

Isle of Wight Council

Supplementary Planning Guidance

Conversion of Rural Buildings



August 2004

This is one of a series of Supplementary Planning Guidance Documents. The Isle of Wight Council adopted this Guide August 2004, following public consultation. It is published by Isle of Wight Council, Directorate of Environment Services.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Isle of Wight is essentially rural and so traditionally constructed farm buildings are an important part of the local heritage and landscape. The reason why the Council allows such buildings to be converted for alternative uses is that in most cases, such action is likely to secure their retention as valued features for future generations. However, in the process of conversion the essential agricultural character of the building is vulnerable to loss. The Council believes that the traditional farm building should remain substantially unaltered so that it continues to look like a farm building after conversion. It is against this principle that all applications will be considered. Approximately half of the Island is designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The Council has statutory responsibilities to have regard for the purposes of the AONB designation to support the conservation and enhancement of landscape character. Rural buildings are an important element of landscape character and can also help to sustain local rural economies.
- 1.2 The Government emphasis on farm and rural diversification has resulted in an increasing number of more modern farm buildings becoming surplus to farming requirements. Although these buildings may not be as valuable to our local heritage and landscape as older traditional farm buildings, they may have an important economic role to play by providing valuable workspace for rural businesses and reducing the demand for new buildings. Applications for the conversion of modern farm buildings, to other "employment" uses will be considered on their individual merits and guidance is available in the Unitary Development Plan, and in particular policy C17.
- 1.3 Planning applications will be primarily considered against the policies within the Unitary Development Plan. The purpose of this guidance is to supplement these policies with more detailed information. However, the guidance has been prepared in consultation with the public and is the subject of Council resolution, which means that weight can be attached to them in the development control process.

UDP Policies: C17

- 1.4 In line with the general principle to resist housing in the countryside, residential use will only be allowed where it is proven to be the only method of serving the retention of a building having architectural and/or historic value. Applicants are required to demonstrate that no other business, employment or tourism use is feasible before residential use will be considered.
- 1.5 Before considering residential schemes for approval, the Council will need to be convinced that every reasonable effort has been made to secure a more appropriate use (including residential use as a subordinate of a larger

scheme) and applicants will need to provide evidence to the Council that this has been done.

1.6 This evidence will need to include:

- Steps taken to market the building, including information on how long the property has been marketed for, and evidence that the price sought is appropriate to the use.
- An analysis of the cost of conversion against likely returns, and availability of grants, to show clearly why alternative uses are not economically viable.
- That works being planned would not undermine the character of the unit.

2 Listed Buildings

2.1 Alterations to listed buildings are subject to special controls. General advice on this matter is available from the Council's Conservation Team.

3 What Do We Mean by Rural Buildings?

- 3.1 The majority of rural buildings are linked to existing or former agricultural uses and have been used as either barns for the storage of hay, grain and farm equipment or for the keeping of animals such as pigs, cows, chickens and sheep. Some of these are listed or have some architectural merit, but many are newer structures of poor quality design. Some are in need of extensive repairs whilst others are sound and robust. Many are part of existing farmsteads while some are isolated and no longer related to any farming operation.
- 3.2 Rural buildings often have the same characteristics – they are generally large open structures with internal features such as exposed ceilings and little subdivision or openings in the form of windows or doors. Historic rural buildings are a finite resource and once their character has been eroded or lost, it cannot be replaced. Modern farm buildings on the other hand, are practical, cheap and functional and bear no relation to the character and quality of the traditional buildings found in the countryside.

4 Buildings Suitable for Conversion for Holiday Accommodation /Residential use.

Type:

- 4.1 Traditionally farm buildings were constructed by local craftsmen and materials. Whilst there is no dominant style or material used, they are mostly simple buildings of modest scale constructed in either stone or chalk, with slate or thatch roof. These are generally the most suitable type for conversion. By contrast, modern farm buildings, due to improvements in technology, are generally much larger in scale and are constructed in standard materials that are cheaper and widely available,



such as steel, concrete, asbestos and plastic. Although these buildings are designed to meet the needs of current agricultural practices, they lack the basic charm of older traditionally constructed farm buildings, and because of their scale, can be visually intrusive in the landscape. These buildings are generally inappropriate for conversion to residential use, but their economic role is recognised.

- 4.2 Occasionally a new farm building may be constructed in the traditional style with careful attention to design, and will later be the subject of a planning application to residential use. However, the Council's policy is not intended to encourage the creation of buildings specifically designed for conversion, but to secure the retention of buildings that are part and parcel of the attractive rural landscape. Where the Council is satisfied that this type of development is an attempt to abuse the system, the Council will normally resist the application.



