



# Contributing to landscape and heritage in the Shropshire Hills

The late-17th century barn and stable. © Jeremy Lake/CCRI

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## 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.

A farmstead and two outfarms are included in this Countryside Stewardship agreement in the **Shropshire Hills National Character Area** NCA. This is an upland area, but it is marked by strong contrasts between the large-scale farmsteads of the vales and the small-scale ones concentrated around Clee Hill and the uplands along the Welsh borders. The farmstead buildings use the traditional farm building maintenance option (HS1), while the two outfarms are covered by the maintenance option for buildings in remote areas (HS8).

## 2 Farmstead character

The courtyard farmstead here is substantially complete and has a range of buildings that are characteristic of this area. It straddles a routeway that led to upland grazing, and is sited on the edge of land that had been mostly enclosed by the 17th century and commons that were enclosed and then dotted with outfarms with barns and cattle housing set around yards in the late 18th and 19th century. Its large (and grade II listed) timber-framed barn and stable that dates from around 1700 illustrates the importance of arable agriculture in the vale landscapes of the Shropshire Hills, most of the other buildings being for housing cattle; a large new stables dates from the late 19th century.

Whilst only part of one of the outfarms survives, repurposed to continuing agricultural use, the other is an extant courtyard group and includes a timber-frame barn which was either resited in its present position or survives as one of the earliest field barns in England. Timber-framed buildings as here continued to be built into the 19th century, and here combine with the use of local stone and imported brick in contributing to the strong sense of place that these upland and upland fringe landscapes on the Welsh borders offer.



The outfarm with its 17th century barn.  
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### 3 Public benefits

Farmsteads make a particularly striking contribution to this NCA, with 69 per cent of those recorded from late 19th century maps retaining more than half of their historic form. Many public footpaths converge on and pass through the farmstead, enabling walkers using this area's extensive network of rights of way – noted as a key opportunity for enhancement in the **Statements of Environmental Opportunity** for this NCA - to experience a Welsh Borders farmstead in its landscape setting. The buildings also provide habitats for birds and bats, and the barn on the outfarm is a roost for barn owls.

### 4 Participating in the scheme

For the agreement holder, the buildings are an important part of the farm and make an important contribution to the character of the landscape. The agreement has made a significant contribution to their maintenance, and 'having them in good condition puts a smile on my face'. Nevertheless, and whilst adaptation has enabled continued use for stock of one outfarm, it is difficult to find a beneficial use for the most complete of the two outfarms.

