

Conservation in Tendring

Traditional Farm Buildings

Guidance on
conversion and re-use

Tendring
District Council



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Foreword

Tendring District contains over 1300 Listed Buildings, many of which are traditional barns and farm buildings. In addition there are potentially hundreds more historic, but unlisted traditional farm buildings all of which contribute to the Area's considerable rural character.

Landowners and farmers have converted many such buildings to other uses, including commercial, holiday or residential use. However, there is some concern that in some instances such conversions have resulted in a diminution to the character and appearance of the original historic building, its setting and resultant adverse impact on the landscape and countryside around it.

Essex County Council produced various guidance documents on barn and farm building conversions in the 1980's and in some respects these are still useful. Some of the text in this publication has been taken from an unpublished draft document which has been in the course of preparation by the County Council. The District Council is grateful for the use of this material.

English Heritage has also produced more recent specialist guidance on this subject all of which are listed at the end of this publication. The Council strongly urges all potential applicants to consult these latest guidance documents.

This booklet looks specifically at the position in Tendring and seeks to draw together more recent guidance on how to consider the re-use and conversion of historic (both listed and unlisted) farm buildings. It is hoped that this publication will assist all those considering the future of their under-used and redundant farm and rural buildings. It is also important that applicants are aware of the relevant planning policies in the Council's Adopted Local Plan (2007) and now in the emerging Local Development Framework (Core Strategy being published in 2011).

Applicants are strongly urged to engage with the Council's Planning Service at an early stage through the established Pre-application process.



Introduction



Tendring District has a substantial number of historic farm buildings, many of which are statutorily protected as buildings of special architectural or historic interest. Often these belong to archaeologically important domestic and agricultural settlements, in some cases dating back to the time of the Norman Conquest. They are a vital element in defining the character of the countryside, and a resource for understanding the development of farming and traditional building construction in the District.



As a result of changes in general farming practice, many of these barns and other structures have become redundant, although frequently they are utilised for low key storage and other uses. Inevitably, without an economic use, many are now suffering decay, some have already disappeared, and many have been converted to other uses. These buildings represent a finite resource which will suffer unacceptable damage unless this process of change can be managed successfully.

The best use for historic farm buildings is low-key or similar to the use for which the building was last designed, but in many cases more radical changes of use are sought. Experience over the last thirty years or more has shown that some of these uses, specifically residential conversions, are potentially very damaging to their character. Some have resulted in the destruction of the historic interest for which the building was listed and buildings that would have been listed unconverted have been rejected for listing because of the impact of the residential conversion.



To try and address the crisis facing redundant agricultural buildings, Essex County Council has in the past drawn up three sets of guidance which reflect changing perceptions of the problem. In 1979 it published 'The Essex Countryside, Historic Barns', a detailed appraisal of the then current situation which described the historical significance of the barn and provided guidance for alternative uses. Further guidance 'Residential barn Conversions, Supplementary Planning Advice', appeared in 1984, giving examples of good practice for repairs and conversion.

This was followed in 1989 by 'Historic Barn Conversions, A Way Forward', the result of detailed investigation of barn conversion schemes then implemented. Whereas beforehand conversion had been seen as a potentially positive step in saving agricultural buildings, this document expressed significant concern about the effect of residential conversion on the character of Essex barns, this being the most common change of use submitted for consideration to local planning authorities in Essex.

These guidance documents were adopted by the District Council for development control purposes.

More recently, English Heritage has carried out research on regional farm buildings, based on which it published new guidance in 2006, 'The Conversion of Traditional Farm Buildings: A guide to good practice' and 'Farming the Historic landscape, Caring for farm buildings'.

This guidance note builds on this accumulated knowledge and experience, and addresses local issues. It is aimed at those barns which are listed as being of special architectural and historic interest, though in many cases it will be applicable to unlisted farm buildings as well.



Some historic farm buildings are on the County Council's Heritage at Risk Register.

Why are these buildings special?

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Barns were built to provide weatherproof storage for agricultural produce, typically sheaves of corn which were stacked up high into the roof. Wealthy manors all had large barns of five bays or more from an early date. The 13th-century Barley and Wheat Barns at Cressing Temple are well-known examples. By the 16th and 17th centuries, small and medium sized farms had barns as well, usually of three bays. They, and indeed small medieval barns, are rare survivals today. Agricultural prosperity in the 18th century saw the construction or reconstruction of many barns. Old farm buildings other than barns are uncommon. By the 19th century, however, farms of all sizes were regularly provided with granaries, stables, and carriage houses and these have survived in considerable numbers. Model farms with livestock buildings laid out on systematic principles are a feature of the middle of the 19th century, reflecting high agricultural incomes and a more scientific approach to farming.

