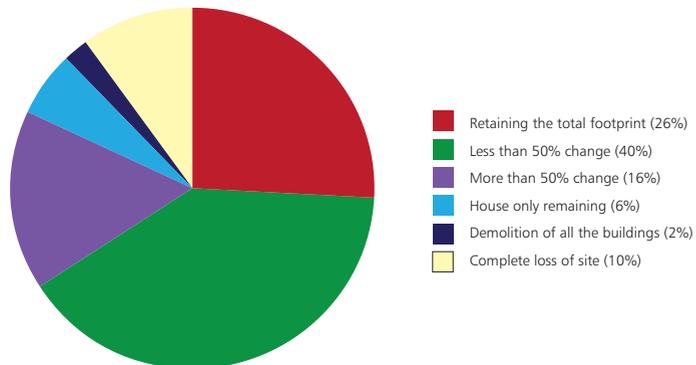


Figure 3b: Levels of Survival

This and other maps have smoothed the results of the farmsteads mapping to an average of 10 kilometres, in order to show the levels of survival of traditional farmsteads. The numeric values assigned to the colours represent the likely levels of survival within each coloured zone on the map as shown below:

- 1.0 Extant
- 0.7 Less than 50% change
- 0.5 More than 50% change
- 0.3 Complete alteration to plan
- 0.2 Only the farmhouse survives
- 0.0 Farmstead lost

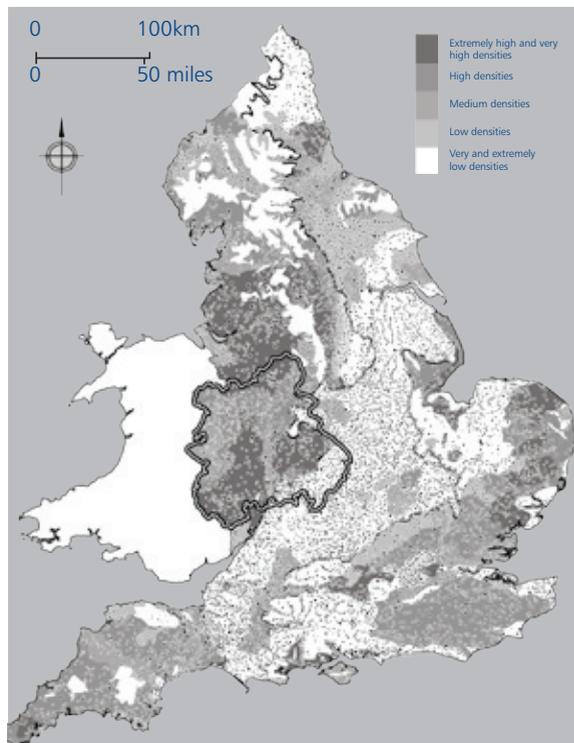
3.2 Farmsteads and Settlement

The Project has demonstrated how the location of farmsteads across the rural landscape of the West Midlands results from past land use and development [Figure 4]. Since the late 18th century the growth of the central conurbation has had a significant impact on agriculture, combined with the expansion and development of existing and new settlements as a result of industrialisation, commuting patterns and planning policies. Dating from the medieval period there is a clear spatial distinction between those landscapes that had been dominated by villages and those of dispersed settlement where villages are relatively few in number and sometimes recent in their development. Villages are concentrated across south and east Warwickshire and Worcestershire. These latter areas form

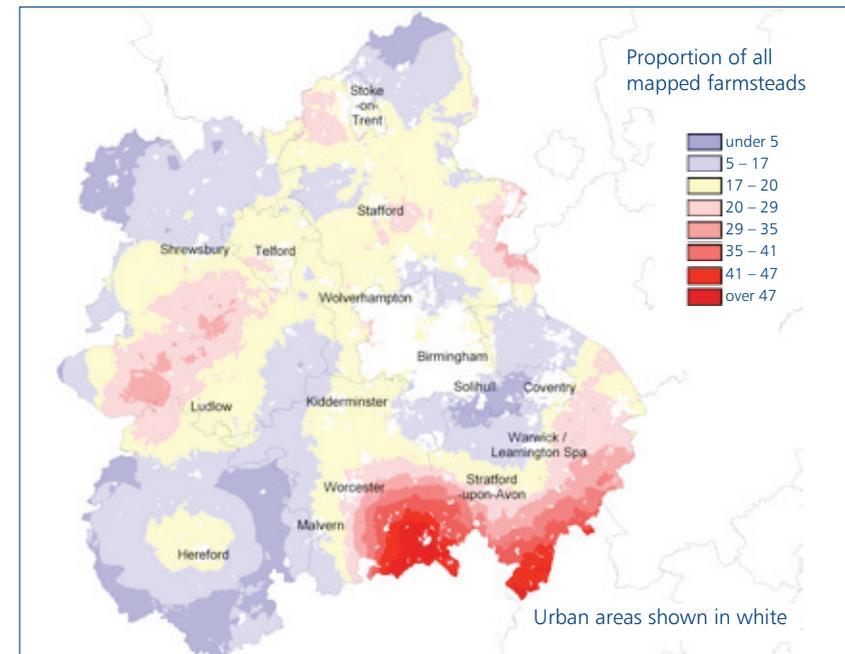
part of the central band of village England where most isolated farmsteads date from the gradual or planned enclosure of the large medieval open fields which extended across most of the surrounding landscape. These village-dominated landscapes are historically very different from the distinctive (and often equally ancient) patterns of dispersed settlement that extend across most of the West Midlands. In these landscapes dwellings, isolated farmsteads and hamlets developed, sometimes in close proximity to each other, in order to exploit complex patterns of fields, areas of common land and industrial workings.

Figure 4: Farmsteads and Settlement

4a. (left) This illustrates an analysis of the settlement pattern of England in the mid-19th century. The West Midlands extends into the central band of village England, but settlement across most of the region is dispersed: darker shading indicates areas with higher densities of dispersal.



4b. (right) Farmsteads in settlements (village and urban) as a proportion of all mapped farmsteads, smoothed to 10 kilometres. The red areas show where the highest proportion of historic farmsteads have remained within villages; yellow areas where small villages and isolated farmsteads and hamlets are intermixed; blue areas where settlement is largely dispersed with scattered farmsteads and hamlets and there are few or no villages.



Historic farmsteads identified from late 19th century maps
 0.4% are located within urban areas
 12% are located within villages
 12% are located within hamlets
 1.4% are located within historic parks
 The remainder are isolated but display different densities of clustering

3.3 Farmstead Type and Scale

Variations in the scale and arrangement of buildings within farmsteads reflect farm size, farming practice and the historic function of farmsteads, particularly to store and process harvested crops and shelter and manage animals. These result in different forms and scales of farmsteads, which once mapped display local and regional variation in the degree to which they are intermixed or dominant. Figure 5 shows that the smallest-scale historic farmstead types are a dominant feature of upland landscapes. In contrast the largest-scale farmsteads are dominant in those lowland areas that had been subject to the greatest degree of farm amalgamation and growth up to the late 19th century. These scales are derived from the basic farmstead types that have been mapped (Figure 6).

