



# TRADITIONAL RURAL BUILDINGS

## Guidance on barn conversions

**SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT**

ADOPTED MARCH 2021



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# PART 1: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) is to provide agents, applicants and owners of traditional rural buildings with guidance to ensure that, in accordance with local plan policy PSP28 “Rural Economy” and PSP40 “Residential Development in the Countryside” of the South Gloucestershire Local Plan: Policies, Sites and Places Plan 2017), when it comes to considering new uses for traditional rural buildings, high standards of design in any scheme of conversion are achieved.

The key to delivering a successful conversion is ensuring that any traditional rural building is re-used or adapted in a way that retains its integrity and local distinctiveness. These objectives also echo the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which places good design, enhancement of local distinctiveness and the conservation of the historic environment at the heart of sustainable development in rural areas. Paragraph 130 of the NPPF states that permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area. Paragraph 124 stresses that good design is a **“key aspect of sustainable development”** and paragraph 127 requires that *“planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments will”*:

- a. function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
- b. are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate landscaping;
- c. are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change.

This SPD can also be considered to be part of the Council's positive strategy for sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage which, in accordance with paragraph 185 of the NPPF seeks to take into account the following objectives;

- a.** The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets, and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- b.** The wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits that conservation of the historic environment can bring;
- c.** The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness; and
- d.** The opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place.

A Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) is a Local Development Document (LDD) that may cover a range of issues, thematic or site specific, and provides further details of policies and proposals in a "parent" Development Plan Documents, which currently is the South Gloucestershire Core Strategy (Adopted 2013) and the South Gloucestershire Local Plan: Policies Sites and Places Plan (Adopted 2017). This SPD will form part of the Council's Local Development Framework (LDF) and once adopted, the guidance contained within this document will be material consideration in the determination of any relevant application.

This guidance aims to cover both traditional rural buildings located in the open countryside and those within villages. This guidance also addresses some key overarching considerations that need to be taken into account when converting a traditional rural building that are statutory listed. However, in such cases further guidance should be sought from South Gloucestershire Council at the earliest stage; as such buildings are subject to special considerations and control.

## PART 2: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TRADITIONAL RURAL BUILDINGS

Historic England Advice Note 9 “*The Adaptive Reuse of Traditional Farm Buildings*” (2017) states “*Traditional farmsteads are an irreplaceable source of character in the English countryside. However, without appropriate uses to fund their long-term maintenance and repair, they will disappear from the landscape. While poor adaption poses a threat new commercial, residential or other uses that enhance their historic character and significance are to be encouraged*”.



**FIG.1** A typical example of a rural building in the Cotswold vernacular

Within the same guidance noted above, Historic England defines “traditional rural buildings” as mostly dating from the 19th century although a very small proportion of older and more architecturally significant examples are protected through listing. The vast majority of traditional farm buildings also form part of farmsteads that include other traditional buildings. Therefore, along with individual value and character, there is often a collective or group character to also consider when considering any proposals adaption.

The term “traditional rural building” is also intended to cover a variety of building types such as barns, field-barn, granaries, shelter-sheds for cattle, stables and cart sheds. Historic England’s *Adapting Traditional Farm Buildings: Best Practice Guidelines for Adaptive Reuse* (2017) provides a detailed description for each of these building types with further information found here

<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/adapting-traditional-farm-buildings/>



**FIG.2** A redundant traditional rural building. Its condition is due to a lack of economic use but was recently been reconstructed and converted for residential use

Changes in the agricultural industry have led to large numbers of rural buildings becoming surplus to requirement as new, comparatively much larger buildings, are constructed to help reduce labour costs and address changes in animal welfare standards. The traditional rural building is now frequently used for low key storage and other nominal uses, but inevitably without an economically sustainable use many now suffer decay which can lead to demolition or collapse. In response to the redundancy of former rural buildings, many have now been converted into other uses although residential uses can be considered the primary alternative use sought. Generally, there is considered to be a clear tension in trying to find a new sustainable use for a traditional rural building, and at the same time, helping to sustain and ideally enhance its character and contribution to the landscape.

This need to preserve the character of traditional rural buildings is important. These buildings can be considered to make a significant and important contribution to the rural landscape character and its sense of local distinctiveness. They should be considered a finite resource that serves as a reminder of the evolution of the rural landscape because they demonstrate local and traditional skills, crafts and building materials that developed over long periods of time to serve a particular function. Moreover, as a result of their construction and materials, traditional rural buildings can be considered to blend easily with the landscape. The harmonious relationship that traditional rural buildings have with their surroundings can be considered to contrast dramatically with their modern and much larger pre-fabricated replacements. These modern buildings tend to possess a utilitarian character that appears often visually intrusive into a rural landscape. However, the considered harm (caused by their scale, form and materials) is overridden by the functional need of these buildings to support an agricultural holding. Therefore, while their presence in the rural landscape may be accepted as part of modern farming practices, these modern pre-fabricated farm buildings largely ignore the former disciplines set by the availability of local materials and the need for sheltered sites that resulted in a “rapport” between traditional farm buildings and the landscape which blurs the distinction between the natural and man-made environment. Consequently, while the traditional rural building can be considered to be in harmony with the inherited farmed landscapes, the modern replacement structures stand obtrusive, alien and independent which make little or no positive contribution to the character of their surroundings.