THE CHARACTER OF TRADITIONAL ESSEX FARM BUILDINGS AND THEIR CONTEXT IN TENDRING DISTRICT

The historic farmstead and its buildings make a fundamental contribution to the richly varied character of the Tendring countryside. The barn is often the largest building in the landscape, apart from the church, and the dominant building in the farmstead. Its simple shape and strong architectural form make it instantly recognisable. The roof dominates the walls, especially in the large early ones which were aisled and have low eaves, and the surfaces of both are blank and uninterrupted, except for the porch or midstrey which enclosed the threshing floor. Often lean-tos and livestock sheds were built up against the barn at a later date.



Until the late 19th century, all farm buildings were timber-framed. The use of brick before then was exceptional. In the course of the 19th century, oak and elm were replaced by mechanically sawn softwood, much of which was imported and import marks can sometimes be seen. Roofs were usually of plain clay tiles, even in the Middle Ages. Pantiles and interlocking clay tiles were used on later smaller buildings, and slate on the slacker roof pitches of the 19th- and 20th-century ones. Floors are generally concreted today, but would originally have been of earth, and later sometimes of asphalt. Bricks, stone and strongly built boarding were laid for the threshing floors, but are uncommon survivals today. Medieval barn walls were boarded or made with wattle and daub infill. Later they were lath and plastered or daubed. Since the 18th century, most have been covered with tarred weatherboard, though sometimes they are rendered. Openings are minimal and determined by the threshing use of the buildings; there are therefore usually only two great door openings opposite each other in the central bay, and usually no windows. The interiors have much in common with parish churches. They are large open spaces with the timber frame visible from end to end. The arcade or storey posts dominate and articulate the space.

The other buildings of the traditional farmstead are mostly simple functional structures made with locally available materials, similar to the barn, but pantile is more common than plain tile for roofing. Much of the interest of these later buildings period is provided by their fixtures and fittings, their significance for the history of the farm, and their relationship to the other buildings in the group.

CONSERVATION OF TRADITIONAL FARM BUILDINGS

Effective conservation requires a thorough understanding of the building and its context, including the historic development of the site and the archaeological implications of any work that might be undertaken. Repairs should be carried out in a sensitive way, using appropriate materials and techniques. Failure to do so may affect the special character or historic interest of the building.

Preliminary advice should be sought on proposed works. Alterations that affect the character of the building, including use of different materials, will require listed building consent. Where possible, failed or rotten fabric should be repaired in situ, not replaced. This is especially important in relation to timber framed barns.

Barns and other farm buildings provide an essential home for protected species such as owls and bats, and an assessment by qualified surveyors should be carried out before any works are undertaken.

See later in this booklet for more information on **Wildlife issues**.



Considering new uses



RE-USE OF FARM BUILDINGS

Barns are the category of farm building most subject to pressure for change. This arises partly from a desire to preserve these landmarks of the rural scene, but also because residential conversion is the most profitable alternative use and represents an opportunity for development in the countryside which may otherwise be difficult to achieve because of planning policies.

It is fundamental that when converted to a new use these buildings still bear witness to the rural craftsmen who originally constructed them, and retain particularly important local features and materials. Retention and Conservation of such features provide evidence of their history and development. Planning Policy Statement 5 provides the framework for the consideration of proposals involving conversion and adaptation of listed and unlisted historic farm buildings (Designated Heritage Assets and Heritage Assets).



Although now cancelled by Government the previous PPG15 stated that “in principle the aim should be to identify the optimum viable use that is compatible with the fabric, interior, and setting of the historic building. This may not necessarily be the most profitable use if that would entail more destructive alterations than other viable uses.”

This principle is still relevant and needs to be considered when proposals for the re-use of farm buildings are being formulated.

The majority of applications received since the initial County Council guidance was issued have been for residential conversion, most of which were approved and implemented. However, it soon

became apparent that the quality of some residential conversions was a matter for concern, and that house conversions were the least sympathetic alternative use. The appeal of the barn conversion to many was clearly an opportunity to provide a large house in an attractive farmland setting. The elements of the ordinary domestic dwelling were imposed on the barn, namely numerous windows and doors, the division of internal spaces into a series of rooms, and ancillary additions such as conservatories, greenhouses, garages, gardens and swimming pools. The character and interest of the barn, and its utilitarian setting, suffered as a result.

In a number of cases, generally outside Tendring, the change to residential use has been so dramatic as to mean that the building no longer qualifies for 'listing'. The very reason for allowing an exceptional change to the listed barn - its historic and architectural character - has been destroyed in the process of conversion.

Suppression of the domestic aspects of the conversion often results in a house that is seen as less welcoming and less convenient, with a large undivided interior and few windows. Very few residential barn conversions successfully reconcile

the two incompatible characters of barn and house. To achieve this, it is necessary to have a client, an architect and a contractor who value the historic building and have the requisite skills to produce an imaginative and sensitive scheme. The ideal client needs to be willing to employ first rate specialists and be prepared to live with some inconvenience.