Condition:

- 4.3 Very often, older traditionally constructed farm buildings will make little or no contribution towards the needs of a modern farm and are frequently just abandoned. Unfortunately, when they have been in this state for a considerable period of time they suffer from neglect and in some cases become structurally unsound due to the effects of subsidence, foundation failure, instability, adverse weathering, rot and decay.
- 4.4 The Council believes that in order to retain the special character and appearance of the building it should be capable of being converted without the need for comprehensive dismantling and reconstruction. Therefore, in every case where a building is located outside the development envelope, the Council will require submission of a full structural survey and condition report from an appropriately qualified professional. The report should include an assessment of the extent to which works or repairs are necessary and the amount of new structural work needed to enable the conversion. Additionally, the application plans should make it clear which parts of the building are to remain, and which parts are new build. For information on qualified structural engineers working on the Island, you may find it helpful to contact the Institute of Structural Engineers whose address and telephone number is listed at the back of this leaflet.
- 4.5 If the structural survey reveals that the building is beyond conversion without substantial demolition and rebuilding, the Council will normally accept that the building is lost and resist the application for its conversion.
- 4.6 Rural buildings generally have no facility for foul drainage. It is advisable to discuss proposals for sewage disposal with the Environment Agency at an early stage in the design process. Foul and surface water drainage must be managed in such a way to protect existing watercourses from pollution and excessive run off. The availability and quality of water supply should be

investigated. Applicants must provide evidence that full consultation has taken place with the Environment Agency and Southern Water.

- 4.7 It should be noted that if the rural building lies within a flood risk area the application should be accompanied by a flood risk assessment. Detailed guidance on the type of information required can be found in Appendix F of PPG25, Development and Flood Risk.

5 Important Characteristics

- 5.1 It is accepted that a certain amount of alteration work will be necessary to accommodate modern living and working conditions. However, this work must be balanced with the need to retain those important features which give the building its distinctive agricultural identity. Applicants are advised that a design/conservation statement should be submitted with any application, identifying the important characteristics of the building and specifying how these would be retained within the conversion. This statement should also address curtilage and landscape issues.
- 5.2 Any Structural or buried features of historic or archaeological importance may have to be recorded before they are altered or demolished, to provide a public record of the finite and fragile elements of the Island’s historic environment. Early consultation with the County Sites and Monuments Record will be required.
- 5.3 It is possible to convert farm buildings without changing their character simply by recognising, respecting and complementing the principal features. These features are considered in more detail below:

Roofs:

- 5.4 The roof is an important feature of the traditional farm building. Roofs dominate elevations and can be seen from over a wide area. Unbroken roof slopes are a characteristic feature of



X No Dormers



traditional farm buildings within the area, and they should therefore remain undisturbed. For this reason, the Council is generally opposed to the insertion of dormers and in many cases, roof lights.

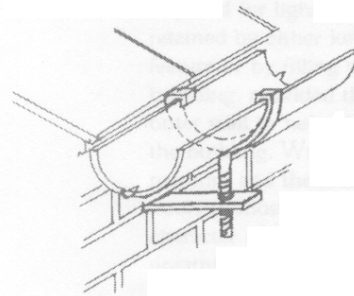
- 5.5 Dormers are not usually found on agricultural buildings and they can be disproportionately

responsible for a change in the building's character. It is less visually damaging to disrupt walls than the roof and it may be advantageous to supplement the level of light by forming an opening in the gable end.

- 5.6 Roof lights can also be disruptive as they can catch the eye by reflecting open sky and sunlight. However, in special circumstances, roof lights may be allowed but they should be limited in number, situated on less prominent slopes and preferably at lower levels. Any glazing of the roof slope should be hardly noticeable with units restricted to a maximum width of 500mm and regularity should be avoided. Normal roof lights have the disadvantage of an up stand that visually jars with the roof profile. Therefore, new roof lights should be flush fitting, conservation type, which have the appearance of cast iron, with glazing bars, with non-reflective glass.
- 5.7 Occasionally, the roof covering may be damaged in places and in need of repair. As much of the existing material should be retained as possible where original, including the timber-supporting frame, with gaps being replaced by salvage materials. Where new materials are used, these should match the existing and their use should be restricted to the less prominent elevations as it may be difficult to provide a perfect match due to the differences caused by weathering. Artificial materials will normally be resisted along with other alien features such as dovecotes, clock towers and weather vanes. Television aerials, vents and flues should be placed at lower locations or within the structure itself, as these are also alien features on traditional farm buildings.