**FIG.3** An historic Grade II\* listed Tithe barn in Hanham. Its form, style and materials give it a considered sense of harmony with its surroundings

The best use for historic farm buildings is a low-key use or similar to the use for which the building was designed for, but in many cases this is not possible as so as noted previously, conversion to residential use is considered to be the predominant option for reuse.

Residential conversions however are potentially very damaging to the character of a traditional rural building, as if undertaken without sympathy for the host building, rather than leave its functional character and narrative legible, the result can be a visually incoherent hybrid building of limited visual appeal that often is left unrecognisable as a barn. Therefore, in considering any conversion, it is important to understand the character of a subject building which is often derived from its historic use, construction, inter-action with other buildings and relationship with the wider landscape.

When considering any scheme of conversion for a traditional rural building, the retention of what are considered to be its historic characteristics should be an overarching principle. As fundamental to the success of any conversion is ensuring that the building still bears witness to the rural craftsman who originally constructed them and that the building retains important local features and materials as evidence of its history, use and development. Furthermore, in light of the likely positive contribution to its surroundings any such building is likely to make, along with the impact on the building itself the impact on the wider landscape should also form a key consideration when finding alternative uses for rural buildings.

Barns and other farm buildings also provide an essential home for protected species such as owls and bats. A habitat assessment by a qualified surveyor should be carried out before any works comment. Options to promote bio-diversity should also be considered as a matter of course. This is discussed further in section 9.

## PART 3: POLICY CONTEXT

The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 came into force on 15th April 2015. This Order changed permitted development rights provisions to allow for the conversion of agricultural buildings provided that certain conditions are met. It is still necessary for the landowner to contact South Gloucestershire Council to apply for a determination as to whether prior approval will be required. Following the most recent changes to the Part Q of the above order, this type of application can now cover design and external appearance and so this SPD should be utilised for guidance on these matters. Prior approval may also be required in regard to transport and highways impacts, noise impacts, contamination risks, flooding risk and the location or siting of the proposed development.

### Further information can be found at:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/596/introduction>

The overall aim of this SPD is to provide further details to policies contained within the South Gloucestershire Local Plan: Policies, Sites and Places Plan (adopted 2017) in accordance with paragraph 28 of the National Planning Policy Framework. The key policies which this SPD is designed to support are considered to be:

Policy PSP1	Local Distinctiveness
Policy PSP2	Landscape
Policy PSP17	Heritage Assets and the Historic Environment
Policy PSP19	Wider Biodiversity
Policy PSP28	Rural Economy
Policy PSP40	Residential Development in the Open Countryside

This SPD can also be considered to help provide further details on how any proposals for the conversion of traditional rural building can comply with the following policies from the South Gloucestershire Local Plan Core Strategy 2006-2027 (adopted 2013).

Policy CS1	High Quality Design
Policy CS5	Location of Development
Policy CS9	Managing the Environment and Heritage

Historic England has also produced a number of documents offering guidance on the conversion of any traditional rural buildings. Below are the relevant links.

**The Adaptive Reuse of Traditional Farm Buildings Historic Advice Note 9:**

<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/adaptive-reuse-traditional-arm-buildings-advice-note-9/heag156-adaptive-reuse-farm-buildings/>

**Adapting Traditional Farm Buildings Best Practice Guidelines for Adaptive Reuse:**

<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/adapting-traditional-farm-buildings/>

All proposals which include the re-use of rural buildings should be in line with national and local plan policy and guidance.

# PART 4: GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR THE CONVERSION AND REUSE OF TRADITIONAL RURAL BUILDINGS

The most common schemes for the conversion of existing traditional rural buildings are for the following three main uses:

1. Residential
2. Commercial uses
3. and Tourism (holiday lets)

Set out below are a number of key design and “in principle” considerations for each type of conversion noted above. These should be considered prior to the submission of any formal application as the guidance reflects the tests embedded with local plan policy and national guidance that will be used to determine whether any proposed conversion is considered to be acceptable or not.

## CONVERSION TYPE 1: RESIDENTIAL CONVERSIONS

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The majority of applications for the conversion of traditional rural buildings are for residential use. As part of understanding whether the principle of a proposed scheme of conversion for residential use will be acceptable, the following issues will need to be considered from the very beginning of the formulation of any proposals.

### **Is it an appropriate building to convert?**

The first principle that needs to be established is whether the type of building is suitable for conversion to residential use. This is a test in the interests of the levels residential amenity that any prospective occupier could be expected to be afforded, but also, as per policy PSP40, it is a test in the interests of the character and appearance of the building and its surroundings.

As noted previously within this SPD, modern pre-fabricated agricultural buildings tend to be visually intrusive and detract from the wider rural landscape character due to their scale, form and materials. The justification for the resulting harm caused by these buildings would have been their functional need as part of supporting the operations of a working farm. Once however the agricultural use ceases, the justification for the discordant nature of any such building also ceases and so at this point, such buildings should be removed and the land restored. Consequently, any application to convert such buildings for residential use would not be considered acceptable, as in the majority of cases the result would be harm caused by these functional buildings being made permanent when the justification for their construction, harm and retention is no longer there. Attempts at remodelling such buildings is also an increasing occurrence through either full planning applications or the prior notification process, but the resultant aesthetic impact is rarely successful. Overall, in the interests of the rural landscape, modern pre-fabricated buildings are not something that should be retained in perpetuity by any scheme of residential conversion.