Where there are proposed changes of use to purposes other than residential, it has been possible to achieve schemes which have had minimal impact upon the building and its setting. Uses such as a workshop, farm shop, office, store, community building, leisure/tourism, museum, restaurant and recreation are fundamentally less demanding of the building and its setting, and also have a greater potential to contribute to the rural economy. They should therefore always be the first uses to be considered.

Conversion to residential accommodation will only be considered as a last resort, as a subordinate part of a conversion to business or commercial use, or where there is no practical prospect of any other use. Even then, the impact of the proposal on the historic building and its setting will always take precedence.



Government Guidance

CHANGE OF USE

PPS 7 supports the re-use of appropriately located and suitably constructed existing buildings and should take account of:

- the potential impact on the countryside and landscapes and wildlife;
- specific local economic and social needs and opportunities;
- settlement patterns and accessibility to service centres, markets and housing;
- the suitability of different types of buildings, and of different scales, for re-use;
- the need to preserve, or the desirability of preserving, buildings of historic or architectural importance or interest, or which otherwise contribute to local character.

The Government's overall aim for the countryside, set out in PPS 7, is to protect it "for the sake of its intrinsic character and beauty, the diversity of its landscapes, heritage and wildlife, the wealth of its natural resources and so it may be enjoyed by all."

POLICY OBJECTIVES

The traditional farm building stock is an important part of this rural heritage and a major contributor to the character, beauty and diversity of the countryside. These historic structures also represent a significant investment of expended energy and materials, and their demolition and replacement would require a major reinvestment of these resources. This building stock is therefore the subject of policies designed to conserve, protect and sustain it. This will be achieved through a combination of conservation policy, rural development policy and land-use planning policy. On this basis decision making should;

- protect the features, settings, cultural significance and wildlife interest of traditional farm buildings;
- retain the contribution that traditional farm buildings make to local distinctiveness and to countryside character; and
- conserve the environmental capital embodied in traditional farm building stock by promoting their sustainable long-term use.

English Heritage and Natural England believe the starting point for future policy must be an understanding of the character, condition and sensitivity to change of farm buildings and the relationship of farm steadings to the wider landscape. Character-based frameworks, which develop an understanding of the resource within its broadest possible context, should provide the context for future decision making. Existing approaches to characterisation of the countryside should therefore be extended to include more systematic analysis of the rural built heritage. Village Design Statements, Conservation Area Character Appraisals, Landscape Character Assessments and Design Guides can provide useful approaches. Many of these documents are available to view or download from the Council's website www.tendringdc.gov.uk.



Guidance on the maintenance of traditional farm buildings is provided by *Farming the historic landscape: caring for farm buildings* (English Heritage et al 2004).



& Local Planning Guidance

REPLACEMENT AND CONVERSION

Decisions concerning individual applications for the replacement or conversion of traditional farm buildings take place within a strategic framework provided by Development Plans and Supplementary Planning Documents. Such policy documents should identify the key characteristics that contribute to the architectural and historic interest and local distinctiveness of farm steading types within a local authority area. They should also consider the sensitivity of farm building types and their immediate settings to changes of use and projected development, and seek to develop positive recommendations to ensure the retention of these key features. Where the local authority is satisfied that a traditional farm building no longer has a viable mainstream or low-key agricultural use, it may be prepared to grant permission for conversion to a new use.

These uses include:

- non-agricultural industrial use (e.g. workshop or storage units);
- community use;
- office use;
- holiday accommodation;
- recreational and/or educational uses;
- housing.

