



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

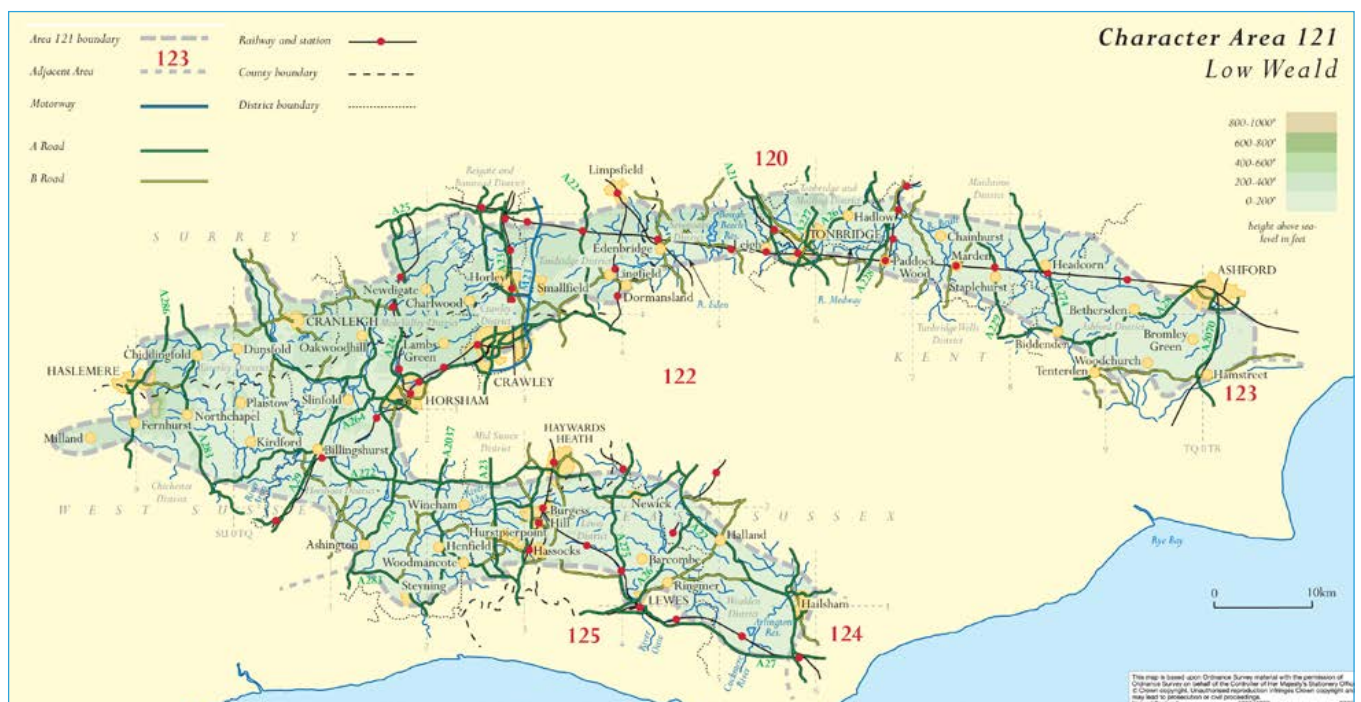
Low Weald

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 121



Introduction

The Farmstead and Landscape Statements will help you to identify the historic character of traditional farmsteads and their buildings in all parts of England, and how they relate to their surrounding landscapes. They are now available for all of England's National Character Areas (NCAs), and should be read in conjunction with the NCA profiles which have been produced by Natural England using a wide range of environmental information (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-character-area-profiles-data-for-local-decision-making/national-character-area-profiles>). Each Farmstead and Landscape Statement is supported by Historic England's advice on farm buildings (<https://historicengland.org.uk/farmbuildings>), which provides links to the *National Farmsteads Character Statement*, national guidance on **Farm Building Types** and a fully-sourced summary in the *Historic Farmsteads: Preliminary Character Statements*. It also forms part of additional research on historic landscapes, including the mapping of farmsteads in some parts of England (see <https://historicengland.org.uk/characterisation>).



This map shows the Low Weald, with the numbers of neighbouring National Character Areas around it.

Front cover: This well-preserved dispersed multi-yard plan farmstead is sited within fields enclosed from woodland in the medieval period. Photo © Historic England 27205/002

Summary

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

The Low Weald is a broad clay vale adjoining the Greensand of the High Weald extending through Sussex, Surrey and Kent. It forms a low-lying, rural, well-wooded landscape, in contrast to the adjacent High Weald and nearby North Downs and South Downs. The Character Area contains around 13% woodland and 7% is classified as urban.