### **Is it capable of conversion?**

To demonstrate a conversion of any traditional rural building is possible, evidence must be provided in the form of a structural survey to demonstrate that the building is structurally sound, large enough and capable of accommodating the conversion. A conversion where substantial rebuilding of the original structure is required (so effectively a rebuild) will be considered a new dwelling rather than a conversion and will not be supported in the majority of cases. Along with there being clear planning policy implications, in such cases where the level of reconstruction is tantamount to a “new build”, it will be considered that with the loss of in situ fabric, the architectural and historic interest of the building is lost and with it the justification for the conversion.

### **What is its character?**

In approaching any conversion, there needs to be an understanding of the character and significance of the subject building and its role as possibly part of a wider farmstead group. This understanding helps inform a building's sensitivity to change



**FIG.4** A conversion should seek to retain existing features and openings

As a guiding principle, the historic character and interest of the building and its informal, functional setting should be preserved. A key part of achieving this is ensuring the suppression of the domestic features or influences such as windows, doors, subdivision of internal spaces and ancillary structures e.g. conservatories, greenhouses and garages.

Reusing existing openings to maintain proportions and aesthetic character can also make a significant contribution to retaining the character of a building. The design of windows and doors need also to reflect a rural or rustic approach, rather than possess a standardised domestic character. Further detailed advice on this is provided later in this SPD but along with ensuring the external character of the building is preserved, of equal importance is the proposed treatment of its setting. While a considered sensitive conversion may help reflect the origins of the building within its elevations, but the character and integrity of the building could be completely compromised by a unsympathetic approach to its landscaped surroundings. For example, the typical, informal and functional character of a farmstead would be significantly harmed by the establishment of residential curtilages enclosed by close-boarded fences with demarcated and formally laid out parking areas. The removal of permitted development rights can go some way to limiting the potential external impacts of residential use, but a comprehensive approach from the outset would be far more successful to “design out” future problems, especially when it comes to the position of private garden areas.

The historic relationship and hierarchy between farm buildings can also be distorted or lost through extensions. It is often the scale and form of the building that provides the narrative of its historic use and in most instances its relationship with the rest of the complex it is (or once was) associated with. Any extension or remodelling of any existing building will in most cases not be supported on the grounds of loss character and interest. This is of even greater importance if the subject building is a rural building that is associated with a listed farmhouse, as it may contribute to the farmstead group which itself contributes to the setting of a designated heritage asset. Consequently, any loss of character or distortion of the hierarchy within the building group caused by unsympathetic alterations to a rural building could result in a degree of harm to the setting and in turn significance of a listed farmhouse and so any such proposals would be resisted on these grounds.

Overall, understanding from the outset the character or significance of any rural building or farmstead group is an essential part of ensuring a successful conversion is achieved. How the character of an existing traditional rural building can be safeguarded is discussed in more detail within the following section of the SPD.

## CONVERSION TYPE 2: COMMERCIAL USES

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Policy PSP28 – “The Rural Economy”, allows for the reuse of buildings within rural areas for business use.

Under part (2) of the PSP28, it states:

*Sustainable new development which promotes a strong and rural economy will be acceptable in rural areas. Proposal(s) for business development outside the defined urban areas and settlement boundaries will be acceptable:*

- 2.** *In the case of the conversion or re-use of existing buildings, where:*
  - a.** *The building is of permanent construction; and*
  - b.** *the buildings are in keeping with their surroundings in terms of character, form, bulk and overall design; and*
  - c.** *the proposals is of a scale which is consistent with its function, use and rural location.*

As noted within the supporting text for PSP28, the NPPF seeks to promote a strong, rural economy and the planning system to promote economic growth within rural areas. However, to protect the character of the rural areas of South Gloucestershire, development that only meets all the criteria above will be permitted outside of settlement boundaries or defined urban areas. Consequently, any proposals to convert an existing building that fails to comply with all of the criteria set out above under part (2) of PSP28 will not be supported. In such cases demolition, clearance and restoration of land may be preferable and provide a degree of enhancement once such a building has become redundant.

Therefore, it not does not follow that all agricultural buildings are appropriate for conversion, even for commercial purposes.

There will also need to be consideration given to protecting the character and appearance of the building and its surroundings. Guidance on this issue is explained under the previous heading and in more detail in the next part of this document.



**FIG.5** An example of a successful conversion of a traditional rural building and farmstead into a commercial use. Note the existing cart entrance and ventilation slots have been retained, as has the ad-hoc nature of the openings to the front elevation



**FIG.6** This commercial office is a converted shelter-shed. The previous use is still articulated with the rhythm of the bays and stone columns, as well as the roof plane remaining unbroken

## CONVERSION TYPE 3: TOURIST ACCOMMODATION CONVERSIONS

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It may be that when considering farm diversification and reuse of existing rural buildings, a business use may not be feasible or viable. For the more remote rural locations, a conversion to holiday accommodation may be acceptable for a traditional rural building.

