Summary

The Shropshire Hills are bounded by the Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain to the north and the Severn Valley and Mid Severn Sandstone Plateau to the east. To the south-east lies the Teme Valley, on the edge of the Herefordshire Plateau, and to the south-west the Clun and North West Herefordshire Hills. The Shropshire Hills form an area of great diversity with steep-sided ‘whaleback’ hills of open moorland interspersed with settled, cultivated valleys. Less than 1% of the area is urban, 8% is woodland. Nearly 50% of the area lies within the Shropshire Hills AONB. The key area variations are:

Clee Hill Uplands and Western Uplands
A very high density of small farms and smallholdings – around the Stiperstones, Cordon Hill, the edge of the Stiperstones and on the Clee Hills - that developed in association with industrial development on the moorland edge.

Hills and Vales
The remainder of the character area is a complex landscape with a mix of dispersed and nucleated settlement where larger farms developed within the reorganised enclosed fields of the valleys and there are higher densities of farmsteads – set in piecemeal and small-scale irregular enclosures - on the valley sides and hills including the Clee Hills.

Teme Valley Fringe
A small area to the south blending into the Teme Valley of mixed farming, with fruit growing and hopyards.

Landscape and Settlement

- High levels of dispersed settlement, with villages concentrated along river valleys: 16.4% of farmsteads located in villages and 18.1% in hamlets.
- Broad mix of farmstead scales across the area, with the vales characterised by large to very large-scale farmsteads. Very high densities of small-scale farmsteads around the Stiperstones and the Clee Hills.

Farmstead and Building Types

- Linear, L-plan (attached house) and small loose courtyard groups (with buildings to one or two sides of the yard) associated with the smallest upland farmsteads.
- Large-scale regular courtyard farmsteads concentrated in Corve Dale and the vales.
- A mix of farmstead types – including regular U plans and large numbers of larger loose courtyard and L-plan groups.
- Dispersed plans are concentrated around the Clee Hill and Western Uplands, particularly dispersed driftways and clusters.
- Timber-framed and stone-built barns found on the lowland farmsteads but often converted to cowhouses and the openings to the threshing bay blocked up.
- Two-storey and single-storey cowhouses, including some rare 18th century and earlier examples, found on many farms.
Rarity and Significance

- Medium-high rates of survival, but higher away from the vales, with 69% of farmsteads recorded from late 19th century maps retaining more than half of their historic footprint.
- Low concentration of pre-1750 farmstead buildings, but these include some notable examples of early loose courtyard groups with 18th century and earlier barns and animal housing.
- Some very rare surviving examples of smallholdings set within moorland edge landscapes.
- Use of graded slates an increasingly rare feature seen in the west of the area.

Drivers for Change

- Increasing farm size through the amalgamation of holdings is leaving many farmsteads detached from agriculture. Dairy and mixed farming has decreased in favour of a concentration on arable farming, pig rearing and poultry.
- 10-15% of listed working buildings have obvious signs of structural disrepair, and 20-30% with visible adaptive reuse.
- The level of conversion of farm buildings is below the national average but recent years have seen the numbers of conversions, particularly for residential use, increase significantly.
- Relatively high proportion of farmsteads remaining in agriculture explaining why indicators of non-agricultural economic activity are all relatively low (including minimal farm diversification or conversion to non-agricultural use, low participation in farm based companies and low participation as directors of substantial companies).
Wentnor
In the lowland areas, dispersed farmsteads are inter-mixed with small villages and hamlets around which former open field strips may be fossilised by enclosure boundaries. The strip fields were farmed from farmsteads located within the village where farm buildings line the village street. Beyond the area of former strip fields are irregular fields of piecemeal enclosure, some of which may have been farmed from new farmsteads created at the time of enclosure. To the eastern edge of the extract are regular fields with straight boundaries representing the enclosure of common land in the 19th century within which some small new farmsteads were built. Maps Based on OS 2nd Edition 25" map © and database right Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Ltd (All rights reserved 2005)
The upland parts of the character area were a focus for industrial activity from the medieval period, particularly coal mining and quarrying. Mining was typically carried out through the use of bell-pits, evidenced by low mounds scattered across the common (seen in foreground of photo). These industrial activities attracted ‘squatter’ settlement; small-holdings and cottages which encroached onto the edges of the common and associated with small often irregular fields for hay; the common providing grazing for cattle, sheep and horses. Some areas of the common were enclosed in the 19th century creating a regular pattern of fields with some small farms and small-holdings. Such enclosure was principally driven by the need to protect the mineral rights of local estates rather than agricultural improvement. Maps Based on OS 2nd Edition 25” map © and database right Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Ltd (All rights reserved 2005) Licence numbers 000394 and TP0024.
I HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