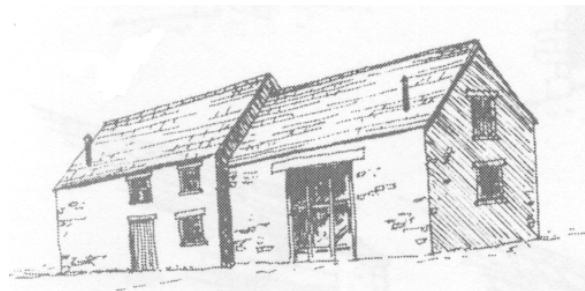
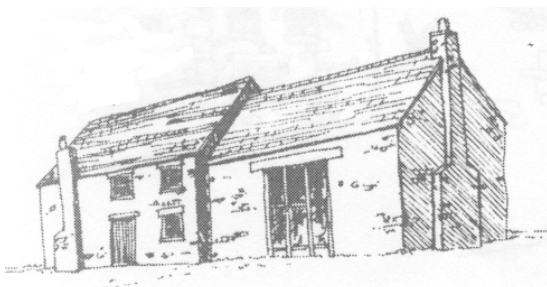
Rainwater Goods:

- 5.8 Traditionally, rain was allowed to run off the eaves of farm buildings, there being no roof drainage system. It follows that new gutters and down pipes should be as few as possible and located on less prominent elevations. On more recent buildings black painted cast iron is used to deal with rainwater. The guttering is held on by rise and fall brackets which are embedded into the masonry. Cast iron has, therefore, become a traditional feature and for this reason is the Council's preferred choice of material. However, the use of other more modern materials, which can achieve the same effect, will not necessarily be ruled out.



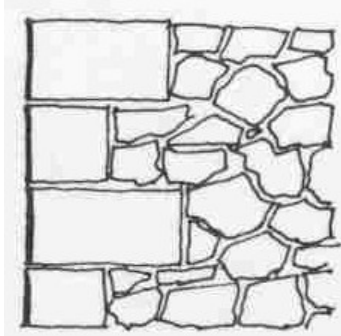
Chimney Stacks:

- 5.9 The addition of chimneystacks can damage the agricultural appearance of the farm buildings by creating a domestic image. Where no chimney exists, then a small metal flue finished in black will be acceptable, provided it is set away from prominent facades.



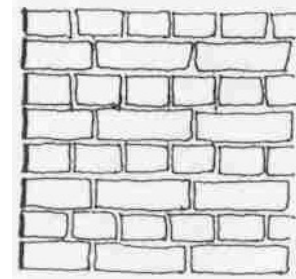
Walls:

5.10 Where an approved element of rebuilding forms part of the conversion scheme, then the existing materials should be re-used. The use of modern materials will be immediately noticeable;



therefore new work should blend in harmoniously with old.

New brick or stonewalling should always be reclaimed and in good condition. Stonework should be regular, coursed or brought to horizontal courses if rubble type. Mortar mix



and pointing is also important. Pointing should be flush with the wall surface with "brushing" when the mortar is almost dry. Traditional lime mortar putty is now readily available and is desirable for the stonework and care should be taken not to smudge the face of stone or brickwork. The aggregate used should be selected to match the original mortar. It is good practice to construct a sample panel 1m² to approve the mortar match. Original features such as owl holes, openings for doves and ventilation slots will be expected to be retained.

Door and Window Openings:

5.11 Agricultural buildings are characterized by few window and door openings. Therefore, the simplicity of the building should be retained by keeping new opening to an absolute minimum in number and size. To achieve this all existing openings should be retained and re-used wherever possible and new openings should preferably be located on elevations away from public views. When determining the type of accommodation to be provided within the

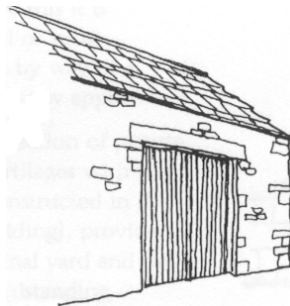
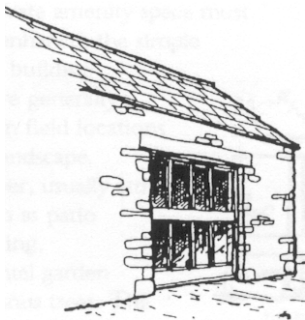
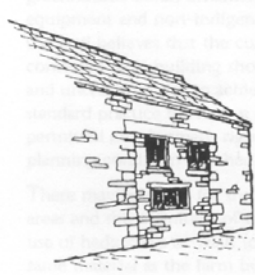


needs of a modern household.

building, the position and size of existing openings should be taken into account. This exercise will determine both the number of rooms, which can be formed, and the uses to which they are put. In other words, the residential needs should be designed to suit the building and the building should not be adapted to suit the residential

Large Barn Door Openings:

5.12 When large door openings form an integral part of the agricultural character



of the building they should, in most cases be retained. They can be used as a feature to provide the majority of internal natural light by constructing a frame set back into the building.