As noted within the supporting text for PSP28, restrictive use conditions in regard to occupancy will be applied, as there have been many cases where tourism accommodation in the form of a “holiday let” has been seen as the first step towards establishing a “full” residential use as part of circumventing the restrictions on conversions for residential use.

There is a material difference between holiday accommodation and a residential use, as while under PSP28 a case could be made for supporting the rural economy through promoting tourism through the conversion of isolated rural buildings, for a residential use, any proposal would be likely contrary to Policy CS5 which seeks to limit development in the open countryside and also in conflict with the requirements of paragraph 79 of the National Planning Policy Framework, unless the stated restrictive criteria are met.

Therefore, while the conversion of a traditional rural building as a “holiday let” may be acceptable and policy compliant, the establishment of this use does not set a precedent for “full” residential use as in certain circumstances, such as a use this would be in clear contravention with national guidance and local plan policy. This point often gets overlooked and so if a holiday let use has been approved and even implemented, this should not be seen as a material consideration of such weight that it outweighs the same national guidance and local plan policy that would have been used to justify the refusal of a full residential use if consent for such a use was initially sought. The fundamental issue is understanding what national guidance and local policy is trying to achieve, which in cases such as this is seeking to promote more sustainable development patterns and protect the rural landscape character.

As with any application for conversion, regard will also need to be given to preserving the character and appearance of any building and its surroundings and so the following detailed guidance on conversions should also be considered.

## PART 5: DETAILED DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS PART 1: THE EXISTING BUILDING

The historic function of each type of traditional rural building is reflected in its character and surroundings, as individual characteristics resulting from the use of localised materials and styles have developed over long periods to serve a particular function. For any scheme of conversion to be successful it must be informed by these characteristics to ensure they are preserved if not enhanced. There is within South Gloucestershire a wide diversity of traditional rural building types and ages and they can be considered to be a major feature of the countryside and are an essential part of its variety and regional identity.

To ensure the historic character of a traditional rural building is not lost and its subsequent contribution to the sense of local distinctiveness is conserved and strengthened, the following design principles should be adopted when considering any residential conversion of the traditional rural building.

Below are a number of illustrations intended to demonstrate “good” and “bad” practice in terms of managing the adaptation of a barn conversion. These are intended to provide a quick overview of the key features of good design to help inform the rest of this section where these key design elements will be discussed in more detail.



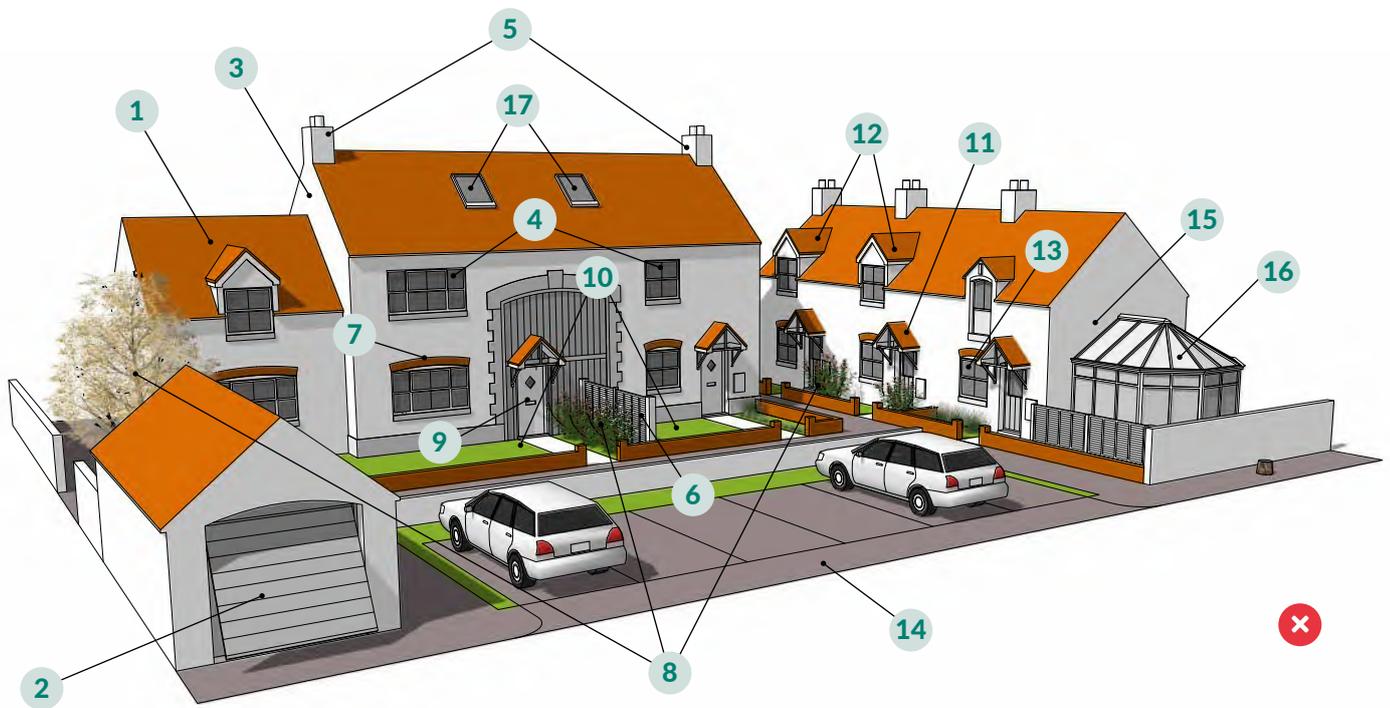
**FIG.7** An existing group of traditional rural buildings