- Extensive evidence for Late Bronze Age and Iron Age settlement sites and field systems.
- Late 11th-12th century defended administrative centres (notably Ludlow, which developed around the medieval castle, seat of the Council of the Marches) and market towns were planted in the west of the area. Others (e.g. Much Wenlock) developed around ecclesiastical foundations. Church Stretton developed as a spa in the mid-late 19th century.
- Rising population from 16th century was closely linked to the increase in lead and coal mining and quarrying. In the moorland edge areas where these industries developed - particularly the Clee Hills and on the western flanks of the Stiperstones - smallholdings and ‘squatter’s’ cottages with access to common grazing on the moorland proliferated.
- Farming on the Clee Hills plateau was mostly small scale and pastoral, but with greater quantities of corn grown than on the uplands around the Long Mynd and the Stiperstones to the west.
- Arable cultivation and stock fattening developed on the loamy soils and valley meadows of the lower areas. Corve Dale was historically the richest in terms of arable cropping, although there still extensive areas of poorly-drained land which remained as common into the 19th century. Underdrainage from the 1830s, and the development of railways focused on the markets at Ludlow and Craven Arms, boosted corn production and stock fattening in lower Corve Dale and the Clee Hills.
- Intensive arable now dominant in lower Corve Dale and on the eastern side of the Clee Hills plateau, with intensive mixed agriculture on dip slopes and valley bottoms elsewhere.

2 LANDSCAPE AND SETTLEMENT

Clee Hill and Western Uplands

- Chains or clusters of smallholdings and small farms, with small-scale regular and irregular fields, developed on the moorland fringe. Sizable tracts of heathland and rough grassland on acid soils persist on the higher ground, most notably on the Stiperstones, Long Mynd and Clee Hills.
- Some areas of larger-scale planned enclosure of moorland during the 18th and 19th centuries was driven by estates and intended to improve pasture for cattle and secure mineral rights.

Hills and Vales

This is a varied area with a wide range of farm size and farmstead type, often intermixed, but with broad distinctions between:

- The large farms of the estate farmlands of the broad river valleys – principally Corve Dale and towards Morville, the northern area which merges into the Shropshire Plain. Here settlement was village-based, and isolated farms mostly developed in association with the enclosure of open fields and sometimes the shrinkage of settlements from villages.
- Elsewhere in the higher ground, including the Clee Hills Plateau, farms were historically smaller, although numbers had been greatly reduced through amalgamation especially over the later 18th and 19th centuries. Farmsteads can still be located in villages, but there are also high densities of isolated farmsteads and hamlets associated with smaller-scale fields, the result of generally pre-17th century enclosure of common fields intermixed with more ancient enclosure patterns (usually the clearance of woodland in the medieval period), and later boundary removal and reorganisation.
- Some isolated farmsteads relate to moated sites of 12th-14th century origin and shrunken medieval settlement.
- Notable concentrations of parkland and designed landscapes, some of the former originating as medieval hunting chase and deer parks and including some fine 18th century houses (e.g. Morville).

3 FARMSTEAD AND BUILDING TYPES

Farmstead types

Small linear farmsteads, dispersed farmsteads and the smallest loose courtyard farmsteads (with working buildings to one or 2 sides of the yard) are largely associated with the small farms and smallholdings (and largely planned enclosures) of part-time farmers in the Clee Hill and Western Uplands. Few of these remain in agricultural use. Significant concentration around the Stiperstones, Cordon Hill, dispersed around the edge of the Long Mynd and dense concentrations on the Clee Hills.

Dispersed plans are concentrated around the Clee Hill and Western Uplands, particularly dispersed driftways and clusters. They appear to have developed as stock pounds sited off tracks linking the hill pasture valley slopes and
upstanding common land.
Loose courtyard farmsteads are concentrated around the moorlands and away from the estate farmlands of the low ground and vales. These include some groups with 18th century or earlier houses and working buildings. The smallest, with detached working buildings to one or two sides of the yard, are concentrated in areas of historic smallholdings. Larger examples, with buildings facing 3 or 4 sides of the yard, are concentrated away from the moorland edges and away from the estate farmlands of the valleys.

Large scale regular courtyard farmsteads (multi-yard, f-, and e-plans) reflect the need to process corn and fatten stock in yards on the largest farmsteads in the vales which specialised in the fattening of cattle as well as large-scale corn production. They correlate to estate farmland and timbered plateau farmland and on the small areas of principal and pastoral settled farmland. These plan forms strongly correlate to the landscape following the line of the Corve Dale, Ape Dale, the flat bottomed valley around Bishops Castle, the Rea Valley into the Vale of Montgomery, and along the northern boundary of the area where the Shropshire Plain meets the hills.

Other regular farmstead types reflect the smaller size of farms away from the vales:
- Regular L plans with multi-functional ranges are less apparent on the estate farmlands of Corve Dale, except at its south-eastern end where stock farming developed around the rail head at Ludlow.
- Regular courtyard U-plans are scattered across areas of late enclosure in the uplands, and are most evident on the timbered plateau farmland – where the abundance of mature hedgerow trees and scattered woodland reflects a long history of enclosure and dispersed settlement - surrounding the Clee Hills. A significant number also run along Wenlock Edge, set between the boundary of the wooded hill estate land and the main estate farmland on the valley bottom, most located within small villages or hamlets.

The farmsteads associated with these landscapes tend to be of medium to large size and include L-shaped steadings with additional buildings to three or four sides of the yard.