Figure 5a: Farmstead Scale in the West Midlands

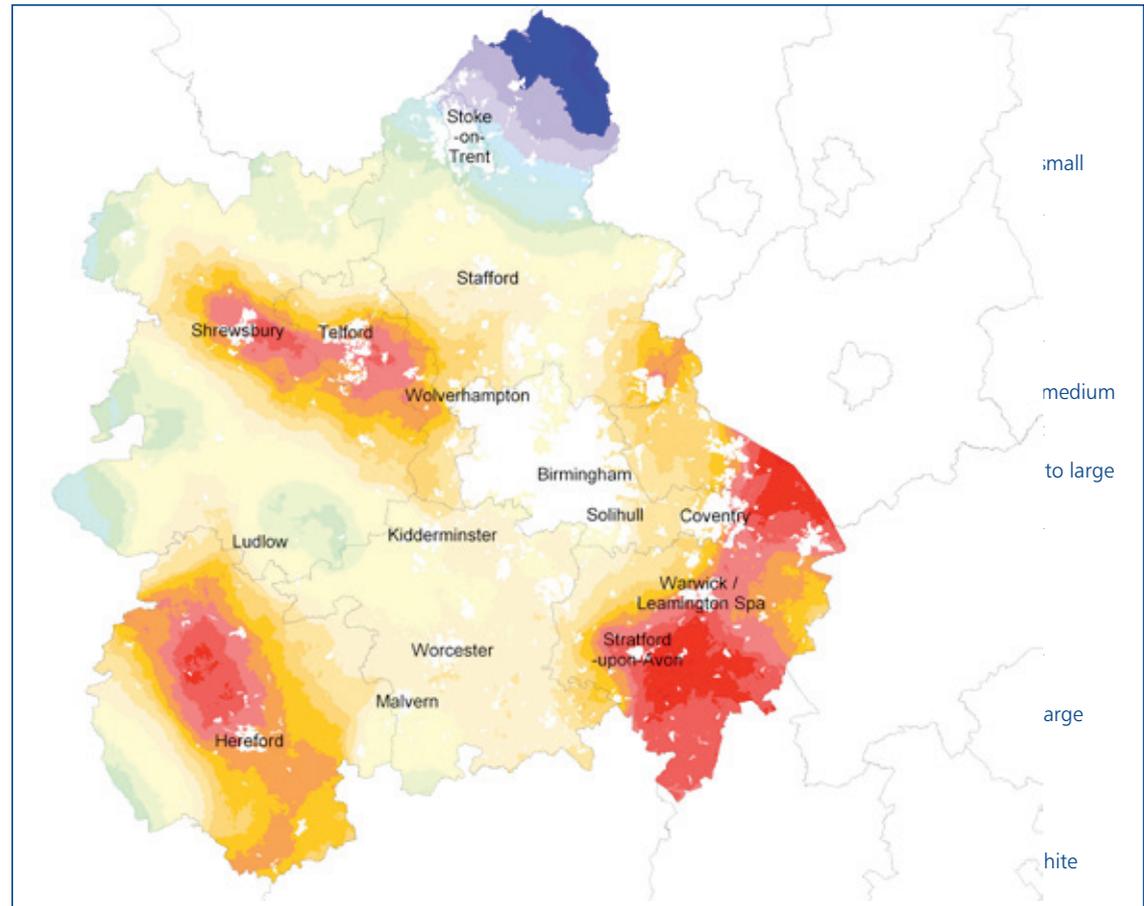
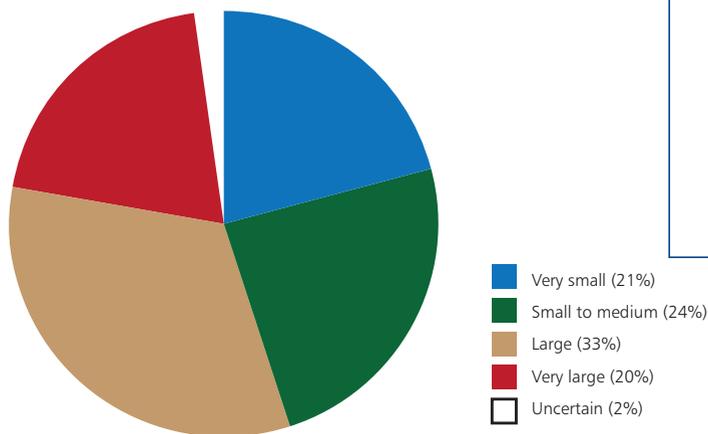
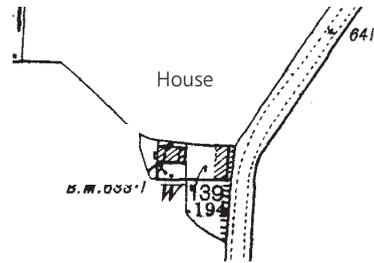


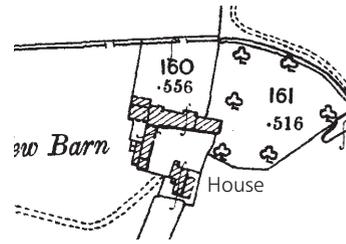
Figure 5b: Farmstead Scale, smoothed to 10 kilometres.

The uplands of north-east Staffordshire, including the Peak District National Park, has the highest density of small-scale farmsteads (in blue). The zones dominated by the largest-scale farmsteads (in red), with buildings to all sides of the yard and multiple yards, are concentrated in the village-based landscapes of Warwickshire away from the Arden, the Herefordshire Lowlands and central Shropshire extending east of Telford into the Mid Severn Sandstone Plateau (see Figure 14).

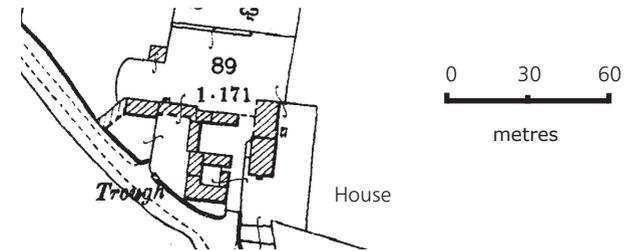
Figure 6: Farmstead Types in the West Midlands, showing a range of examples that survive and (top row) examples from late 19th century maps.



A small loose courtyard plan with the working buildings and working building to one side of the yard.



A medium-scale L-shaped plan with a barn and attached animal housing.



A large-scale regular multi-yard plan.



A small linear farmstead in the Oswestry Hills, where the house and working buildings are attached and in-line. This is the most common layout across the border in Wales and in the upland and some lowland areas further north in England.



A loose courtyard farmstead with a 17th century house, barn and animal house (the single-storey building) in the Avon Valley. In parts of the region there are some very rare surviving groups of the 18th century and earlier that have survived to the present day because they were large enough to meet the requirements of later generations of farmers.



Most working farmstead buildings date from the 19th century, and regular farmstead layouts with interlinked buildings are the most common farmstead layout in the Region – as here in the central Shropshire plain.

3.4 Farmsteads and Landscape

The historic character of the present-day landscape is mapped across the West Midlands through Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC), a national initiative funded by English Heritage and undertaken by local authorities. This provides a spatial framework to help understand how distinctive elements in the fabric of the landscape, such as the form and scale of fields, have been formed as a result of past patterns of historic settlement and land use. Fields with highly irregular boundaries may date from the clearance of woodland, often before the 14th century: an example is the Arden south of Birmingham, a landscape studded with farmsteads. Irregular or curved boundaries to fields result from the gradual or piecemeal enclosure of medieval open fields and areas of common land. They display an earlier origin and development than the surveyor-drawn fields with straight, regular boundaries which date from the later 18th and 19th centuries. These result from the taking in of new and reorganisation of earlier farmland, for example in the Clun Forest and the Staffordshire Moorlands. All of these landscapes have been subject to different degrees of later reorganisation and enlargement.