**FIG.8** "How to do it" - a successful conversion to residential use of the traditional rural buildings

**Items for a successful residential conversion to consider**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Good use of cart shed for garaging                         | 9. Simple metal flue                       |
| 2. Solid and robust ledged and braced doors                   | 10. Retention of loft door                 |
| 3. Retention of elevation detail                              | 11. Sturdy metal handrail to tallet steps  |
| 4. Use of farmyard wall for visual containment                | 12. Retention of tallet steps              |
| 5. Limited use of rooflights of an appropriate scale and form | 13. Respect for original raised walkways   |
| 6. Useful storage of domestic clutter                         | 14. "Hard" surface material of texture     |
| 7. Successful infilling of unwanted opening                   | 15. Walling retained                       |
| 8. Two good examples of door/shutter treatment                | 16. Gate design reflective of original use |



**FIG.9** “How not to do it”, an unsuccessful conversion due to the heavily domestic overtones

#### Items for an unsuccessful “domestic” residential conversion

1. Extensions should be unnecessary
2. Metal up and over garage doors
3. Blocking-in/ or loss of original barn features
4. New openings of standard domestic proportions and design. Result is a loss of character and interest by not reusing the dimensions of the existing openings.
5. Chimney stacks breaking ridge line
6. Subdivision and physical demarcation of plots
7. Intrusive and harmful lintel detail
8. Ornamental domestic tree planting
9. Insertion of standard domestic door and glazed side panel
10. Domestic soft landscaping scheme
11. Elevation and proportions distorted by “cottage” style porch
12. Breaking eaves lines with inappropriate dormers – design and number
13. Window proportions alien to historic functional character of the buildings
14. A sea of tarmac to provide formal parking, all out of character with the rural setting, especially the former farmyard
15. Loss of tallet steps
16. The addition of overtly domestic structures such as conservatories only serve to detract from the historic function character of a former rural building
17. Prominent roof lights of an inappropriate scale and form

What makes the “successful” conversion is more of the character or more importantly, the historical evidence of the original farmstead is retained in the “successful” conversion. There might however also be internal fittings that are also important in the interpretation of the buildings that are inevitably lost. It is also easy to confuse retaining historical evidence with good tastes. The dormers proposed and the enlarged openings in the “unsuccessful” scheme are not a matter of simply character and aesthetics, they represent a loss of historical integrity. Some functional additions may also be unsightly, but these would not affect the historical significance of the buildings – satellite dishes, meter boxes for example. There is a narrow line between the two, but to ensure a conversion is considered “successful”, an understanding of the historic significance and character is essential to inform the proposals.

## **(i) HISTORIC MATERIALS, FINISHES AND FEATURES**

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Historic materials and finishes should be retained as far as possible. Any introduced materials should be detailed to match the original. New materials rather than reclaimed is preferable if the reclaimed materials are to be sourced off-site.

Any new material required will need to be natural and match the colour, profile, texture and scale of the original materials as closely as possible.

The re-pointing of joints should be confined to local areas that require repair, using a traditional lime-based mortar of appropriate colour and scale.

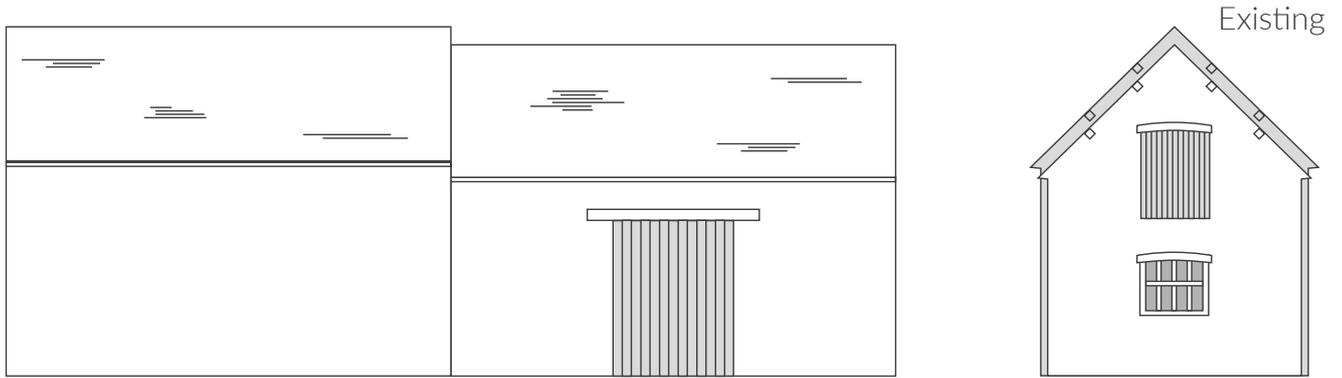
The retention of historic features helps preserve evidence of their former use. This can be hatches, stable and other fittings, ventilation slits, dovecotes, floors and vertically boarded doors. All historic features can be considered to contribute to a building's significance and these should therefore be incorporated into the final conversion.