Historic character

- There are very high densities of isolated farmsteads, set within an anciently enclosed medieval landscape, but where the enlargement of farms and mixed agriculture has resulted in generally larger farmsteads and fields than in the High Weald.
- Many farmsteads are small, loose courtyard plan.
- Large-scale, regular courtyard plan farmsteads and covered yards are concentrated in the area immediately west of the High Weald.
- Multi-yard plan farmsteads, either dispersed or regular in their overall form, are a distinctive feature of this area, often presenting open aspects to the surrounding landscape.
- Farmstead groups are dominated by one barn or sometimes more, often aisled to at least one side and with hipped roofs, with other buildings (mostly for cattle and facing into their own yards) being single storey.

Significance

- The area has a high density of pre-1700, timber-framed buildings. Of recorded farmsteads, 30% retain a pre-1700 farmhouse and 4.9% of sites have one or more pre-1700 working buildings, with 3% of sites having both a pre-1700 farmhouse and working building. These sites are of particular significance.
- The Low Weald has a high rate of survival of traditional farmsteads; 80% of recorded farmsteads retain some farmstead character whilst 61% of farmsteads mapped from c.1900 have retained more than 50% of their historic form, the highest percentage recorded in the south-east of England.
- Unconverted oasts retaining internal fittings and farmsteads retaining a range of structures associated with the hop industry are rare and significant.

Present and future issues

- In this National Character Area, the Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a high proportion of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use (49%, the national average being 32%). The project also

noted an above-average percentage (10.58%, the national average being 7.5%) of listed working buildings showing obvious signs of structural disrepair.

Historic development

- Agriculture on the heavy clay soils of the Low Weald was largely pastoral with the emphasis on fatstock with some dairying, but arable farming was also carried out. The extent of arable has fluctuated considerably over time; much arable was abandoned in the later 14th and 15th centuries.
- Mixed farming was found on the lighter soils on slightly higher ground, including arable

and fruit growing on the better-quality drift deposits of brickearths in Kent and the Bargate outcrop in Surrey.

- There was extensive arable – in contrast to the High Weald – in the 18th and 19th centuries, although levels fell from the late 19th century with pastoral farming once again dominating.

Landscape and settlement

- There are high densities of isolated farmsteads set within an anciently enclosed medieval landscape, but where the enlargement of farms and mixed agriculture has resulted in generally larger farmsteads and fields than in the High Weald.
- Small hamlets and dispersed, ancient farmsteads and farmstead clusters form the predominant element of the settlement pattern. There are some small villages, including linear groups along roadsides and others centred on greens or commons.
- There is a high density, by national standards, of small hamlets and dispersed, ancient farmsteads and farmstead clusters, a pattern established in the early to medieval period through the evolution of manorial dens or swine pastures carved from the wood and wood pasture.
- There are some small villages, including linear groups along roadsides and others centred on greens or commons.

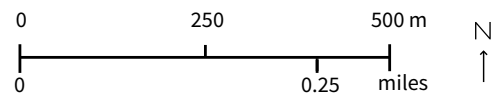
- Fields are generally small and irregular, largely created through assarting of woodland up to the 14th century, and are divided by a dense network of hedges and shaws that are often remnants of ancient woodland.
- Fields are slightly larger and more regular on the higher ground and areas of lighter soils, including the better quality drift deposits of brickearths in Kent and the Bargate outcrop in Surrey, where there is a lower density of farmsteads and of pre-1750 fabric or farmstead sites.
- The arrival of the railways in the mid-19th century made a significant impact on the agriculture of the Weald, opening up the London market for hops, fruit and poultry. Hop gardens and orchards, widespread on the northern side of the Low Weald, insulated this area from the worst of the late 19th-century agricultural depression.