The mapping of farmsteads is contributing further to this understanding. The broad distinctions in the scale of farmsteads and their fields that have been revealed at a regional level (Figure 5) provide a framework for understanding local distinctiveness in the distributions and densities of historic farmsteads at a local level [Figure 8]. The highest densities of farmsteads are found where small farms and smallholdings developed as a result of the clearance of woodland and around heaths, mosses and moorland. In these areas the ratio of historic farmsteads to the existing residential stock is particularly high (see Figure 10). By contrast, those areas with the lowest densities of farmsteads had by the late 19th century been marked by the emergence of the largest-scale farmsteads and their associated fields as a result of the growth of large farms and the intense amalgamation of holdings.

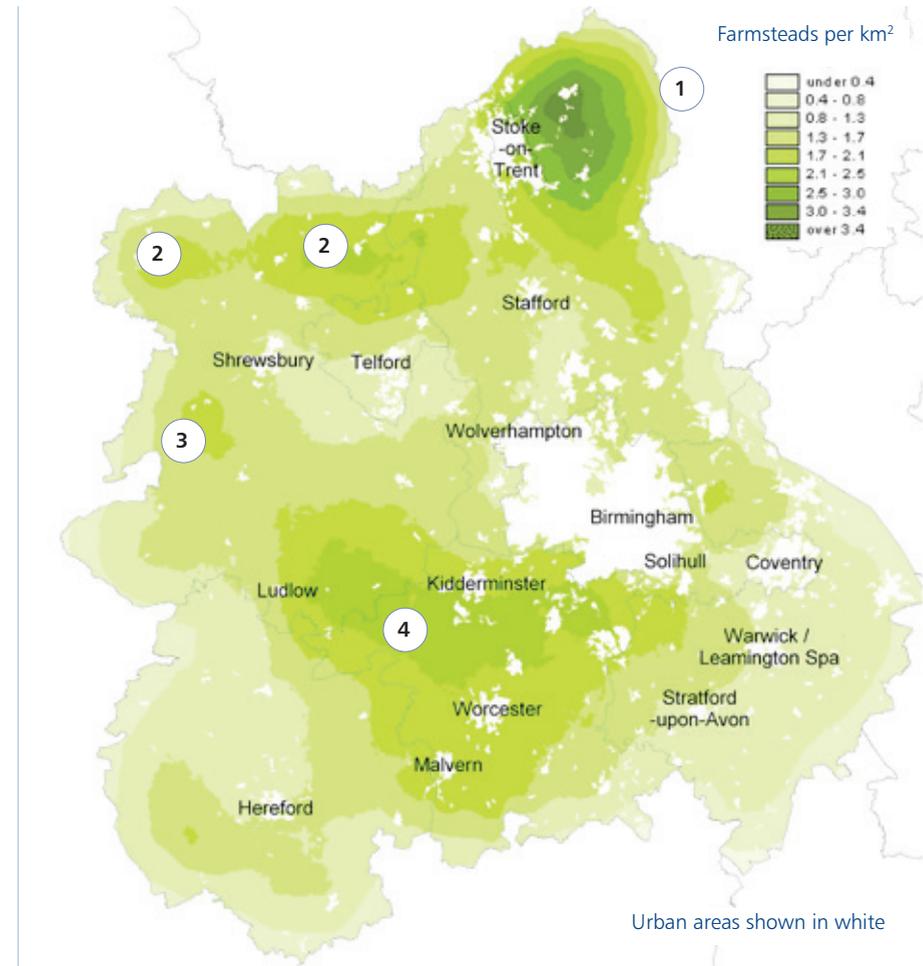


Figure 7: The Varying Densities of Farmsteads

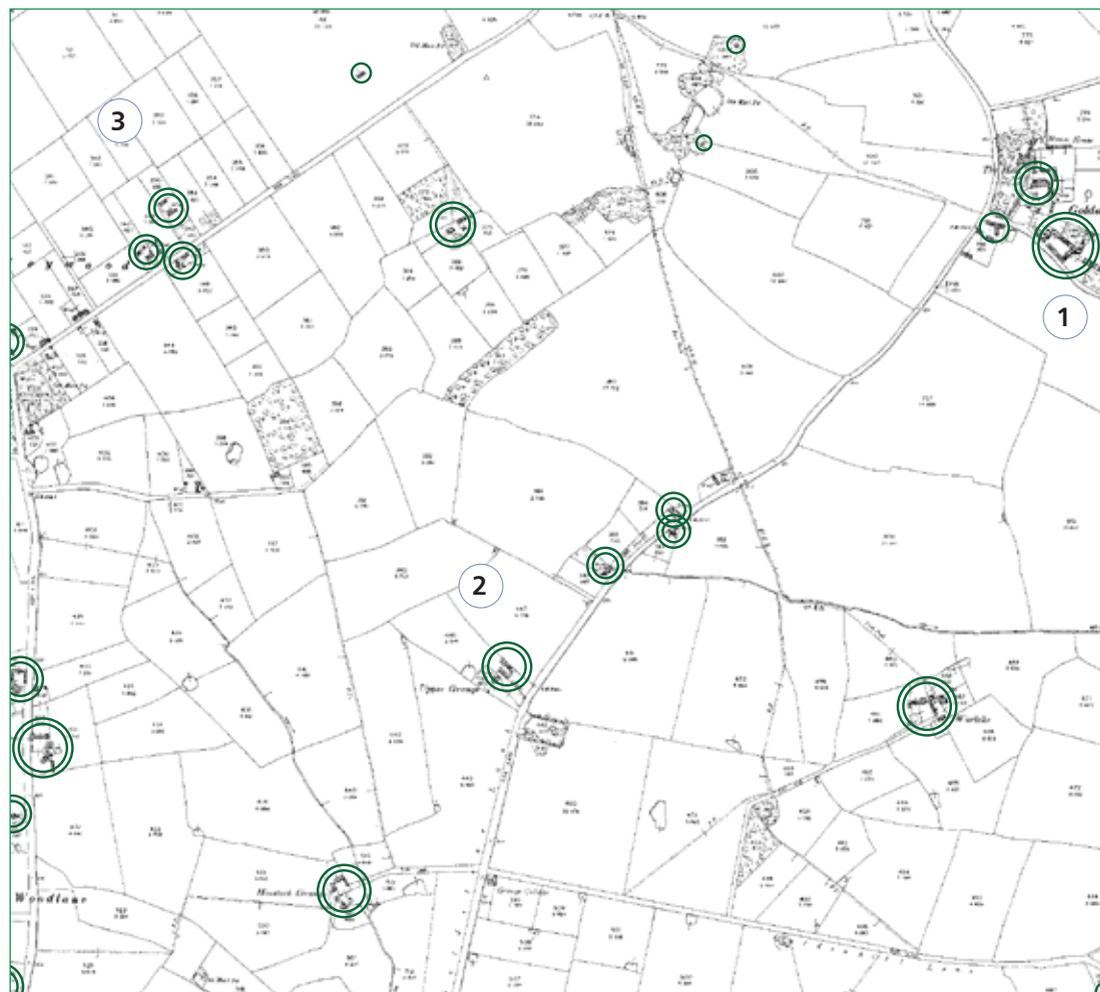
This shows the density of farmsteads in the landscape across the West Midlands; dark green showing areas where there is a high density. Notable for their high densities of small to medium-sized farmsteads are the upland areas of the Staffordshire Moorlands (1), the mosslands, heathlands and uplands of north Shropshire (2) and the Stiperstones (3) and a broad zone

extending from the Clee Hills across the Teme valley and the north of the Severn and Avon Vales into the Arden of Warwickshire (4). There are low densities of farmsteads in the central Shropshire plain, the lowlands of Herefordshire and in the village-dominated landscapes of the south east of the region.