## **(ii) MAKING USE OF THE EXISTING OPENINGS**

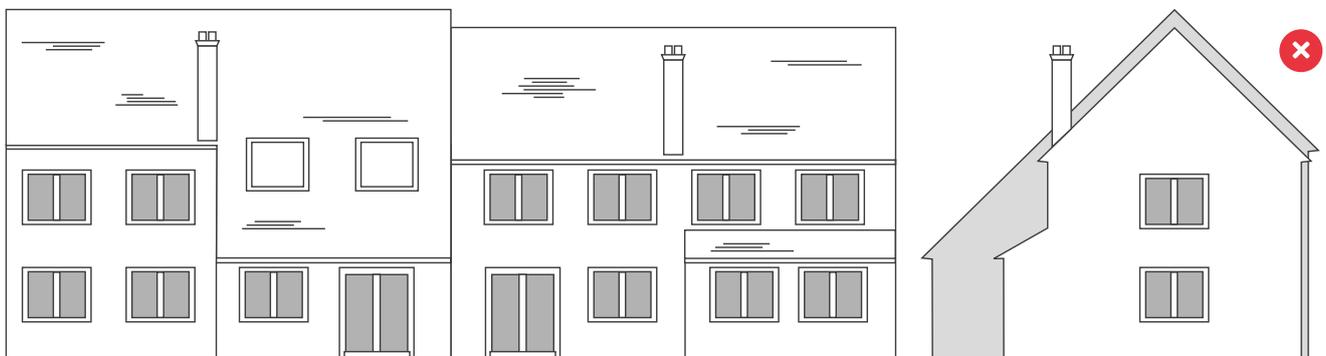
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The proportions of a rural building make a significant and positive contribution to its aesthetic appearance and physical narrative, as they often convey how the buildings were historically used. Light was also not important for many agricultural uses but the orientation of the openings was. The existing openings of a rural building are therefore significant as they add to a building's character and authenticity, as along with form, layout and features, collectively they express the agricultural origins of the building. Consequently when considering the design of any conversion, the internal layout should be dictated by the existing external characteristics to maximise daylight opportunities in the interests of the historic character of the building.

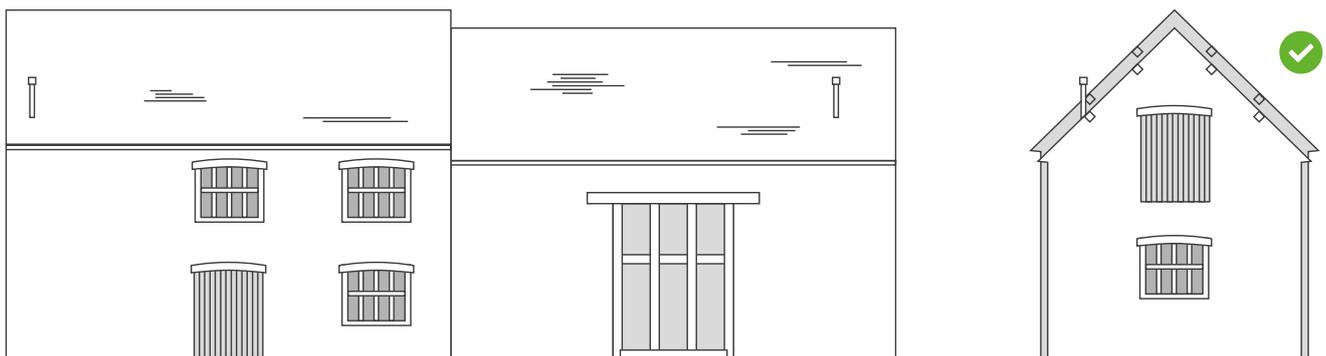
Understanding the proportions of a building is therefore critical and so while an appreciation of the simplicity of design and the position of the existing openings is critical, of equal importance is an understanding of the building's solidity or the contrast between large unbroken areas of wall and a few large openings. It is this "solid" compared to "void" that is referred to as the "solid-to-void" ratio.



**FIG.10** The importance of reusing existing openings as part of maintaining the solidity and aesthetic character of the building



**FIG.11** How not to do it – excessive introduction of new openings of an inappropriate design along with additions and other features that would be out of character



**FIG.12** How to do it – reuse of existing openings to retain character and limited introduction of additional openings of a style that can be considered in keeping with the character of the building



**FIG.13** Two examples of barn conversions where the urge to insert new windows has been resisted which has maintain the existing opening only help retains the proportions and aesthetic character of the building

Inserting new openings can result in dramatic and harmful change in character, as the legibility of the building's historic functional origins could be eroded if the insertion of additional openings introduces a form and regularity that is at odds with the ad-hoc functional arrangement. The result could be overtly announcing a domestic use of the building that would undermine its intrinsic character as an historic, functional agricultural building.

Each window and door opening, along with large existing openings such as carriage entry within a projecting porch of a threshing barn should therefore be fully utilised to allow natural light into the building. However, such openings are likely to be a prominent and key characteristic of any building and to ensure the contribution to the character of the building is preserved, any glazing should be designed to be in a well- proportioned layout and set well back in the openings (or indented). Existing shutters or doors could be retained and fixed back either permanently or during the day so they can be used for security at night.