Maps are based on 2nd edition 25" Ordnance Survey maps, which show farmsteads after the last major phase in the building of traditional farmsteads in England.
© Crown Copyright [and database rights] 2020. OS 100024900

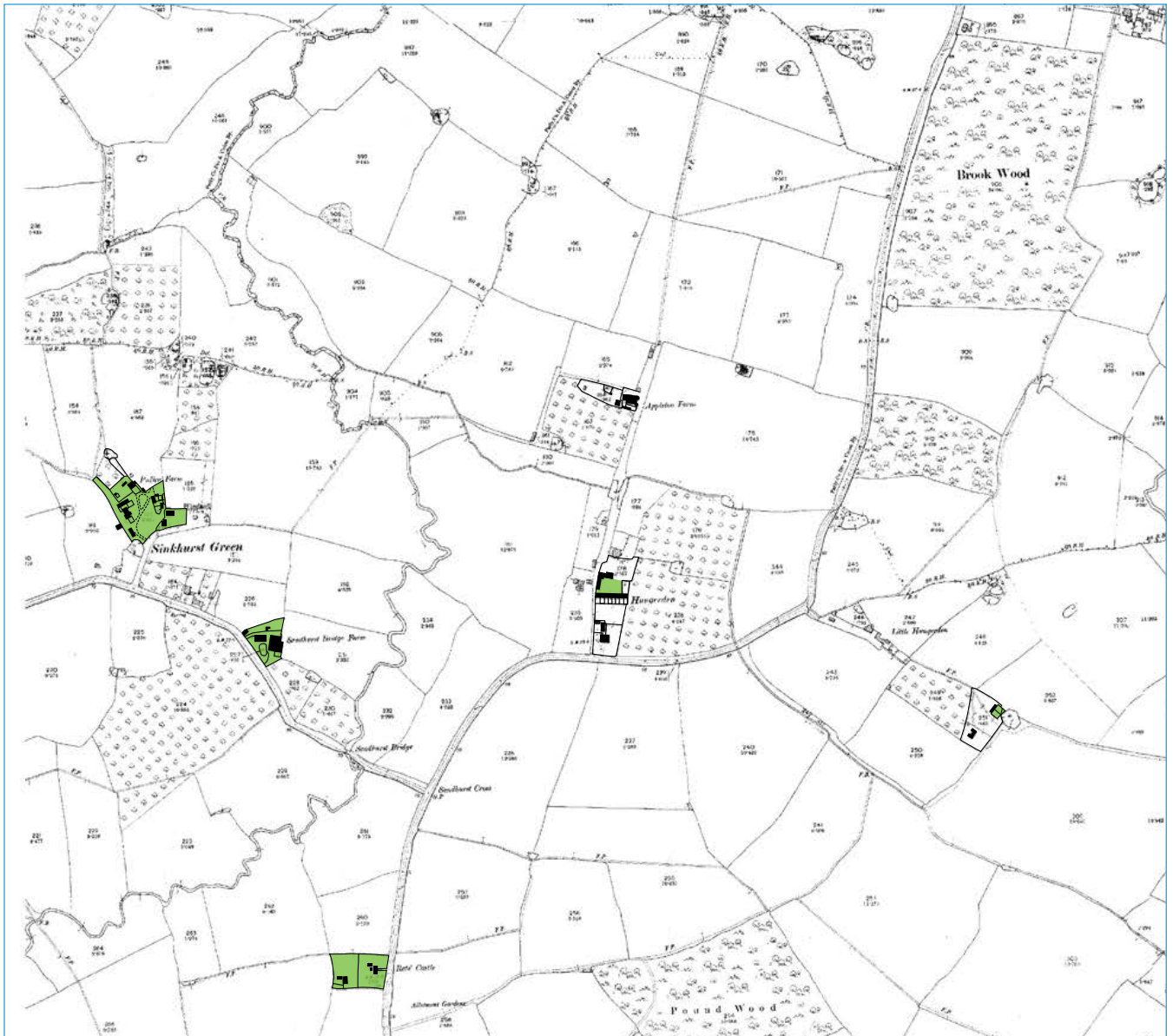


Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.



Morgans Green

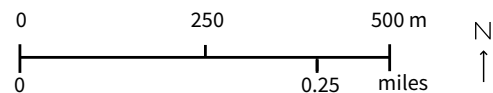
A typical western Low Weald landscape of medium and some larger scale farmsteads dispersed within a pattern of generally medium-sized, irregular fields, often with wooded shaws along their boundaries and small blocks of woodland which are the product of medieval clearance of woodland and piecemeal enclosure. Dispersed plan farmsteads are an important element of farmstead character in the Low Weald, Howick Farm and Mill Farm both having dispersed multi-yard plans. Regular U-plans, as at Hale Farm are also more common in this part of the Low Weald than in the neighbouring High Weald or the northern (Kent) part of the Character Area. Wide-span, covered yard buildings such as that at Arun Bank Farm are also a feature of this part of the Character Area.