Figure 8: Variations at a Local Level

This map illustrates the relationships between farmsteads and fields at a local level in north Shropshire. Within this small area are three distinct areas of fieldscapes:

- (1) the large-scale piecemeal enclosure around the hamlet of Goldstone results from the development of two large farmsteads which had by the late 19th century provided the foci for enlarged holdings with large fields;
- (2) the smaller-scale piecemeal enclosure to the south-west has some straight boundaries and regular fields resulting from 19th century enclosure and reorganisation, but clearly visible are earlier more irregular patterns of fields which can be read with medium to large-scale farmsteads retaining buildings from the 17th and 18th centuries;
- (3) to the north-west are small regular fields created through the enclosure of former common land, associated with small loose courtyard farmsteads and smallholdings where farming supplemented other forms of income.

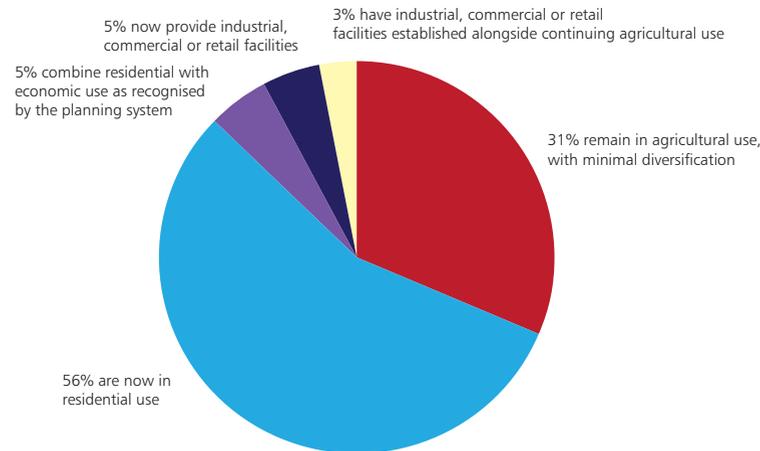


4 The Use of Historic Farmsteads in the West Midlands

4.1 Introduction

This section focuses on the types and patterns of current use of the nearly 17,000 farmsteads which retain some or all of their traditional working buildings from the late 19th century.

Figure 9: The Use of Historic Farmsteads in the West Midlands



4.2 Types of Use

Historic farmsteads in use make a varied contribution to the rural housing stock across the West Midlands (see Figure 10).

Agricultural and Commercial/Industrial Use

Nearly a third of identified historic farmsteads continue to be in agricultural use, although this is a declining proportion. Significant diversification has taken place alongside farming operations in only one in twelve of these farmsteads. This contrasts to the minimal on-farm diversification that helps the primary agricultural enterprise to be retained: these types of activities have not been subject to analysis in this Project.

Despite the support in planning policy for promoting economic use it has proved difficult in practice to secure non-residential after-uses for historic farmsteads.

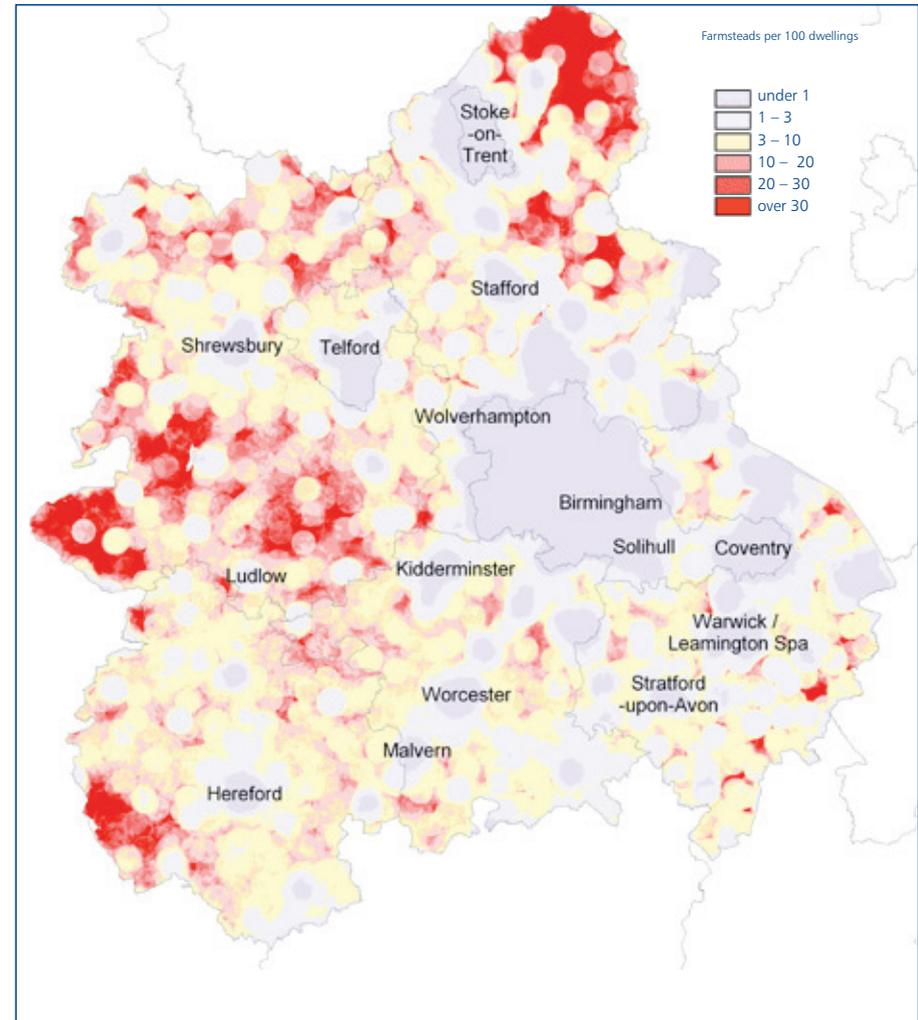


Figure 10 Historic Farmsteads in current use per 100 dwellings, smoothed to 10 kilometres

Those areas where historic farmsteads make the greatest contribution to the rural housing stock are indicated in red.

Where new industrial and commercial facilities have been developed on historic farmsteads (regardless of whether farming continues or not), they have predominantly been workshops (one scheme in four), self-catering holiday homes (one scheme in five, particularly on farmsteads where agricultural use continues), and office space (one scheme in ten, and more on farmsteads where farming has ceased completely).

Residential Use and Home Working

The overwhelming majority of farmsteads in non-farming use provide homes: this includes those farmsteads where some or all of the working buildings have been converted to residential use. It is clear, however, that their economic significance has been overlooked. This is because they provide the basis for a broad spectrum of enterprises which do not require commercial or industrial facilities or infrastructure as recognised by the planning system.

- One in twelve of the farmsteads in residential use are also the registered office of a limited company, this measure serving as a proxy indicator of professional home-based working. This form of business activity, which excludes companies engaged in property management, exceeds the number of historic farmsteads in farming use which have significant diversification and the number converted for industrial or commercial use.
- The economic activity of companies based in residential farmsteads covers a very wide spectrum of activity. Of particular importance are business services (30%), construction (10%), real estate (8%), recreational and cultural services (5%), medical and related services (5%), retail (5%) and catering (4%).
- They often provide homes for a business elite, with 22 directorships of substantial firms (defined as companies with a turnover in excess of £1.5 million per annum) for every 100 farmsteads. This outstrips the national average for all residential property of this type, of 5 in 100 households for urban areas and 8 in 100 households for rural areas.