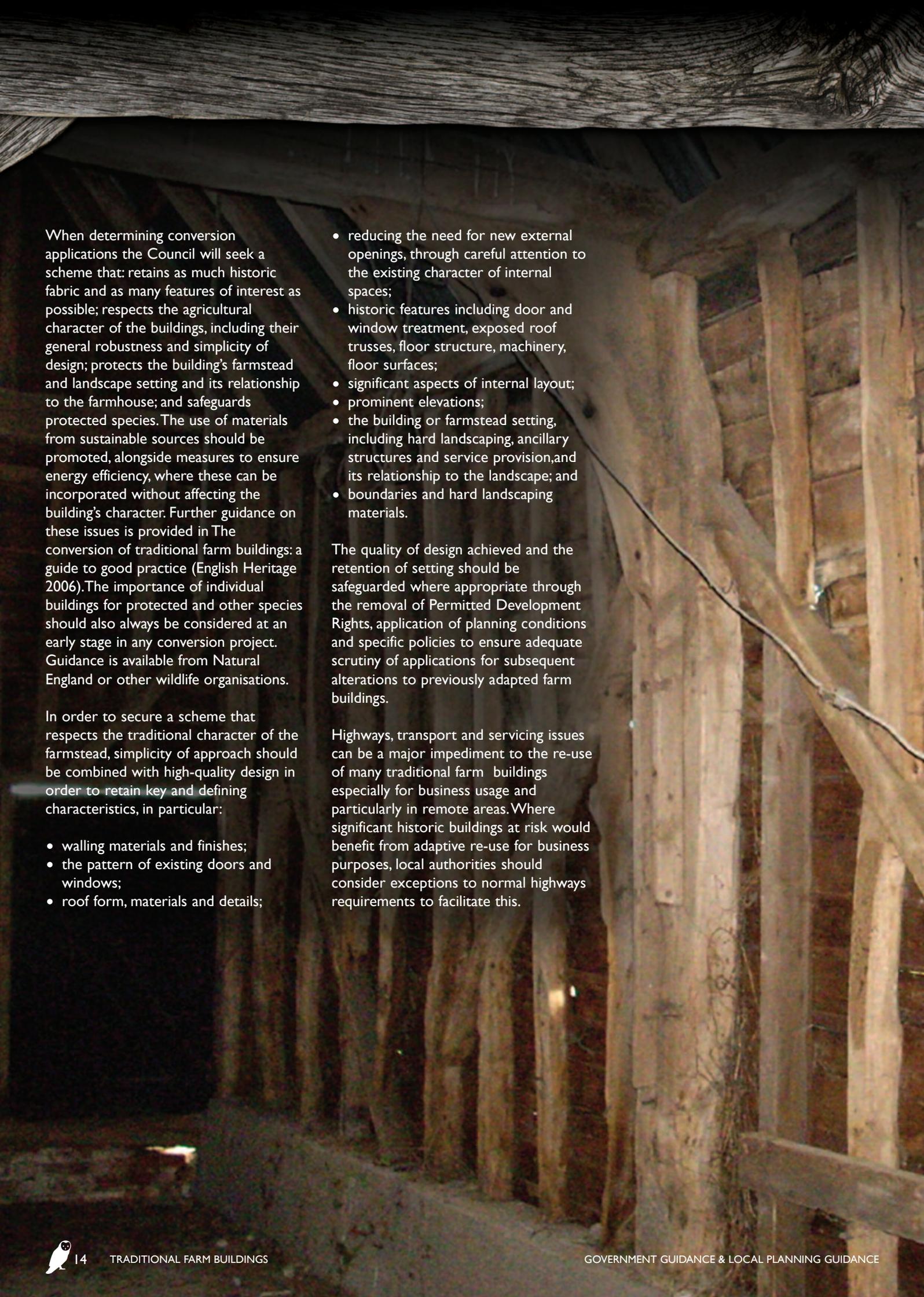
It is acknowledged that some of these alternative uses can be more damaging to the cultural significance of individual buildings or a whole farmstead than others. In many cases, conversion to workshop, light industrial or storage use can be more successfully accommodated than conversion to residential, retail or office use. Conversion to residential use is usually considered to be the most damaging in terms of its impact on historic features (such as spaces and finishes), and the setting and legibility of buildings.

In sensitive landscape settings, it is generally less intrusive and more sustainable to use an adapted traditional building than to build a new structure. Proposals to demolish traditional farm buildings and replace them with new structures will always be carefully scrutinised. Where new structures are proposed on the farmstead, their effect upon the historic relationship between the farm buildings and the farmhouse, on the character of the farmstead as a whole, and on its landscape setting, must be very carefully considered, alongside the needs of the farm business. In some instances, of course, new farm buildings can be erected without the need to apply for planning permission.



For further information see [Tendring District Local Plan \(Adopted 2007\)](#) and the emerging [Local Development Framework \(Core Strategy 2011\)](#)





When determining conversion applications the Council will seek a scheme that: retains as much historic fabric and as many features of interest as possible; respects the agricultural character of the buildings, including their general robustness and simplicity of design; protects the building's farmstead and landscape setting and its relationship to the farmhouse; and safeguards protected species. The use of materials from sustainable sources should be promoted, alongside measures to ensure energy efficiency, where these can be incorporated without affecting the building's character. Further guidance on these issues is provided in The conversion of traditional farm buildings: a guide to good practice (English Heritage 2006). The importance of individual buildings for protected and other species should also always be considered at an early stage in any conversion project. Guidance is available from Natural England or other wildlife organisations.

