

Malvern Hills AONB Farmstead Character Analysis

The Malvern Hills AONB has been divided into a number of Landscape Character Types (LCTs) which have been used to inform the assessment of the character of the built environment across the area.

This report presents an analysis of farmstead character in the AONB utilising farmsteads mapping data derived from projects previously undertaken in Herefordshire and Worcestershire, with the small area of the AONB within Gloucestershire being mapped specifically for this project. This analysis has informed the production of farmstead character summaries for five areas:

- Commons (being an amalgamation of Enclosed Commons and Unenclosed Commons LCTs)
- Wooded Hills
- Timbered Farmlands
- Settled Pastoral Farmlands
- Estate Farmlands

Whilst there are other LCTs within the AONB, the number or survival of farmsteads within these areas is limited meaning that it is difficult to meaningfully discuss farmstead character.

Commons

This area represents the combination of two LCTs; Unenclosed Common and Enclosed Common. These areas have been combined because in terms of farmstead character, the two landscapes are closely inter-related and therefore the division between the two LCTs is not meaningful.

There are two distinct types of enclosure within this area. To the north there is regular enclosure of common characterised by straight roads and tracks which provide a framework for small to medium scale fields with straight boundaries. However, the field pattern does not have the high degree of regularity sometimes seen in such landscapes; the fields here vary considerably in size and shape, some being parallelograms as well as the usual rectangles.

Within this landscape there is a low density of isolated medium to large scale farmsteads, typically with regular courtyard plans, associated with the enclosure of the common in the late 18th or 19th centuries.

To the centre and south of the area are enclosures around areas of surviving open common. These fields are generally small, irregular closes and include some 'islands' of enclosure that lie within the open common reflecting the piecemeal enclosure and encroachment on the edges of the common. This is a process that has been underway since the medieval period but increasing from the 17th century, often led by small farmers and squatters, which has produced a distinctive settlement pattern with a high density of small-scale farmsteads, smallholdings and

cottages. In some cases earlier farmsteads that once sat on the edge of the common are now separated from it by later phases of enclosure and encroachment.

Farmsteads in this part of the area were typically of linear, dispersed or small loose courtyard form, these types representing 56% of recorded farmsteads. These groups and have been highly vulnerable to change with a high proportion of these sites being lost from the landscape. Smallholdings were also a feature of this landscape but many have been lost or significantly altered.

Overall, this area has seen a relatively high level of change within its farmsteads – 50% survive with more than 50% of their late 19th century form intact whilst 33% have lost their historic farmstead character.

Few farmsteads in this area include listed buildings and only 4% have pre-1700 buildings.

Principal Wooded Hills

The Wooded Hills area is one of the principal areas within the AONB extending almost the full length of the area and lying to the west of the main chain of the Malvern Hills. This area has a complex, intimate topography with frequent irregular areas of woodland within which are scattered isolated farmsteads linked by a network of lanes, tracks and paths. The irregular fields within the area are generally small to medium scale and probably represent the piecemeal clearance of woodland from the medieval period. Fields tend to be slightly larger to the south.

The pattern of farmsteads within this area also shows a difference between the north and south; to the north there is a noticeably higher density of farmsteads compared to the south despite the lesser extent of woodland. This lower density is explained by the presence of some higher status sites including Eastnor Castle with its associated deer park and Bronsil Castle.

24% of farmsteads retain pre-1700 buildings, mainly concentrated in the north of the area. Only three sites retain both a pre-1700 farmhouse and one or more working buildings, these sites being of particular significance.

Courtyard plans are predominant in the area with an almost equal division between medium to large scale loose and regular courtyard plans. There is a higher proportion of linear plans in this area but the numbers may represent an under-recording in the Herefordshire part of the AONB.

The farmsteads of this area have been subject to relatively low levels of change; 79% retaining more than 50% of their late 19th century form compared to the AONB average of 66.5%.

Principal Timbered Farmlands

The Timbered Farmlands LCT consists of one large area in the west of the AONB and several smaller areas, mainly lying along the edges of the AONB. A small area lies in the south-east of the AONB. These areas are typically low lying, gently

undulating landscapes. Settlement in this LCT is predominantly dispersed with scattered, isolated farmsteads, some of which are on moated sites, and a few hamlets. To the south of the main area of this LCT farmsteads are typically located on the boundary between the Timbered Farmlands and Wooded Hills LCTs. The fields are generally larger than in the Wooded Hills LCT area but are still predominantly irregular in form representing piecemeal enclosure.

20% of farmsteads in this area retain a pre-1700 listed building, all of which are farmhouses.

Farmstead plans are predominantly of courtyard form, almost equally split between medium scale loose and regular types. There are some linear type plans with a possibility of under-recording in the Herefordshire part of the area.

74% of farmsteads survive with less than 50% loss of their late 19th century form, above the AONB average of 66.5%. However, 25% of recorded farmsteads have lost their historic farmstead character, above the AONB average of 17.0%

Settled Pastoral Farmlands

This LCT consists of two areas, both located in the south-east of the AONB. Despite the name, the southern-most of these two areas is largely devoid of settlement with only a few farmsteads located on the edge of the area. This area consists of flat, low lying pastureland with numerous ponds within the small and medium scale irregular fields.

The northern area is markedly different. The fields here are mainly small fields that possibly represent fossilised strip fields pushing out towards the open areas of Castlemorton Common except for the small northern edge where there is a small area of larger fields associated with a larger farmstead. Within this northern block of this LCT there is also some common edge settlement consisting of houses set in small plots along the fringe of the common. Farmsteads and smallholdings in this small area are more closely related to the Commons area described above. Otherwise, settlement in this area is dispersed with isolated farmsteads and cottages.

Five farmsteads (31%) retain buildings of pre-1700 date, two of which also have a working building of pre-1700 date. These latter two sites are of particular significance.

Courtyard plans are predominant and are almost equally divided between medium scale regular and loose courtyard types.

56% of farmsteads survive with more than 50% of their historic form intact, below the AONB average of 66.5% whilst all recorded farmsteads retain some farmstead character.

Estate Farmlands

The Estate Farmlands LCT lies at the southern end of the AONB and represents a landscape medium scale irregular fields with occasional larger fields that are probably the result of 20th century boundary removal. A stream flows along the southern edge of the area where a few farmsteads are located with further farmsteads lying on the gently sloping valley side. These farmsteads are either isolated or lie in loose association with other farmsteads (farmstead clusters) meaning that the settlement pattern is dispersed.

33% of farmsteads retain a pre-1700 farmhouse. No pre-1700 working buildings are recorded in the area.

Regular plan types are predominant, representing 78% of recorded examples. These include four examples of Regular Multi-yards which are often associated with higher status farmsteads. A linear plan and a smallholding lie within this area but both are on the northern boundary of the area.

78% of farmsteads survive with more than 50% of their historic form intact, above the AONB average of 66.5%.

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