4.3 Patterns of Use

The inherited character of farmsteads, particularly their layout and scale, affords different capacities for change and new uses. The current economic context exerts the greatest influence on the present-day patterns of use. Of particular importance is how farmsteads are located in relationship to the value of buildings applied to the production of goods and services (capital services in buildings or CSB) and 'economic mass'. Economic mass relates to the potential of the population (by virtue of the aggregate number of households within 10km of any point) to provide a labour force and an aggregate consumer spending. This is why peripheral rural areas such as south Shropshire are regarded as 'low productivity' areas in contrast to the productivity benefits offered by the conurbation core and other areas with high-density populations.

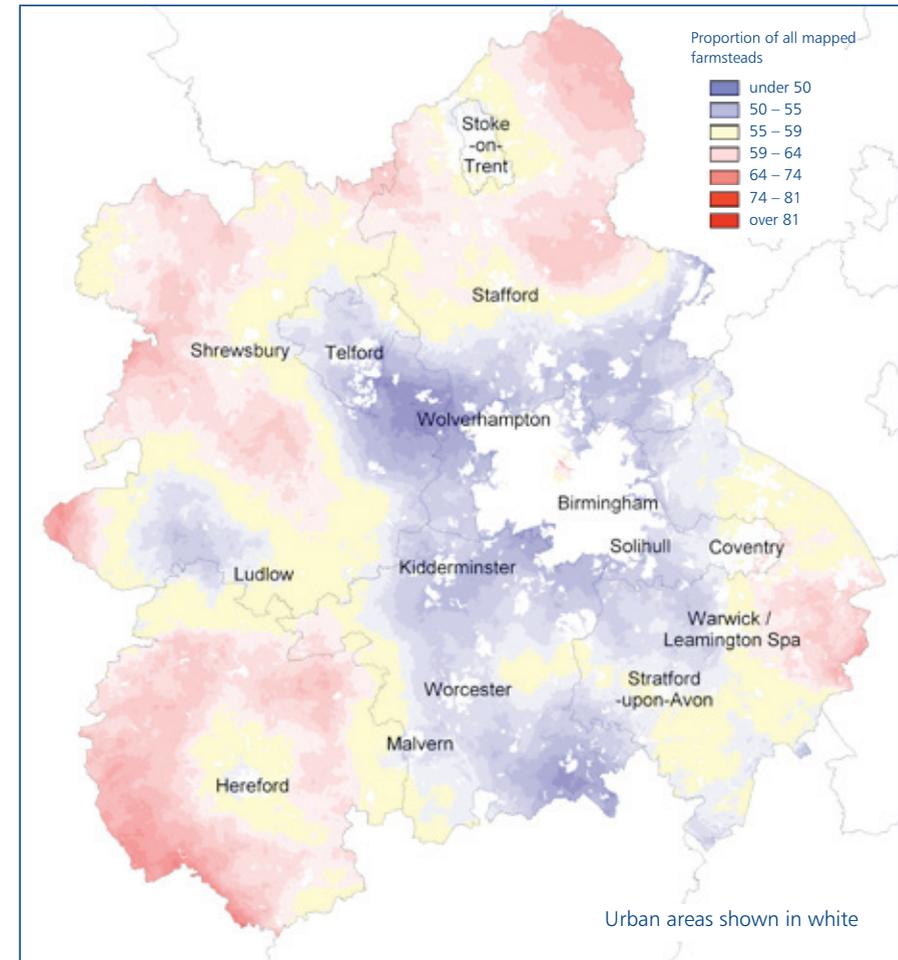


Figure 11 The Proportion of Historic Farmsteads in Agricultural Use, smoothed to 10 kilometres

This shows the principal areas of agricultural use in red, and those areas where the greatest numbers of historic farmsteads have fallen out of agricultural use in blue.

4.3.2 Patterns of Residential Use and Home Working

A greater proportion of the smallest historic farmsteads have been converted to residential use than other farmstead types. This form of use is otherwise evenly spread across all types and scales of farmstead, demonstrating that farmsteads meet a strong market demand in all areas for distinctive living space in desirable locations. Residential use (C3) increases in step with economic mass, occurring most on the fringes of the central conurbation, especially where Green Belt policy restricts other development choices.

Of particular importance is that residential (C3) property can accommodate significant, and until now largely hidden, business activity on historic farmsteads. This partly reflects the fact that the need for office space (a subset of B1 uses) has declined as high-speed internet connection has allowed dispersal of activity into the homes of professional workers, thus reducing employers' office costs. In the West Midlands the proportion of historic farm properties with home-based limited liability companies is more than three times higher than in other dwellings regardless of where they are located. Also, relative to households, they are concentrated in desirable rural locations with high property values which are close to major population centres of high economic mass. These 'exurbs' are physically rural but functionally suburban zones.

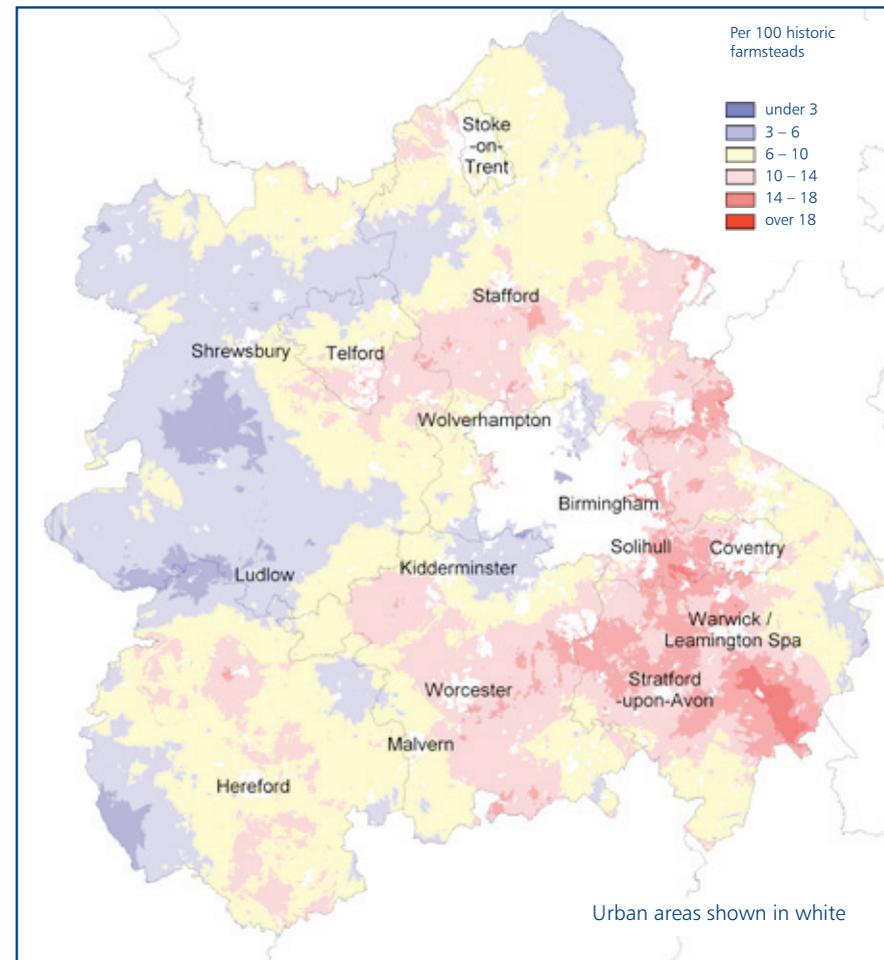


Figure 12 Registered Offices in Historic Farmsteads, per 100 Historic Farms in current use

Areas with the highest concentrations of this type of use are concentrated in areas of economic mass, but not exclusively so.