**FIG.14** Here to proportions of the cart entrance to the central gabled projecting porch have been retained, as have the other existing openings

Where the introduction of new openings is necessary and justifiable, they should be of a size that respects the building's character, be kept to an absolute minimum and be discreetly located on the less publicly visible elevations. Openings should also not interrupt distinctive architectural features such as ventilation slits or owl holes.

Surplus openings that are no longer required may be used as convenient storage facilities for bins accessed from the outside of the building, or as unobtrusive locations for utility meters. Where openings need to be blocked up, the infill should be of a sympathetic material and fully recessed for the full extent of the original opening. Such an approach emphasises the original opening and preserves the building's character and evidence of former uses.



**FIG.15** Note hay loft door above flat arch and also stable door to its right at first floor level. This approach to maintaining the openings and whether functional or not is considered to be an important part of what is a good example of a residential conversion of a former stable as it has retained the random nature of the openings in terms of positioning and scale

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### (iii) WINDOWS

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Where original window joinery exists, this should be repaired rather than renewed. Existing historical window shutters (where present) can either be retained and tied back to the wall, or retained in working order to provide an additional layer of security when the building is empty.

New windows inserted into existing openings should utilise bespoke units composed of either timber or metal. Features out of keeping with traditional rural buildings such as dormer windows, uPVC windows, overtly domestic window designs, will be resisted due to the harm they would cause to the character of the host building unless there is a compelling reason why they are required.

Existing window cill detail should be retained and replicated where possible.



**FIG.16**  
Some good examples of bespoke window design

To help reduce the requirement for new openings to be punched through a building's historic walls or roof, small service rooms such as toilets can be provided without natural light. Dormers are unacceptable and rooflights are generally discouraged with a panel of patent glazing with non-reflective glass considered a far less intrusive alternative.

#### (iv) DOORS

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Where present original doors should be retained. Large doors are part of the original character of the certain types of agricultural building and should also be retained and tied back in the open position.

Where required, any new doors should be based on the design of any original surviving doors. Old ironmongery, where present should also be retained. Lintels over openings should be preserved where possible. Where new lintels are required, the external appearance should replicate the existing details on the building, for example, natural stone, brick or timber facing.



**FIG.17** A good example of how to approach either an existing or new opening in terms of simple door design and use of shutters under an exposed timber lintel. The use of external shutters and blue engineering bricks to door reveals also add interest

## **(v) EXISTING ROOFS**

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The roof of a farm building is the most visible feature and forms a key part of the building's character. Traditional farm buildings' roofs are generally simple in character and composed of local materials.

When roof finishes need to be relayed, the original material should be reused. Sometimes, it will be necessary to reinstate a traditional roof finish in place of a more recent alteration. This should be done in a material appropriate to the locality or adjacent buildings. Natural materials should be used to repair the existing structure and avoid total reconstruction that irons out all characterful irregularities. Much of the character of an old roof lies in its slight unevenness where it has settled on the purlins between the trusses.

Modern domestic roof details such as cupolas and weathervanes are not considered acceptable. Any applications which propose to add such features will need to demonstrate that there is a historic precedent for them on the subject building(s).

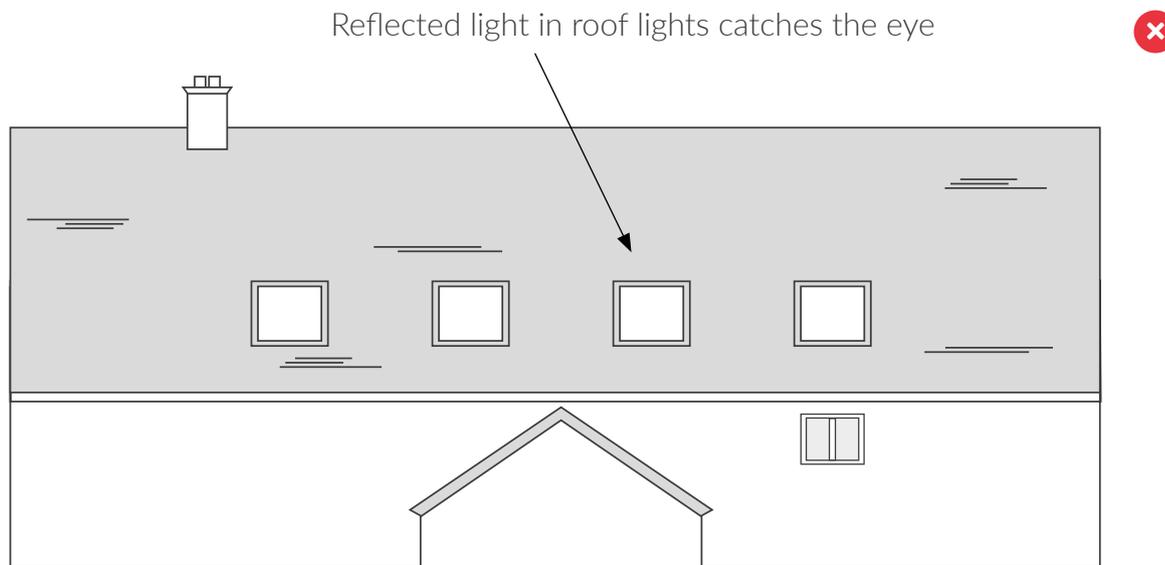
Aerials and satellite dishes should be discreetly located on the rear slope and set to the corner of the building. Metal flues should also not exceed the ridge of the building, be thin and painted in an unobtrusive matt finish. Brick chimneys of a domestic style are not generally considered acceptable.