Maps are based on 2nd edition 25" Ordnance Survey maps, which show farmsteads after the last major phase in the building of traditional farmsteads in England. © Crown Copyright [and database rights] 2020. OS 100024900



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



Frittenden

The Kent Low Weald generally has medium to large fields that show a much higher level of regularity than is characteristic of the High Weald or the western Low Weald. However, these fields, the result of piecemeal enclosure from the 16th-century and often later reorganisation, do not have the level of regularity of 18th- or 19th-century enclosures. Settlement predominantly consists of dispersed farmsteads intermixed with small farmsteads clusters and hamlets as at Sinkhurst Green and some villages. Dispersed and small to medium, loose courtyard plan farmsteads are typical of the Kent part of the Character Area although many farms were subject to rebuilding or major additions in the late 19th century. At Great Hungerden, an estate-owned farm, a large bullock lodge with a series of yards attached was added and a new large farmhouse built, the medieval house being split to form cottages for farm labourers.

An example of a dispersed multi-yard plan, now conserved through residential use and clearly visible within its historic landscape. Photo © Historic England 27204/038





A characteristic small Wealden farmstead with its medieval, timber-framed house with a hipped roof and a barn clad in weatherboard, set within a landscape of medium-sized fields with well-wooded boundaries. Photo © Bob Edwards



A roadside farmstead group displaying a typical range of roof forms and materials. Photo © Bob Edwards



A small, loose courtyard group with a barn and a single-storey range bounding two sides of a yard with the farmhouse facing into its garden. Photo © Bob Edwards



This large, dispersed multi-yard farmstead has several detached yards including two large, covered yard buildings; the large shed in the foreground formerly had a series of gabled roofs that have been replaced and raised. Additionally, many of the buildings are ranged alongside a track that runs through the farmstead, giving this group a dispersed, driftway character. Photo © Bob Edwards



A regular L-plan yard with a five-bay barn and attached single-storey range that provided stabling or housing for cattle. Photo © Bob Edwards



A dispersed multi-yard group (for the landscape context see page 3). The farmhouse faces into a yard area with buildings to two sides but the barn stands nearby facing into a former yard area. To the rear of the farmhouse is a rare survival of a detached kitchen. Photo © Historic England 27205/009



A large architect-designed regular courtyard farmstead associated with a large estate. The 'turrets' with their conical roofs give this external elevation the appearance of a castle or chateau and was meant to hide the more functional buildings behind. Photo © Bob Edwards



Timber-framed barns of three bays are common on the smaller farms of the area. Photo © Bob Edwards



A three-bay barn with an outshot against the gable end. The small door suggests that this was a multifunctional barn, possibly providing stabling or housing for cattle in this end of the building. Photo © Bob Edwards



Barns in the Low Weald rarely exceeded five bays in length. This example has a former shelter shed attached to its side and possibly stabling in the single-storey range. Photo © Bob Edwards



A rare example of a timber-framed stable, probably 17th century in date. The lower wall has been re-built in brick. Photo © Bob Edwards



Most cattle housing in the area dates from the 19th century and took the form of open-fronted shelter sheds. This range has been subsequently infilled with brick to provide stabling. Photo © Bob Edwards



A late 19th-century covered yard building for cattle which allowed cattle to fatten more quickly and preserved the manure from dilution by rainfall. Such wide-span buildings are a feature of the western part of the Low Weald, where large estate-owned farmsteads developed on farmland reorganised in the 19th century or newly-enclosed from heath. Photo © Bob Edwards



The Low Weald was the primary area for the growing of hops in Kent and has the highest density of oast houses. The largest examples are indicative of an industrial scale of production, often owned directly by breweries. Photo © Bob Edwards



Outfarms and field barns were once a common feature of the Low Weald landscape but few survive intact. This outfarm has a three-bay barn and attached shelter shed facing into a yard. Photo © Bob Edwards



Historic England

This guidance has been prepared by
Jeremy Lake with Bob Edwards.

First published by English Heritage 2013. This
edition published by Historic England 2020.

Please refer to this document as:
Historic England 2020 Farmstead and Landscape
Statement: Low Weald. Swindon: Historic
England.

We are the public body that looks after
England's historic environment. We champion
historic places, helping people understand,
value and care for them.

Please contact
guidance@HistoricEngland.org.uk
with any questions about this document.

HistoricEngland.org.uk

If you would like this document in a different
format, please contact our customer services
department on:

Tel: 0370 333 0607

Email: customers@HistoricEngland.org.uk

All information and weblinks accurate at the
time of publication.

Please consider the environment before printing
this document

Product code: 52235 RRL code: 125/2020

Publication date: February 2020 © Historic England
Design: Historic England and Chantal Freeman, Diva
Arts