4.4 Sub-Regional Variation

There is a very clear pattern of sub-regional variation in the current use of historic farmsteads. This responds primarily to economic mass (see 4.3). It is modified slightly by farmstead size and farming specialisation, and is further modified or intensified in areas subject to Green Belt and National Park controls. The key sub-regional variations are outlined in more depth as follows:

- Residential use is most strongly concentrated in the highly accessible *rural areas around the central conurbation*. These are areas characterised by historic patterns of dispersed settlement, where historic farmsteads form an important part of the housing stock of wealthy, residential ‘exurbs’ which are physically detached from the urban core, but functionally part of it. This is typically in association with a particular form of low density residential development, where sporadic dwellings are intermixed with grazing, limited hobby farming and equestrian and related uses (Figure 13). A relatively high proportion of residents participate in non-farming business, either as principals of farmstead-based limited companies or as directors of substantial businesses. Within these areas, farmsteads close to, but outside, settlements are particularly likely to play these roles. These patterns of use and value have intensified within the rigorous context provided by Green Belt policies.
- Residential use is also high at the *southern margin of Stratford-on-Avon and Wychavon Districts*. Despite its low economic mass, this area is favoured by high landscape quality and the availability of historic farmsteads in village settings. Director participation is high with significant commuting beyond the West Midlands.
- In *an area centred on the Malvern Hills AONB*, where moderate economic mass combines with high landscape quality and an inherited stock of smaller-scale dispersed farmsteads, resident participation in substantial business at director level is particularly high (over 36 in 100 households, see 4.2) and the proportion of farmsteads remaining in agricultural use is the lowest of any in the West Midlands.
- The proportion of farmsteads in agricultural use is highest in the *western periphery* comprising much of *Herefordshire and Shropshire, particularly in the western fringes of Herefordshire towards the Black Mountains*. Fewer farmstead residents engage in substantial business as directors, reflecting the disadvantage of poor accessibility to economic centres for groups who need to maintain face-to-face contact. The rate of professional home-based activity in

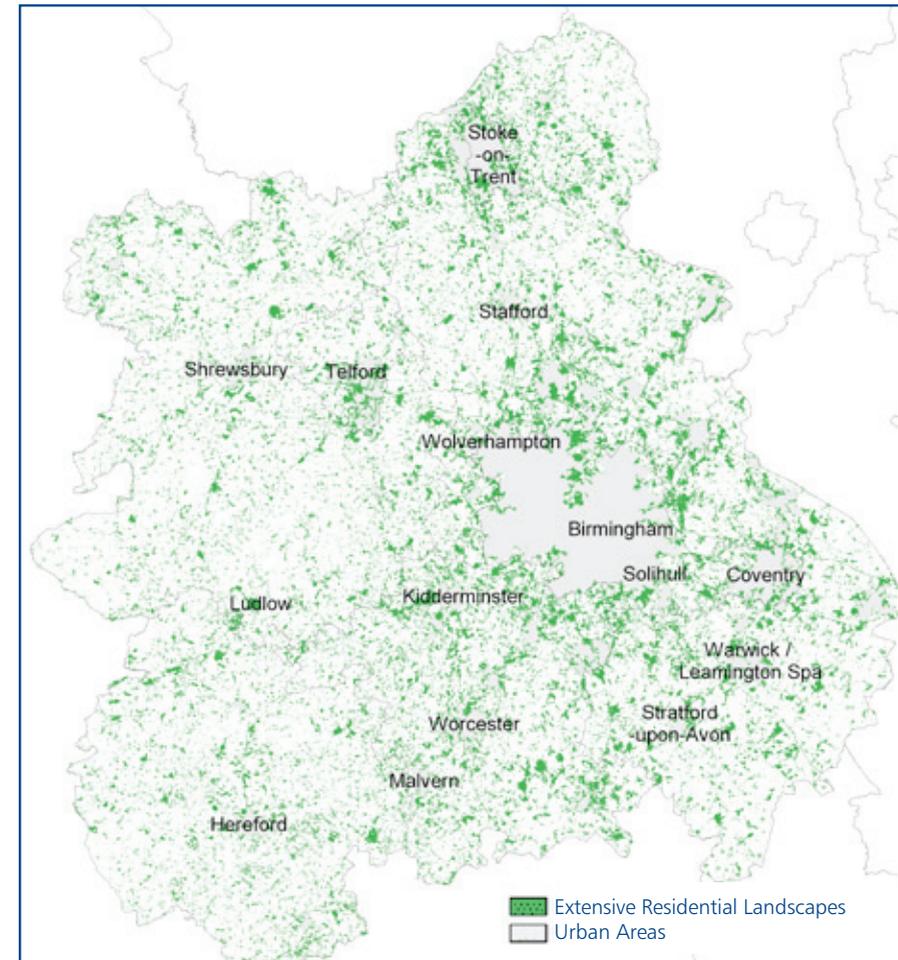


Figure 13 Extensive Residential Landscapes

Major urban areas are shown in grey, and the areas of green show concentrations of low-density residential areas. These are marked by dwellings intermixed with grazing, limited hobby farming and equestrian and related uses.

farmstead properties still exceeds that in other dwellings in the West Midlands, despite variable access to broadband. There is a higher tendency to on-farm diversification involving the creation of business space and tourist facilities in Herefordshire, responding to the inherited character of the large-scale farmsteads across much of the county. There is a markedly higher tendency to residential use, but relatively low in business participation, within village-based farmsteads centred on Craven Arms in the south of Shropshire.

- In *the hinterland of the North Staffordshire conurbation*, where economic mass and pressure for non-agricultural use has been much lower than around the central conurbation, there are two distinguishing sub-areas:
 - The first is very close to the conurbation and in the Churnet Valley where higher economic mass has encouraged a higher level of residential use (though participation of residents in business activity is relatively low).
 - The second is located within and around the Peak District where conversion to residential use has been markedly lower, and diversification on working farms has been higher due to a combination of its peripheral location, agri-environment schemes and policies within the National Park.

5 Policy and Land Use Implications

Historic farmsteads are assets which make a significant and highly varied contribution to the rural building stock, landscape character and local distinctiveness of the West Midlands

Approximately 17,000 historic farmsteads have retained some or all of their working buildings from the late 19th century, around 30% of which have listed working buildings and houses. They are an integral part of the dynamic and ever-changing character of the landscapes within which they developed.

Approaches to future change, whether through spatial planning, place-shaping, economic developing and agricultural policy, can capitalise on the character of farmsteads and their landscapes inherited from the past, by considering:

1. differences in the density, location and contribution of farmsteads to landscape character and the local housing stock;
2. differences in the historic character and significance of farmsteads as a result of past change and traditions;
3. differences in their capacity for change, both in terms of whole sites and their landscape context and that of individual buildings.

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

Over 80% of historic farmsteads have remained as sites in different forms of active use, although with differing extents of survival. Two-thirds of farmsteads are no longer functionally dependent on their locality through agricultural use. Additional research has indicated 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 opportunities for diversifying farm businesses and in some cases disposal onto the property market.

The Project has shown that residential and economic use can be interlinked, and that ancillary service sector activity on historic farmsteads can be easily overlooked. Historic farmsteads are a key component in delivering a sustainable and diverse rural economy, comprising start-ups and 'high-end' business activity as well as farm-based diversification in new business sectors. These may utilise but are not dependent on broadband. However, the continuing development and investment in IT infrastructure has the potential to serve a range of uses including professional home-working. Such measures, however, also require support

by a positive spatial planning framework which reflects and responds to local circumstances and opportunities.

