



# Celebrating landscape character in the South Suffolk and North Essex Clayland

The farmstead is prominently sited next to an ancient holloway. © Jeremy Lake/CCRI



## 1 Introduction

From its inception over 30 years ago Agri-Environment Scheme (AES) policy has consistently recognised the importance of protecting and managing the historic environment, including traditional farm buildings, to secure a range of public goods for society. In 2021 Natural England commissioned research to review the uptake and values of AES options designed to support the maintenance of traditional farm buildings. This case study is one of a suite designed to illustrate the range of public benefits provided by this investment. Actual site locations are anonymised but are described with reference to the National Character Areas (NCA) in which they are located. Understanding the success and value of such funding is crucial in supporting future conservation decision making, especially for AES development.

The farmstead is set in a part of the **South Suffolk and North Essex Clayland** NCA, which is noted for its dispersed medieval settlement pattern of scattered farmsteads, hamlets and small settlements around 'tyes' (commons) or strip greens as here. Large fields, enclosed by around 1700 and enlarged or otherwise changed since then, also illustrate how large mixed farms developed from the medieval period.

## 2 Farmstead character

This Countryside Stewardship agreement uses the traditional farm building maintenance option (HS1) to maintain buildings at two farmstead sites. The farmhouses and barns on both sites are listed at grade II, as also is a granary which is not in the scheme (as it is converted to an office) at one of the sites. The farmstead illustrated here has retained all of its historic form from 1900, and has a range of buildings which illustrate the importance of corn (17th century and earlier threshing barns with a later granary), of teams of horses for working the fields (stables) and carting manure and produce (cart shed) and of cattle for their meat, milk and manure (cowhouses and shelter sheds). The whole group also illustrates how timber-framing was for centuries the main building technique for houses and farm buildings, and also the use of plain clay tiles and pantiles for roofing, and weatherboarding, flint and brick for walls. These features are some of the defining characteristics of this NCA. The solid thatch roof on one of the buildings is a very rare survival.

## 3 Public benefits

This farmstead sits to one side of an ancient holloway, used as a public footpath, and like the other well-preserved farmstead in this scheme is prominent in the landscape. The profile for this NCA notes that farmsteads are one of the many heritage assets, *clearly visible throughout this landscape which provide a strong sense of history and how the landscape has developed over time* and deliver a range of ecosystem services noted in the **Statements of Environmental Opportunity** (SEO), particularly SEO 2 to encourage measures that conserve and enhance the characteristic historic settlement patterns and features.

## 4 Participating in the scheme

For the farm manager they are beautiful buildings, an integral part of the farming landscape and offering a great sense of identity and belonging. The owners value both of these sites, and whilst the agreement acknowledges the work that is put into their maintenance they are committed to their retention in their existing condition for the foreseeable future.



Tile roofs, weatherboarded timber frame and the use – often to decorative effect – of brick to add strength to flint walls are all characteristic of this area. © Jeremy Lake/CCRI



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The solid thatch roof on one of the buildings is a very rare survival. © Jeremy Lake/CCRI



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