

SUMMARY

Farmsteads Assessment Guidance for Tunbridge Wells Borough Supplementary Planning Document

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council has recently adopted the **Farmsteads Assessment Guidance for Tunbridge Wells Borough** as a Supplementary Planning Document for use in development management.

Below is a summary of the document which provides an overview of the content and its application. The full document is available on the Borough Council's website.

Aims of the document

The purpose of this guidance document is to help secure sustainable development and the conservation of farmstead character in the Borough of Tunbridge Wells through the planning system. It is focused on understanding whole farmsteads in their landscape context, rather than providing detailed guidance on the adaptation or conversion of individual buildings. It will help you consider the capacity for change of farmsteads at the earliest critical stage in the planning process, through understanding:

- their **character**, which results from their historic development and function as whole sites, including any routeways and spaces within and around them, and how they are linked to the surrounding landscape and settlement
- their **significance**, a factor that can be of critical importance in determining planning applications
- their **sensitivity** or capacity for the change being considered, and other issues that can inform pre-application discussion and be taken forward when preparing a scheme

Why guidance for farmsteads?

Farmsteads have been identified as a key component of the historic dispersed settlement pattern of the Wealden landscape contributing to the natural beauty of the High Weald AONB and the local landscape character across the Borough. They are a distinctive feature that helps give this area its unique character. Although many individual buildings may be listed it is the farmsteads as whole which are often the greatest asset and it can be that the wider features and non listed buildings of a farmstead are overlooked when changes take place.

Traditional farmstead groups then and their buildings make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness. They are also assets which, through a diversity of uses, can make an important contribution to the rural economy and communities. Historic farm buildings are, however, largely redundant for mainstream agricultural use as a result of changing agricultural practice. As a consequence they are under the greatest threat of neglect on one hand, and development on the other, than any rural building type.

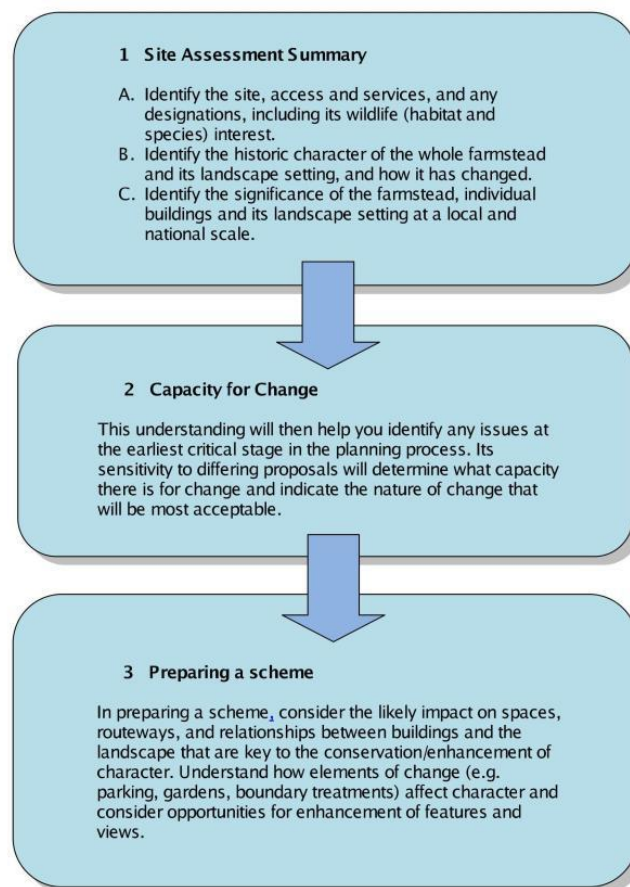
Chapter 1 covers **Planning Context**, provides a **summary of research on farmsteads and rural economies**, and has sections to help understand **Farmstead Character**, **Significance** and **Capacity for Change**.

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Chapter 2 is the **Site Assessment Framework** and sets out detailed guidance with worked examples of how to undertake the three staged process:



Chapter 3 provides a summary guidance on Farmstead Character and Significance in Tunbridge Wells Borough and explains about farmstead types.