Towards the centre of the West Midlands historic farmsteads in accessible rural areas form an integral part of an entire functioning urban zone. They make a special contribution to accommodating both ancillary business activity and a business elite playing a key role in the 'urban' economy.

Towards the northern and western periphery of the West Midlands there are high numbers of historic farmsteads in continuing agricultural use. A high proportion of these are sited within areas of high amenity and landscape value with low productive capacity and prejudiced by low capital endowment. Evidence indicating the high numbers of farmsteads in poor repair (see 2.2) has been reinforced by a condition survey of a sample of those historic farmsteads mapped under this project in the Shropshire Hills AONB. The survey found that around 30% of farm buildings require long-term or urgent maintenance to prevent decline. The farm buildings were overwhelmingly in agricultural use, those in the worst condition being located at higher altitudes more vulnerable to weather extremes. This serves to emphasise that buildings in poor condition, if without a sustainable use or incentives for enhanced maintenance, will eventually be lost from the landscape.

This evidence base can be used to inform positive approaches to shaping the character and economy of places, which are tailored to the future conservation and use of historic farmsteads

For the overwhelming majority of sites across the West Midlands private investment and management offers the most effective long-term solution to maintaining historic farmsteads as assets in the landscape. To ensure that sustainable re-use and economic growth is achieved, change to historic farmsteads needs to be fully informed by a balanced appraisal of wider social, economic and environmental factors, this including an understanding of the significance of the asset and its landscape setting.

A challenge for spatial planning and economic development in rural areas is the formulation of policies and delivery programmes that achieve a balance between promoting economic and social vitality and the protection and enhancement of landscape character and local distinctiveness. This can be achieved by ensuring that policy and implementation are based on an understanding of the character, significance and capacity for adaptive reuse of historic farmsteads and their buildings. All end uses must be addressed, in order to facilitate their sustainable re-use. This informed approach can deliver Government objectives for the historic

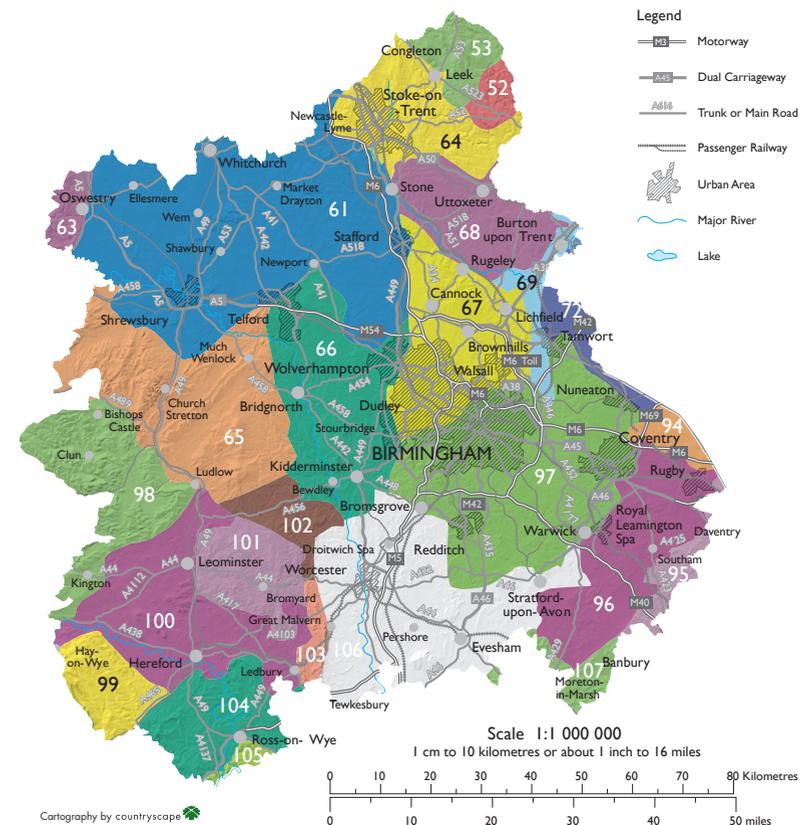
environment, as set out in PPS5 (*Planning for the Historic Environment*), and for sustainable economic development as set out in PPS4 (*Planning for Sustainable Development*).

Tailored approaches can be developed by taking into account local variations in the location of farmsteads; their potential for continued agricultural use; the position they occupy in the local housing market and the potential economic benefits of farmsteads and their building stock as residential/live-work and business space; the extent to which they contribute to the overall housing stock; their potential for social housing, including in combination with farm businesses; and the character of places as a result of historical influences as well as recent settlement change. Consideration of the inherited character and sensitivity to change of the whole farmstead site can help develop a strategic and preliminary understanding of the capacity for change. Key issues including opportunities for adaptive use and small-scale development that capitalises on this character, and the conservation of significant buildings with varying capacities for change, can then be identified at the earliest stage in the planning process, including for pre-application discussion.

Environmental Stewardship and other grants for farmsteads in agricultural use can most effectively be focused on those peripheral areas of high amenity and landscape value to the west and north east of the region. These areas have high numbers of historic farmsteads in agricultural use coupled with low capital endowment, in addition to a high proportion of listed farm buildings in poor repair. A second focus should be on those traditional farmstead buildings in all areas, including those subject to high degrees of change, that are judged to be both the most significant and the least adaptable to new uses.



Figure 14 The West Midlands, showing the National Character Areas (NCAs) within and extending across the region. These NCAs combine a broad understanding of the historic environment with physical landscape character and the natural environment. They are used as a framework for analysing the trends and options for future change across landscapes and for informing the targetting of agri-environment schemes. Natural England is leading on updating the NCAs, including the identification of landscape objectives on their future protection, planning and management. The result of this Project will feed into this process for the West Midlands.



6 Recommendations and Next Steps

6.1 Recommendations

Historic farmsteads that are no longer in agricultural use provide opportunities for living space and businesses, and can occupy distinct niches in the property market. These uses can be in keeping with landscape character and local distinctiveness if appropriately informed. Policy and delivery programmes should therefore recognise the actual and potential role of historic farmsteads as an economic asset within a changing rural economy. Recognition should also be given to the role that a strong but adaptable conservation framework plays in enabling sustainable rural development, place-shaping, and a prosperous rural economy.

Historic Character and Local Distinctiveness

The evidence base developed through this Project has delivered an improved understanding of farmsteads as assets that contribute to and can help enhance the distinctive character and identity of rural areas. This offers the basis for an integrated and forward-looking approach which can be delivered through conserving and enhancing local distinctiveness, sustaining quality landscapes and heritage assets, and inspiring high quality and sustainable design in new development and adaptive reuse.

Rural Economy

Local policies and implementation plans should acknowledge that residential and economic use can be interlinked. Greater recognition should also be given to the potential that the reuse and small-scale development of farmsteads can make to supporting the rural economy. Residential use, linked to home-based entrepreneurial business, is a key component of this growth. Policies should hence be more fully informed by an understanding of the drivers for change. They should also recognise that new uses for historic farmsteads and their buildings:

- can make a significant contribution to rural economies and communities;
- can effectively work with the inherited character of whole farmstead sites, thus conserving their distinct character and identity as historic and economic assets; and
- provide a sound capital base for the maintenance and renewal of farmsteads, that extends beyond rigidly defined hierarchies of rural settlement and business.