In order to secure a scheme that respects the traditional character of the farmstead, simplicity of approach should be combined with high-quality design in order to retain key and defining characteristics, in particular:

- walling materials and finishes;
- the pattern of existing doors and windows;
- roof form, materials and details;

- reducing the need for new external openings, through careful attention to the existing character of internal spaces;
- historic features including door and window treatment, exposed roof trusses, floor structure, machinery, floor surfaces;
- significant aspects of internal layout;
- prominent elevations;
- the building or farmstead setting, including hard landscaping, ancillary structures and service provision, and its relationship to the landscape; and
- boundaries and hard landscaping materials.

The quality of design achieved and the retention of setting should be safeguarded where appropriate through the removal of Permitted Development Rights, application of planning conditions and specific policies to ensure adequate scrutiny of applications for subsequent alterations to previously adapted farm buildings.

Highways, transport and servicing issues can be a major impediment to the re-use of many traditional farm buildings especially for business usage and particularly in remote areas. Where significant historic buildings at risk would benefit from adaptive re-use for business purposes, local authorities should consider exceptions to normal highways requirements to facilitate this.

EXCEPTIONS TO CONVERSION

A very small number of traditional farm buildings (principally grade I and II* listed buildings and scheduled monuments) are such historically or architecturally significant elements of our heritage that they should be conserved without alteration for the benefit of current and future generations. Even if they become redundant, they should be maintained and kept in good repair. Grants may be available from public funds, or, exceptionally, appropriate enabling development should be considered in line with current guidance (English Heritage 2008).

Historic ancillary structures often enhance the group value of traditional farm buildings and are of significance in their own right, but they are under-represented in the statutory lists. Some, such as cart sheds, can easily find new uses but others, particularly pigsties and dovecotes, are often unsuited to intensive re-use because of their small size or particular character and are therefore at greater risk of neglect and dereliction than larger farm buildings. When granting planning permission for conversion projects regard should be had to the interest of the farmstead as a group and, wherever possible, should seek the future upkeep of ancillary structures by means of planning conditions or legal agreements.

CONVERSION TO RESIDENTIAL USE

PPS 7 encourages local planning policies to consider landscape character and sustainable development. The location of farmsteads is an essential part of landscape character and varies locally. Some areas are traditionally characterised by dispersed farmsteads in open countryside, others by farmsteads in hamlets and villages. In general terms, traditional farm buildings located in settlements are more suitable for conversion to residential use than buildings that are isolated in remote countryside. Nevertheless, this approach should be applied with due regard to the need to provide agricultural, forestry and other essential occupational dwellings in the open countryside.

The historic settlement pattern will also be taken into account. Where dispersed farmsteads are of intrinsic historic or landscape interest, sensitive residential conversion may be acceptable if loss through dilapidation is the alternative. Where conversion schemes are proposed within settlements, their impact on the character and appearance of designated conservation areas will be considered.



Adapting and Repairing:



GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND DESIGN ISSUES

English Heritage's 'The Conversion of Traditional Farm Buildings: A guide to good practice' has identified the issues as follows:

- Understanding character, significance and context. This must inform any proposals for repairs, use or alteration. This will normally be in the form of an impact assessment and an accurate and detailed survey to determine the exact relationship of the structural members.
- Respecting the architectural and historic interest of the building and its setting. This starts with pairing uses and buildings sensitively; by investigation of the possible alternative uses taking the least destructive first. The least destructive use is usually the current use, which may be low key storage. There is a presumption against residential conversion of any barn or farm building which is of architectural or historic interest as this is normally the most destructive use.
- Striking a balance between incorporating the practical requirements of a new use and protecting the special character or significance of the farm building and its setting. Users may have to accept that the building imposes constraints that require some degree of compromise if its character and significance is to be retained.



Conversions of a barn will limit the use of the building such as:

- The setting should remain rural and agricultural. Parking for industrial, community and restaurant users may be a problem. Normal domestic curtilage such as gardens, screening, oil tanks and washing lines are also out of place in this setting.



- There will be limited light levels due to the need to retain an uninterrupted external appearance.
- There will be large open volumes due to the need to retain the hall-like character.
- There will be limited openings and headroom due to the need to retain the historic frame and there will be important fittings to be retained in-situ such as stable partitions, hatches and historic flooring.



General Principles

- Achieving high standards of design and craftsmanship. The skill and knowledge of those qualified and experienced in conserving historic buildings is essential in matching the new use to the building, assessing the impact of changes and carrying out sensitive and appropriate repairs.
- Minimising loss of and intervention in significant historic fabric. The historic



fabric and structure of the building embodies its character and interest and its retention is crucial. This includes original timber framing, brickwork, fixtures and fittings, and any subsequent alterations, fixtures and fittings that are identified as important for understanding of the uses of the building. The frame survey drawings will help to inform whether any new openings can be accommodated in modern or altered framing subject to the external appearance. Any mezzanine or first floor area

should be independently supported to avoid overloading the original structure. Repairs should be carried out in-situ to avoid reconstruction and should be like-for-like regarding timber types, design and methods of construction.