Building types
- Cattle housing is a particularly distinctive characteristic of this area. Single storey and 2-storey timber-framed cowhouses mainly date from the 18th and 19th centuries with very rare earlier examples. Sizes vary from small buildings for 8-12 cattle to large ranges within planned L-plan farmsteads.
- Small numbers of timber-framed threshing barns and cowhouses survive.
- Threshing barns usually form part of or are absorbed into late 18th/19th century combination ranges which are a feature of most farms.
- Much evidence – in the form of blocked openings to the large threshing doors and inserted openings to animal housing and lofts - for barns being converted to cattle housing and other uses.
• Some rare surviving examples of horse engine houses attached to barns.
• Some stone or brick-built hay barns, especially on the larger lowland farmsteads where larger numbers of fatstock were over-wintered.

• Granaries – usually on larger farms - found above cart sheds or stables and accessed by external steps.
• Some farmstead buildings retain evidence for their former domestic use. These either relate to the shrinkage of hamlets into individual farmsteads or the accommodation of labourers.

The largest timber-framed barns are concentrated in the arable west of the area. This has been extended into an L-plan – a common form.

The majority of barns are stone built and incorporated into combination ranges. The threshing door was blocked (and given pigeon holes) in the late 19th century when additional doors were inserted for its conversion to a cowhouse and stables.

Open-sided stone-built hay barns are found in small numbers, especially on larger farms across the lower lying parts of the area.
Cattle housing

Buildings for cattle are found on nearly all farmsteads in the area. There are some 17th and 18th century timber-framed buildings for cattle (a, b and c) but commonly cattle were housed in enclosed single storey buildings of late 18th and 19th century date ranging from small cowhouses to large ranges or forming part of combination ranges (d and e). Open-fronted shelter sheds are also found facing into yards (f).

Cartsheds

Granaries are found on the larger farmsteads of the area and were usually incorporated at first floor level within combination ranges or located over cartsheds (left).
Stables are found on all but the smallest farmsteads but the larger examples are found on the farms with greater areas of arable in the lowland areas. Many stables are incorporated into combination ranges.

Free-standing dovecotes are a feature of some of the larger, often manor farms, of the area. Most are of 18th or early 19th century date. Dovecotes may also be incorporated into other buildings such as barns or stables.

There are some rare but significant survivals of very small buildings that provided accommodation for labourers, often found close to the farmstead. Externally these buildings may appear similar to cowhouses but the presence of a fireplace and a narrower doorway evidence their domestic function. Such buildings contribute to the social history of rural communities.

4 MATERIALS AND DETAIL

- Timber-framing widely used for farmhouses and barns until the 17th century. Stone also used from medieval period for high-status houses and some farm buildings; stone continued as the predominant building material into the 19th century.
- Building stones used within the area include igneous rock to west and on the Clee Hills, sandstone around the Clee Hills and limestone on Wenlock Edge.
- Weatherboarding is a common form of cladding for timber-framed barns and other farm buildings, and in the western part of the area is often associated with tall, stone plinths and gable walls. A similar combination of weatherboarded framing (often in softwood) and brick walls is associated with barns of late 18th to early 19th century date.
- Brick was used from the 17th century often in-filling timber-frame panels. From the 18th century brick was used in some larger farmsteads, particularly in the west of the area.
- Thick and roughly edged slate, often graded in size, is now increasingly rare.
- Clay tile and thin Welsh slate typical.

Timber-framed farm buildings, either weather-boarded or with brick infill, are most commonly seen in the western part of the area. There are some very rare examples of cleft oak panels (right).
This is one of the **Farmsteads Character Statements** for the National Character Areas. Further illustrated guidance on historic character and significance, under the same headings, is provided in the **West Midlands Farmsteads Character Statement**. They result from The West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project, which has mapped the historic character and use of farmsteads across the region, and developed planning tools to inform future change. A **Summary Report** summarises the results of the whole project for the whole region and sets out policy and land use implications, and recommendations and next steps for further work.

The **Rarity and Significance** and **Drivers for Change** headings, and other elements of the main text, are based upon the mapping and interpretation of historic character. These records are stored in the relevant local authority **Historic Environment Record** and there is a **Historic Farmstead Characterisation Report** for each county and the Central Conurbation. These have been used as a baseline to determine the patterns of current use, as summarised for each area in the **Drivers for Change** section. There is a **Farmstead Use Report** for the region.

Also under the **Drivers for Change** heading are percentages of listed working farm buildings with visible structural failure and evidence of adaptive reuse. These are based on comparison of 1980s with 1999-2006 photographs, from the **Photo Image Survey** (University of Gloucestershire for English Heritage, 2009). In the West Midlands 27% of listed working farm buildings have evidence for residential reuse (national level 30%), 3% other (national 4%) and 70% (national 66%) have no other evidence for other use. 18.9% have evidence for structural failure (national 8.9%).

**The West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project** is a collaborative project led by English Heritage with the county and metropolitan authorities. This document has been written by Jeremy Lake of English Heritage’s Characterisation Team with assistance from Bob Edwards of Forum Heritage Services. All photographs are by English Heritage and Forum Heritage Services unless otherwise acknowledged.