Tailored responses

The evidence base generated by the Project can be used alongside tools and guidance developed by English Heritage to inform options for future change, spatial planning and site-based assessment, specifically:

- to improve the quality of place-shaping, planning and regeneration;
- minimise risks and delays to planning applications and listed building consent, by informing pre-application discussions and approaches to reuse and good design.

Across the West Midlands there is great diversity in farmstead character and use over short distances. The broad patterns that can be identified at the regional scale provide a context for understanding the key issues at a local scale. This variation requires a tailored response in policy and implementation to ensure that change is sustainable and that benefits for rural communities and economies are maximised.

In terms of the inherited patterns of farmstead and landscape character, there are strong differences between:

- the village-based south and east of the region, where a higher proportion of historic farmsteads (mostly out of agricultural use) are located in villages and possibly within designated conservation areas. Otherwise isolated farmsteads display a tendency to be large-scale, and include some very rare surviving early groups;
- those areas where the overwhelming majority of historic farmsteads are isolated or located in hamlets, and far fewer farmsteads are found within villages and less likely to have been protected within designated conservation areas.

In terms of economic context there are differences between:

- Areas where the participation of residents in business activity (whether farm based or as directors of substantial companies) is relatively high, with particularly high levels of engagement at farmsteads that are easily accessible to substantial urban areas. This is especially the case in the Greenbelt around the central conurbation, and in the Arden area south of Birmingham, which can be viewed as 'exurban' landscapes characterised by an inherited pattern of dispersed farmsteads. This is a settlement pattern distinct from those other settlements in this zone which mostly result from 19th and 20th century development.

- Accessible areas with high quality landscapes and high densities of small to medium-scale farmsteads that have fallen out of agricultural use, but have very high levels of business activity and directorships of significant companies. These areas extend southwards from east Shropshire (the Mid Severn Sandstone Plateau) across the Teme Valley and the Malverns to the Forest of Dean.
- Areas of high economic mass but low business activity, principally the Potteries with Churnet Valley, where very high rates of survival of medium to small-scale farmsteads has allowed conversion of over 60% of farmsteads to residential use.
- Areas of low economic mass, principally the Shropshire Hills and the Clun Forest, where the proportion of farmsteads in residential use is high (this largely excluding the largest-scale farmsteads in agricultural use), but participation in business is low whether measured by farmstead-based companies or directorships of substantial firms.
- Large parts of Herefordshire, and to a lesser extent in the central Shropshire plain and Corve Dale within the Shropshire Hills, where the inherited pattern of large-scale farms implies a higher proportion of farmsteads remaining in agricultural use than is typical of the West Midlands as a whole. There is also a higher tendency for diversification on working farms with numbers of holiday homes and workshops above the regional average.
- Areas where the survival rates of historic farmsteads (typically small-medium scale) are high and there are high numbers in farming as opposed to residential use and low participation in business. These comprise the peripheral areas of low economic mass to the north east (from the South West Peak towards Uttoxeter) and west (the uplands of the Oswestry Hills and Shropshire Hills, Clun Forest and the North West Herefordshire Hills and the Black Mountains). Agri-environment schemes have assisted in the maintenance of buildings in poor or declining condition. However, the future of these schemes is uncertain and future changes in the farming industry may release many more sites onto the property market. In the Peak District the numbers of holiday homes substantially exceed regional expectations.
- Differences between the AONBs which reflect the relationship between property prices, local economic conditions and infrastructure, and inherited character. Both Cannock Chase and the Malverns have similar patterns with regard to the mix of farmstead scales. Cannock Chase is an area of major amenity value in close proximity to 19th and 20th century industrial and residential development. The latter has stimulated the high incidence of commercial and industrial use, combined with residential use, shared with the Trent Valley to the east. The

Malverns has developed as a high-status residential area since the 19th century, and this is reflected in the high numbers of directorships.

6.2 Next Steps

The next steps for English Heritage include the following:

- Use the evidence to inform spatial planning and delivery in partnership with other regional and sub-regional stakeholders.
- Inform the targeting of Environmental Stewardship and other agri-environment schemes and land management programmes in liaison with Natural England and other partners, and the development of landscape objectives through the West Midlands Landscape Partnership.
- Disseminate the results of the work and promote the use of planning tools to key stakeholders.
- Share the results of the Project and lessons learned with stakeholders in other parts of the country.
- Work with local planning authorities and their historic environment teams on the preparation of Local Development Frameworks, including the policy approach for rural areas, its implementation, and delivery through development management. This may include the development of Supplementary Planning Documents.
- Work with local authorities in utilising the evidence base and planning tools provided by this project to inform the preparation of local economic assessments and regeneration strategies.
- Demonstrate how the Local Authority Historic Environment Records can be used as a result of this project, in accordance with PPS 5 (*Planning for the Historic Environment*).
- Develop a range of case studies demonstrating the use of the evidence base and the practical application of the planning tools for further dissemination.
- Work with local authorities and local groups in using the evidence base to inform community and area based planning initiatives, such as Parish Plans, Village Design Statements and the preparation of local lists.
- Identify areas for follow-on work.

7 Further Information

Together with this Report the key products of the Project are:

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 and 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

- *County Reports* (including the central conurbation) which analyse the results of the farmsteads mapping held on Historic Environment Records, 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.

SUMMARY REPORT

This report summarises the results and products of the West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project

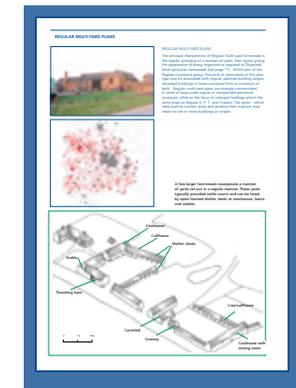
PLANNING TOOLS REPORT

GUIDANCE

West Midlands Farmsteads
Character Statement
Farmsteads Character Statements
for National Character Areas

EVIDENCE

Historic Farmsteads Mapping –
County Reports
Technical Report on
Farmstead Use and Role



Key Sources

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Dwelly, T., Maguire K. and Truscott, M. (2007) *Under the Radar. Tracking and supporting rural home-based businesses*. A report prepared for the Commission for Rural Communities by the Live-Work network.

English Heritage, the Countryside Agency and the University of Gloucestershire (2006) *Living Buildings in a Living Landscape: Finding a Future for Traditional Farm Buildings*. London: English Heritage and the Countryside Agency www.english-heritage.org.uk/upload/pdf/Living-Buildings-Long-Version.pdf

Gaskell, P. and Owen, S. (2005) *Historic Farm Buildings: Constructing the Evidence Base*. London: English Heritage and the Countryside Agency www.helm.org.uk/upload/pdf/Historic_farm_buildings_full.pdf

Other work by English Heritage and its partners on historic farm buildings is summarised on the HELM website on www.helm.org.uk/farmbuildings

The *Rural Evidence Base* for the West Midlands can be accessed online at:

www.advantagewm.co.uk/what-we-do/improving-places/ruralevidence-base.aspx

Advantage West Midlands commissioned a report on the West Midlands Rural Economy 2008. See:

http://www.advantagewm.co.uk/Images/AWM_114204%20Rural%20Economy%20Bro%20FINAL!_tcm9-16587.pdf

Design and Illustration

This report has been designed and set out by Chantal Freeman of Diva Arts.

The maps (Figures 3b, 4b, 5b, 7, 10, 11, 12 and 13) are by Paul Brindley of the University of Sheffield. The pie charts (Figures) are by Chantal Freeman of Diva Arts.

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