

WEST MIDLANDS FARMSTEADS AND LANDSCAPES PROJECT

SUMMARY REPORT FOR CENTRAL CONURBATION

Executive Summary

Solutions to finding a future sustainable use for historic farmsteads and their buildings require an integrated approach, considering their merits as heritage assets, their contribution to landscape character and their role in the changing structure of rural communities and economies. This report summarises the results of mapping the historic character and present use of historic farmsteads in Worcestershire. This is part of the West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscape Project (see www.english-heritage.org.uk/wmidlandsfarmsteads) which has concluded 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.
- 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.
- This understanding 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.

This report summarises the results of the West Midlands Historic Farmsteads Characterisation Project covering the city and metropolitan areas of Birmingham, Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton. The mapping was carried out by Forum Heritage Services between April and May 2010. The *West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project* (see www.english-heritage.org.uk/wmidlandsfarmsteads) was conducted by English Heritage in collaboration with regional development agency Advantage West Midlands and local county and metropolitan authorities to help national and local decision-makers evaluate what future uses for farm buildings should be, to understand how they contribute to local character and to identify the most significant and vulnerable cases. For the first time at a regional level the Project has:

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

The Project has produced:

- The *West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project: Summary Report*, which summarises the results of the whole project and sets out policy and land use implications, and recommendations and next steps for further work.
- *Illustrated Farmstead Character Statements* that outline the historic character and present day role of historic farmsteads for the whole region and the 26 National Character Areas that fall within or astride it. These bring together the results of all this work, combined with the results of extensive survey work and other available information.
- A *Farmstead Use Report* which provides a detailed statistical analysis of the patterns of farmstead use across the West Midlands, and their social and economic role.
- 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.
- *Historic Farmstead Characterisation Reports* for each county and the Central Conurbation which present a detailed analysis of the mapping of farmsteads in relationship to landscape character and type, and which are stored on the local authority Historic Environment Record.

An important aspect of this project is the fact that all the partners are using a consistent methodology for mapping farmsteads so that the data can be combined to produce a regional picture of farmstead character. This report summarises the key findings of the Historic Farmstead Characterisation Report for Worcestershire, and the analysis of current use.

Historic Farmstead Survival and Change

The project mapped 831 farmsteads and 199 outfarms or field barns. Unsurprisingly, the majority of the farmsteads recorded from the 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey mapping of c.1900 have been lost through urban expansion. However, 120 farmstead sites survive to some degree as recognisable historic farmsteads but only 3 outfarms or field barns survive, mostly within the small areas of rural landscape around and between the urban areas, but occasionally farmsteads survive, converted to other uses, within the built-up area. Of the farmsteads that have been lost from the landscape, those sites that are located in undeveloped areas may represent sites

of archaeological interest and the mapping will be used to enhance the Historic Environment Records of Birmingham City Council, Dudley, Sandwell MBC, Walsall MBC and Wolverhampton City Council.

Historic Farmstead Character and Context

Whilst the number of surviving farmsteads recorded is relatively small, the mapping within the Conurbation area helps to complete a full picture of the location, density and character of farmsteads across the whole of the West Midlands region meaning that the farmsteads within the pockets of rural landscape of the study area can be seen in their wider landscape context. Through the examination of the farmstead data against the Black Country Historic Landscape Characterisation it has been possible to identify areas where there is a strong surviving association between farmsteads and their landscape which will be important to consider in future management decisions relating to both the farmsteads and the landscape. Analysis of the farmstead data also shows that the character of farmsteads within the Conurbation relates

closely to the character of the landscape of the three National Character Areas that cover the Conurbation area: Mid Severn Sandstone Plateau, Cannock Chase and Cank Wood and the Arden.

Current Use

For further details see the Farmstead Use Report

- Economic development over two centuries has ensured the highest level of capital endowment within the West Midlands, though as a result few farmsteads survive.
- The likelihood that surviving farmsteads are in residential use is similar to that for the region as a whole.
- Surviving farmsteads are slightly less likely to be in agricultural use than elsewhere within the region and very slightly more likely to have been converted to B1, B2 or B8 use. Several unconverted farmstead sites are used for the storage of caravans.



A farmstead now located on the edge of the urban extant of Walsall; the modern housing developments visible just beyond the farmstead. The farmstead is associated with an area of late enclosure of common with regular fields which was fringed by a number of farmsteads, two of which survive. These farmsteads and their landscape are significant survivals within the West Midlands conurbation.

Acknowledgements for maps and plans

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