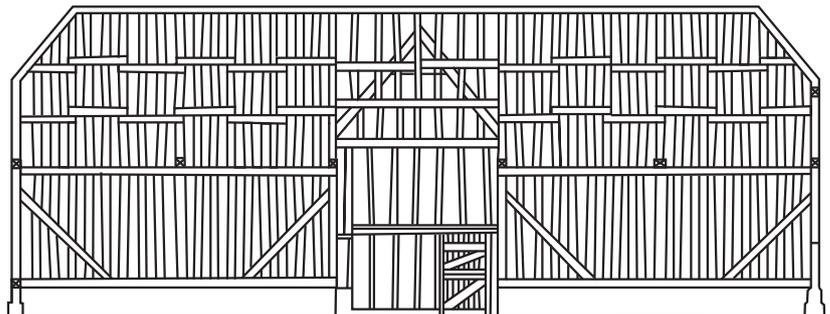
- Providing sufficient detail for the building to be assessed.

GUIDANCE FOR APPLICATIONS

- Full planning permission is needed for a change of use and listed building consent is required for alteration to the character of a listed building. Applications should be accompanied by details of all proposed works, a complete structural survey, full measured detailed survey record drawings and an impact assessment of the history and development of the building and group and the effect of the proposal upon its character.
- Drawings should include all external elevations, sections showing all internal elevations and across the buildings, plans, site and location plans, materials and details of the main construction including doors, windows, floors, staircases and roof details. These should be as existing and as proposed and plans and elevations should be at 1:100 or larger (1:50 is often required). Larger scale detail drawings should be included showing all main units of

construction and the relationship of these units to adjacent structures (doors, windows, staircases etc) including mouldings. All drawings should be fully annotated to indicate clearly the proposed works and all materials of construction and surface finishes.

- Implications of structural works, Building Regulations and Fire Regulations should be submitted where they will affect the existing structure or the practicality of the proposed scheme. This should include any proposals for insulation, inserted floors, rebuilding of plinths, foundations or frames, fire escape and protection against damp.
- A marketing exercise should be carried out for any farm building proposed for residential use to identify whether there is demand for any other less damaging use. The marketing exercise should be carried out for a minimum of one year and the value put on the building shall be reasonable. Clear advertisement should be maintained on site and by an estate agent during that entire period.
- If there is the possibility of use of the building or site by protected wildlife species such as owls or bats, an assessment by qualified surveyors should be submitted with the application. (See **Wildlife section**)



Design Considerations



set well back in the opening, with the doors fixed back either permanently or during the day so they can be used for security at night. Small service rooms such as toilets can be without natural light. Dormers are unacceptable and rooflights are discouraged unless hidden. A panel of patent glazing with non-reflective glass has sometimes been used successfully.

Neat solutions for small openings include slit windows at eaves level or a weatherboard at the eaves replaced by a length of dark tinted glass. Small hatches can be glazed with the door fixed back.

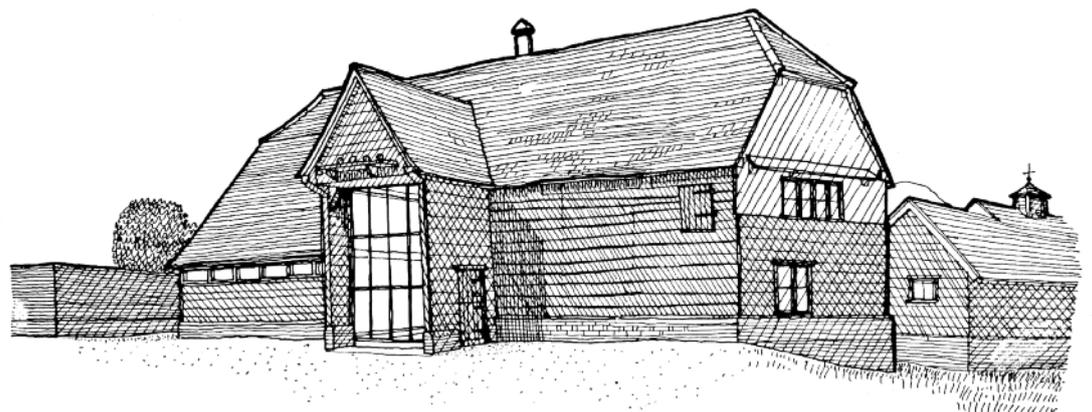
- Subdivision, particularly if a significant feature of the building is its open interior; impressive proportions and long sight lines. In any design, the open space and volume of the barn should be retained and the majority of the building including the midstreys should be left unobstructed without inserted structure such as floors, partitions and staircases. Buildings attached to a barn can be used to create smaller spaces providing that historic timber framing is not disturbed when forming the opening between buildings.