In Tunbridge Wells Borough the settlement pattern across the Borough is predominantly dispersed with high densities of isolated farmsteads, 74% of farmsteads being recorded as 'isolated'. these farmsteads are mostly set within an anciently enclosed landscape of small fields that have their origins in the medieval period.

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High Weald

- within the High Weald, the pattern of anciently enclosed fields survives to a remarkable degree, often with large wooded hedges and shaws
- the few large rural settlements, for example Goudhurst and Cranbrook, are generally later developments within this pattern of dispersed settlement and served as market centres rather than as agricultural settlements
- there are many hamlets consisting of one or more farmsteads and cottages within the High Weald, except for in the area around Royal Tunbridge Wells

Low Weald

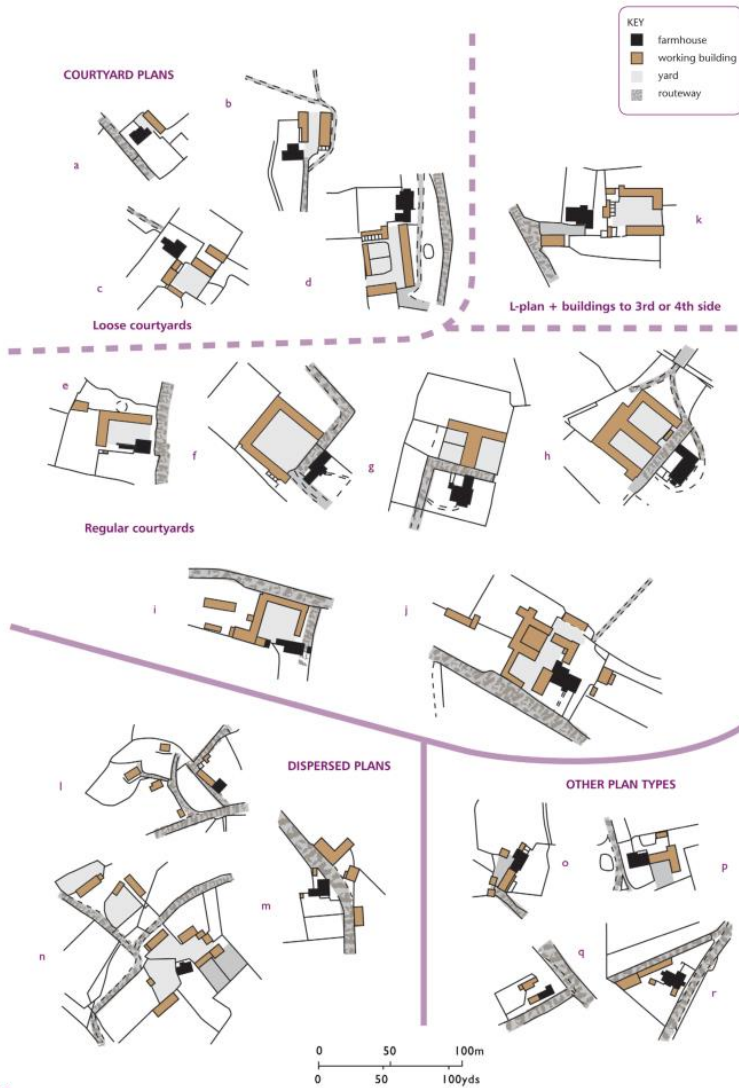
- the pattern of early enclosure has been subject to higher levels of change than in the High Weald, leading to the creation of larger fields and farms, although the early origins of the enclosures can still be discerned
- field boundaries tend to be smaller and less wooded than in the High Weald and there are fewer areas of woodland

Farmstead and building types

The scale, plan form and date of farmsteads and their buildings reflects farm size and the type of farming practised within an area over time. The Weald in general is an area that is characterised by small-scale farmsteads, mainly of loose courtyard and dispersed plan types.

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Chapter 4 Provides Sources of Information and advice.

Importantly it directs the reader to other related guidance that might assist in preparing a planning application.