In the event that a large opening is not required for lighting the original opening should be retained by either keeping the door and making it a feature, or by filling the opening with vertical timber boarding, provided the boarding is set back from the outer wall to help emphasise

an original feature of the building. Large areas of glazing can be covered by large doors/shutters.

Walling up larger openings with masonry and the insertion of smaller windows or doors in most

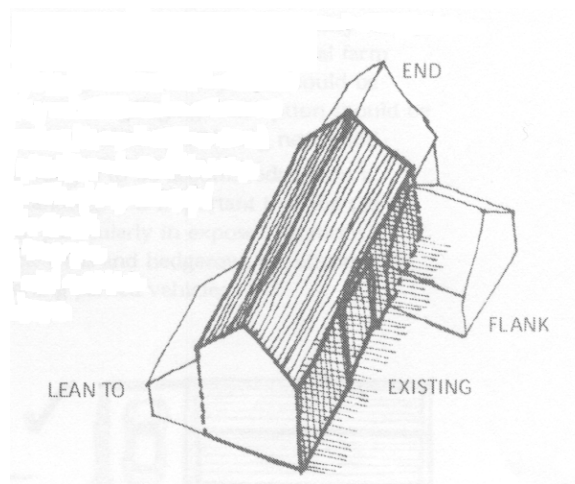
cases looks artificial, detracts from the character of the building, and is therefore an unsatisfactory method of treatment.

Extensions:

5.13 Farm buildings have a functional simplicity that is part of their appeal..

Changes to the roof slope, amendments to the eaves line and the addition of porches in most cases result in the loss of the building's original character. The Council believes that farm buildings should be preserved in their original form. The building should, therefore, be large enough for conversion without the need for substantial and alien new extensions. If an addition to the building is unavoidable, extensions should be a subsidiary

element of the original building that can be achieved by keeping the extension small scale, simple and unobtrusive. Acceptable designs could include single storey lean-to, gable end, or flank extensions. An alternative may be a neutral link to another simple form.



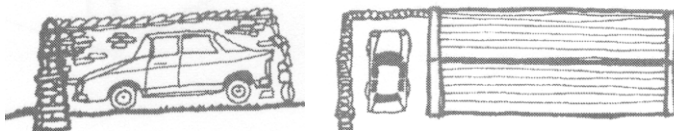
Timber:

- 5.14 All timber frames, doors, windows and roof trusses should be preserved as completely as possible, where appropriate. The repair and adaptation of existing features is preferred to their replacement. All new timberwork for infill and new doors should be purpose made, vertical timber boarded and treated with a dark preservative stain. Metal or UPVC materials will not normally be permitted. New windows should be of a simple design that enhances the true shape and size of the original opening. Often, a single sheet of glass with no glazing bars is the best solution. Many external paint manufacturers now offer a heritage range of paint colours that are more sympathetic to old farm buildings than modern, brilliant white. The use of brilliant white paint finishes will be resisted.

**6 Access, Parking and Garages**

- 6.1 Access to traditional farm buildings usually follows field boundaries along the lines of hedges and walls. As a result they are usually discreet, blending in naturally with the landscape. Proposals for the conversion of farm buildings should retain existing access points. If the existing access cannot be retained, any new access should follow natural boundaries and avoid crossing the middle of the fields.

- 6.2 Parked motorcars detract from the appearance of farmyards and contribute towards the creation of a domestic appearance. Parking and garaging should be concealed as far as possible. The Council is reluctant to accept new structures for garaging when other suitable



accommodation exists. Often smaller buildings, such as cart sheds, may form part of a grouping of traditional farm buildings and in many cases could be adapted for garaging, this option should be explored before considering new build.

- 6.3 If parking is to be accommodated on a hard standing, it is important that the site is well screened, particularly in exposed locations. Stone or brick walls and hedgerows are effective ways of screening parked vehicles.

7 Curtilages

- 7.1 All new dwellings created by conversions should provide a satisfactory amount of private amenity space for purposes of sitting out, drying clothes and children's play. Where this cannot be achieved, the Council may resist the application. However, where this can be achieved, the private amenity space must be defined in a way that enhances the simple unfussy identity of the farm building.

