



Communities and wildlife in the Severn and Avon Vales

At the core of the care farm is a very large threshing barn with an attached stable or cowhouse, both built in around 1700, with a later brick-built stable to its east end.

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NATURAL
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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.

The buildings here remain from a large farmstead of a type which developed on the edge of villages and hamlets, often in tandem with the gradual and planned enclosure of the open fields around them, in this part of the **Severn and Avon Vales** NCA. This is a landscape of large farms and estates with rich evidence for farming and settlement from the Roman and prehistoric periods, surviving as earthworks and buried archaeology to the north and east of this site.

2 Farmstead character

Two farmsteads which retain more than 50 per cent of their historic character and a field barn are included in this Environmental Stewardship agreement using the traditional farm building maintenance option (D1). A 16th century or earlier house, remodelled as a prestigious house with its own landscaped gardens in about 1860, stands to one side of a large multi-yard farmstead that had developed into its present form over the 19th century. One farmyard with hop kilns has been converted to residential use. Within the scheme is a very large timber-framed threshing barn with an attached stable or cowhouse, both built in around 1700, with a later brick-built stable to its east end. Close to the house is a large late 18th century stables with a granary, built of brick, which is attached to a long timber-framed cart shed range of the early-mid 19th century. All these buildings illustrate the importance of arable farming and how large arable farms had appeared and continued to develop in this area from at least the 17th century. The cider house survives as a reminder of the local cider industry, only fragments now surviving of the apple orchards that extended across the surrounding landscape; it forms part of a range which also includes the rare survival of a combined bakehouse and brewhouse with its bread oven and copper. The use of timber frame for the barn range, and use of brick, tile and slate for the other buildings, is also characteristic of this area.

The agreement also includes a small field barn for cattle, which provided manure for the strip of orchard in which it is sited. Over 72 per cent of these have been lost or demolished across Worcestershire, and in fruit growing areas they were often sited in orchards.

3 Public benefits

Like 64 per cent of recorded farmsteads in this large NCA, this group has retained more than half of its historic form. Its buildings are prominently located on the edge of a small hamlet with other houses, including former farm buildings and also Victorian farm workers' cottages. The large scale of the barn makes it a visually impressive part of its community, and it is rare to find stables or cowhouses which date from or before the early 18th century. The barn range lies at the core of a care farm which provides therapeutic care to those in recovery as well as offering educational tours for schools and other groups. It is also included on one of the history trails for the parish.

The barn range offers a habitat for swallows, sparrows, other birds and bats. The field barn provides a roost for barn owls, and the bay at one end – by simply fixing a sheet to the underside of the rafters – provides a roost for



The small field barn for housing cattle and producing manure, which provides a habitat for bats and barn owls. © Jeremy Lake/CCRI

bats. The modern farm has also received awards for wildlife-friendly farming.

In this respect, the agreement helps to deliver the recommendations for conservation and enhancement of the natural and historic environment set out in the **Statements of Environmental Opportunity** (SEO) for this NCA, particularly SEO 3 on reinforcing the existing landscape structure, for example, by:

Conserving the area's richly varied traditional architecture and farmsteads, vernacular and historic buildings in Cotswold stone, timber framing and deep-red brick, encouraging the use of appropriate styles and use of locally distinctive materials. Ensuring that the repair, restoration or conversion of vernacular buildings is carried out with due regard to this historic interest using local and appropriate materials, styles and detailing.

4 Participating in the scheme

The buildings have been part of the family farm for nearly 100 years, and the agreement holder considers that the options are really important for buildings where it is hard to find an economic use, and also the scheme enables farmers to budget ahead. He also views the farmstead buildings as making a significant contribution to the character of the local area and having great potential for interpretation, in addition to being used by a variety of bats and birds and as part of the care farm, and the field barn as a significant habitat and heritage asset.