DESIGN ISSUES



Successful conversions of farm buildings must overcome the following design issues:

- Maximising daylight without compromising character: Light was not important for many farmyard uses and the orientation of openings was important. The challenge for the designer is to introduce light while minimising alterations to the external envelope. A barn can utilise the light entering the great midstreys doors, using glazing in a well proportioned layout



- The retention of historic features. Farm buildings invariably preserve evidence of their former use, including hatches, stable and other fittings, ventilation slits, dovecotes, floors and vertically boarded doors, which contribute to their historic significance. These should be incorporated in the final conversion.
- Impact upon setting. The building's relationship with its immediate surroundings and landscape should be unspoilt by prominent car parking, commercial signage, gardens and domestic boundary treatments. Rural barns pose the challenge of retaining the continuous flow of the landscape up to the building without any visible boundaries. Boundaries and external structures should be simple and utilitarian, in harmony with the agricultural context. Oil tanks, swimming pools, gardens, washing lines, climbing frames and prominent security and domestic lights are inappropriate. (See also section on Setting).
- Preservation of materials and finishes. These should be retained as far as possible. Any introduced materials should be detailed to match the original, and new rather than bought second-hand. Replacement weatherboard cladding detracts from the building if boards are too small and too neatly arranged. They should be featheredged (tapered boards, not shiplap), finished in black tar or black matt paint. Openings should be finished in black to match the surrounding wall material so not to appear conspicuous. (In small buildings, it was often traditional to paint small windows white or green). Cleaning of any surface by abrasive or chemical methods to tidy it up is damaging.
- Incorporating services and complying with Building Regulations using appropriate techniques and materials in a way that is unobtrusive, avoids damage to historic fabric and allows the historic structure to breathe and work traditionally.



Design Considerations

SERVICES AND SUSTAINABILITY

Most new uses will have some service requirements and need to comply with Building Regulations. Whilst some Building Regulation requirements may be relatively flexible because the building already exists and upgrading is required to be reasonable, such as the extent of insulation needed; some requirements are more onerous, such as the means of escape in case of fire. Because this may have implications on the viability of the proposed use and the amount of alteration to the building, the extent of works needs to be identified at an early stage and included in the impact assessment in the application for consent. The English Heritage publication 'Building Regulations and Historic Buildings', provides guidance on the subject.

The imposition of modern standards and techniques and compliance with the Approved Documents of Part L may not be appropriate. Typically the construction of modern buildings is designed impermeably to shed water rather than the historic permeable method of construction to absorb and then evaporate water. A combination of the two methods of construction can lead to significant damage and damp penetration. The main clauses of the Building Regulations allow for more flexibility and the requirements to be fulfilled in ways other than the Approved Documents. Part L2.9-2.11 recognises that historic buildings require a different approach to modern buildings and that some flexibility is needed to mitigate the potential conflicts between the building and energy conservation.

Normally Building Control will expect some increase in insulation for a change of use. It is not necessary to increase the levels of insulation to those illustrated in Part L of the Approved Documents if it would damage the character and interest of the historic building. For instance, insulation would not be allowed if it would involve the destruction of historic materials and finishes such as boarding, lath and plaster or wattle and daub in order to install it. It would also not be allowed if it changed the profile of the exterior or interior, obscured significant exposed structure or framing, squared the building up to make it look modern, or made the boarding overlap the plinth in a non-traditional way. Any insulation used in a permeable construction should also be permeable and plastic should not touch historic structure and risk sweating. If the ground floor is of no historic interest, it can be replaced using a breathable insulated slab or insulated floor.

When carrying out energy calculations for historic buildings, it should be taken into account that there is a significant saving of energy in reusing a building compared to the construction of a new building which equates to typically five to ten years of lighting and heating an average home. (English Heritage Building Regulations and Historic Buildings 1.4).

The need for heating will require some changes and often the introduction of a flue. Although not ideal because it is prominent on the roof slope, the more successful flue is as small as possible, on a less important slope, and finished in matt black or dark grey. Balanced flues may be used on unobtrusive elevations and away from pathways to reduce the need for unsightly grilles. Under-floor heating is often used for barn conversions as it avoids localised hotspots and allows the historic interior walls to be visible. It needs space for a dedicated control area

and is not suitable for use with historic floor structures and finishes such as stable floors or a threshing floor or where the foundations are very shallow. Ground source heat pumps may be used where there is sufficient storage space and ground adjacent and no archaeological deposits would be damaged.