Traditional farm buildings are generally associated with yards or open field locations and complement the rural landscape. Residential dwellings however, usually attract suburban paraphernalia, such as patio equipment, interwoven fencing, greenhouses/sheds, ornamental garden equipment and non-indigenous trees. The Council believes that the curtilage of a converted farm building should remain open and uncluttered and to achieve this is it standard practice to remove all or most permitted development rights by way of a planning condition attached to any approval.



- 7.2 There may be scope for the creation of private areas and the definition of curtilages with the use of hedgerows or walls (constructed in the same material as the farm building), provided they are confined to the original yard and on less prominent elevations. Hard standing surfaces should reflect the character of the farm building. Existing stone sets, bricks or blocks should always be retained and supplemented. Larger areas could be covered with crushed local stone. The use of modern ground surface materials such as tarmac and concrete, or indeed large areas of brick paviours, should be avoided as they are usually out of character with the farm building.

8 Interiors

- 8.1 Traditional farm buildings will retain their integrity if the interior is left open when an impression of the pre-converted space can be obtained. The Council, therefore, prefers open plan designs, which enable the roof



structure to be appreciated from either the ground or first floor where it is

appropriate. This type of layout helps natural light penetrate from a limited number of openings and helps reduce the need for further openings. Internal walls and structures such as stairs, etc should be integrated with the conversion, especially where they are historically significant and new divisions should be kept to a minimum.

9 Barn Owls and Bats and other protected species

- 9.1 Traditional farm buildings are often used by barn owls and bats as roosting or nesting sites. Both species are protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and, additionally, bats are protected under European Law. Consequently, if either species is present within a building, no work can be undertaken without prior consultation with English Nature whose address and telephone number is listed at the back of this leaflet. A development license from DEFRA may also be required for European protected species before any work can be undertaken.
- 9.2 In most cases work will be delayed until the breeding and nesting season is over but provision of alternative accommodation for the affected species is likely to be required. Survey results with appropriate mitigation will need to be submitted at the time of submission of the planning application. Developers are advised to make pre-application approaches to the authority to identify whether surveys are likely to be required to establish the presence of relevant protected species.
- 9.3 Applicants are encouraged to submit relevant photographs of the inside and outside of the building, illustrating barn owl/bat roosting or nesting sites with their application. Where other birds such as swallows and little owls, are using a barn for nesting, applicants are encouraged to provide alternative bird boxes for these species.

10 Summary

- 10.1 The conversion of traditional farm buildings to residential use is one of the very few instances of where new residential development in the countryside is allowed without the usual occupancy constraints. In any conversion scheme, it must be remembered that one of the reasons why the Council allows this to happen, is that it secures the retention of buildings of local heritage and landscape importance for future generations. This should be reflected in all applications. These buildings should be respected for what they are and not for what they could become. Therefore, the adaptation and re-use of these buildings requires a high degree of skill and expertise and applicants are advised to engage professionals for this work.

11 Advice and Further Information

11.1 If you are uncertain about any of the points made in this leaflet in relation to a particular building or group of buildings you are considering having converted, you may find it useful to discuss your proposal with a member of staff from the Council's Development Control Section, whose address and telephone number is given below.

11.2 Appointments can also be made to meet a member of staff at the Council's planning offices, and such contact will enable the principle of re-use to be established, and could save time and money on drawings and a structural survey.

11.3 You will also need to gain Building Control Permission for any conversion works, which is in addition to planning permission.

12 Summary of Contacts

The Development Control Section is part of the Council's Planning Services Department, which is located at:

Seaclose Offices, Fairlee Road, Newport, Isle of Wight, PO30 2QS Tel: (01983) 823552

The Planning Reception is open Monday – Thursday 08:30 – 17:00 and Friday 08:30 – 16:30. Planning Officers are available to give advice between the hours of 08:30-12:30 on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays.

The Council's Building Control Section is also located at the address above.

County Sites and Monuments Officer
County Archaeological Centre, 61 Clatterford Road, Newport, Isle of Wight, Tel: (01983) 823810

The Institute of Structural Engineers
11 Upper Belgrave Street, London, SW1X 8BH Tel: 020 7235 4535, Fax: 020 7235 4294

English Nature
Northminster House, Peterborough, PE1 1UA Tel: 01733 455000
Fax: 01733 568834

The assistance of the following Local Authorities and organisations in supplying information used in the publication of this Supplementary Planning Guidance Note is gratefully acknowledged:

- Hambleton District Council
- North Cornwall District Council
- London Borough of Kingston Upon Thames
- Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council