Provision for some energy efficiency and insulation in a benign way is possible in most historic buildings and easier to accommodate when carrying out a conversion or new build. The most effective and potentially damaging ways of improving can be made by insulating the roof (ensuring ventilation is retained and avoiding interstitial condensation), changing the boiler to a condensing boiler, recycling grey-water or rainwater, using passive ventilation rather than air

conditioning, avoiding condensation on surfaces and within the structure (by using permeable and absorbent natural finishes), shading using trees and landscaping and reducing light gain and heat loss by using baffles, heavy curtains or minimising sizes of openings.

In less sensitive locations, for instance on hidden roof slopes it may be possible to locate solar panels or photo-voltaic cells subject to consent. Likewise other incongruous fixtures like satellite dishes need listed building consent and will only be permitted in hidden positions.

Setting



The settings of traditional farm buildings are an integral part of their interest and character. It is the buildings in their setting, not simply the buildings themselves, that is significant in conservation terms. In every case, therefore, the aim should be to retain the spatial characteristics of a setting as well as any features of interest it possesses.

Some farmyards (and spaces nearby) may have been permanently sub-divided in the past to create small folds or pens. While it will usually be desirable to retain these for their historic interest, the creation of more sub-divisions should be avoided, especially where the space concerned is open to public view. (This includes the avoidance of lines of large stones intended to define separate ownerships or vehicular routes, as these create a particularly incongruous appearance).

Boundary structures like hedge banks, walls and traditional fences and gates, which enclose spaces around a farmstead (including the approach lanes and any ancillary yards or paddocks) possess historical interest and are usually features

of particular character in themselves. They nearly always have aesthetic value too, creating visual links between buildings (and therefore holding them together as a harmonious group) or helping to create spaces that are visually self contained (and often hidden from view.)

Aim to respect and utilise these values from the outset, as the conservation of boundary structures is fundamental to achieving an acceptable scheme. Those that exist should be retained and where necessary repaired in a like for like manner.

New structures may be acceptable but they will need to reinforce existing characteristics and be constructed in a way that is compatible with local

materials and methods. Walls of standard concrete blocks will nearly always be inappropriate, as will plastic chain link fences and fences made of lapped or ornamental timber panels. As far as new hedge banks are concerned, these should always be planted with indigenous hedgerow species, not ornamental ones and never leylandii.

Structures and features that are normally associated with residential sites and areas, like garden sheds, summer houses, gazebos and greenhouses are unlikely to suit the non domestic character of farm buildings and their settings. Unless shielded from view by existing walls or buildings, or otherwise located in an inconspicuous position their introduction is unlikely to be acceptable.



Wildlife Issues



Wildlife considerations are particularly important when considering the future of historic farm buildings. Such considerations range from solitary bees in soft mortar burrows to barn owls in roomy roof voids. The survival of them all is important, but it is the well-being of roosting bats (any of the 16 species found in this country) and nesting birds (especially barn owls, and particularly swallows, swifts and house martins) that need to be most carefully addressed - not least because the protective provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, the Habitats Regulations of 1994 and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2001, insist it must be. Principally this means doing two things: making absolutely sure their lives are not disturbed during their nesting or breeding seasons, and making arrangements to ensure their “occupation” of the building is sustained and not threatened by any works or actions.

It is necessary to resolve how this will be achieved before an application is determined because it might involve works that need to be considered in the context of the overall scheme. In addition, it will be in an applicant's personal interests to deal with these matters “in advance” as disturbance is no less a criminal act as killing, injuring or capturing a bat or bird, taking a nest or egg, interfering with a nest or roost, or obstructing a flight path to them.

Establishing whether any protected species are present is an essential first step, so aim to have an ecological survey carried out by a specialist consultant at the earliest opportunity.

It is the applicant's responsibility to have these surveys done, while help in choosing a local consultant can be obtained from Natural England, the local Wildlife Trust or the Council. If a protected species is found during a structural survey, then this would need to be investigated before continuing with it.

Proposals affecting buildings where protected species are found must be notified to Natural England. In order for Natural England to support the proposals it will need to be satisfied that measures will be taken to minimise and mitigate their impact. The ecological survey should therefore show how the bats or birds will

be protected during the works, how damage and disturbance will be minimised, and what provisions will be made to sustain their occupation in the long term. If any of the mitigating measures involve acts that are prohibited by the wildlife legislation (like the disturbance of a bat roost) a licence permitting their carrying out is likely to be required from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

Many traditional farm buildings are located in settings that are potentially ideal for supporting a wealth of wildlife, so even if ecological surveys confirm an absence of protected species, it is always desirable to consider whether provisions could be made to encourage native species that have become increasingly rare. Not just birds and bats, but butterflies and moths, frogs and newts, dragonflies and bees, and small mammals like hedgehogs, field mice and voles. And whether required by the wildlife legislation or not, include details of the provisions with the application to ensure they are suitable for their purpose and receive consent if it is needed.



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