## **(vi) ROOFLIGHTS**

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In principle the use of rooflights are discouraged. However, their introduction may be acceptable if they are seen as essential in facilitating a much needed conversion and so secure the future of a building. In such cases they would still need to be used with restraint, as while the origins of rooflights can be traced back to agricultural buildings, due to the design and appearance of most rooflight products, they potentially represent a significant domestic influence that would serve to detract from the historic character of a building. The insertion of rooflights can also severely disrupt the plane of the roof which can be harmful to its character and the insertion of rooflights can also add a form and regularity that is out of keeping with the functional ad-hoc nature of the elevations and character of the building. If rooflights are to be considered, then they should generally be located on the rear slope rather than the principal elevation, with a flush fitting design and non-reflective glass. Moreover, along with limiting the scale and number of rooflights to what only what is functionally required, consideration to their position on the roof is also required.

In light of the above, in considering any scheme for conversion, the justification for the insertion of any rooflights will be carefully considered (i.e. light, ventilation and means of escape Building Regulations requirements) and if not considered essential, their removal from any scheme on the grounds of preserving the character of the building will be required if a positive outcome is to be sought. For example any rooflights to serve a bathroom may not be considered essential when mechanical ventilation would be sufficient.



**FIG.18** Roof lights are generally considered discordant features that disrupt roof slopes

## (vii) EAVES AND VERGES

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Historic eaves and verge details such as corbelling or ventilations should be retained and repaired. As originally built the majority of traditional farm buildings had closed verges, clipped eaves and with guttering supported on rise and fall brackets with no fascia boards. Standard modern box eaves with deep projecting fascia boards, flat soffit boards and projecting barge boards will not be an acceptable detail on traditional farm buildings.



**FIG.19** Traditional rise and fall brackets supporting the gutter

## **(viii) RAINWATER GOODS (GUTTERS)**

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Where present historic gutters should be retained and if necessary, so should be repaired as opposed to replaced. If replacement gutters or downpipes can be justified as necessary, the replacements should be of the same materials (or an appropriate modern equivalent eg. aluminium instead of cast iron) and be simple in character and painted in an appropriate colour.

## **(ix) INTERNAL SUBDIVISION**

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Subdivision is often one of the greatest design challenges, 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 any midstreys should be left unobstructed without inserted structures such as floors, partitions and staircases. Any 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 the buildings.

## **(x) EXTENSIONS AND OUTBUILDINGS**

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Small scale new buildings may be considered, but their acceptability will be determined by design, location and the character of the existing site. To provide some guidance on this, for a scheme of conversion for a former farmstead to provide multiple residential units, the introduction of a number of detached garages would be considered harmful and contrary to the need to preserve in a convincing manner the character of the existing site. While the residential conversion will bring a number of unavoidable domestic influences, providing detached garages would be seen to make a cumulative contribution that would exacerbate the erosion or loss of the existing character in a very direct way.

It may however be for a smaller scaled and isolated scheme, an appropriately sited and designed garage could be considered, which in terms of design, means suitable materials, appropriate scale and proportions and so as a matter of principle the use of up-and-over suburban style garage doors would not be acceptable.

## (xi) SERVICES AND SUSTAINABILITY

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The strict adherence to modern standards and techniques and compliance with the Approved Documents of Part L may not be appropriate in all historic buildings and those of traditional construction. Typically the construction of modern buildings is designed impermeably to shed water rather than the historic permeable method of construction that absorb and then evaporate water. A combination of the two methods of construction can lead to significant damage and damp penetration. In relation to historic buildings the main clauses of the Building Regulations allow for more flexibility to enable requirements of Building Regulations to be fulfilled in ways other than that set out within the Approved Document. The relevant Approved Documents themselves recognise that historic buildings require a different approach to modern buildings and some flexibility is needed to mitigate the potential conflicts between the building and energy conservation.

Building Regulations require an increase in insulation for a change of use to habitable or most business accommodation, however where meeting the full requirements of Part L of the approved documents would cause unacceptable harm to the character and interest of the historic building the standards can be applied flexibly. 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 or 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 or squared the building up to make it look modern. However, insulation losses caused by the need to maintain historic fabric can be recovered by looking at what other opportunities may exist in other parts of the structure to exceed the minimum requirements.

Any insulation used in a permeable construction should also be permeable (timber boards/ insulating lime-based renders using hemp or eco-cork for example) 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 floor or slab such as limecrete and glasscrete construction for example.

Alterations to improve energy efficiency including significant insulation gains are possible in most historic buildings and easier to accommodate when carrying out a conversion or new build. The most effective ways of improving energy efficiency can be made by insulating the roof (whilst ensuring ventilation is retained and avoiding interstitial condensation), changing to a condensing boiler, using passive ventilation, avoiding condensation on surfaces and within the structure by using permeable and absorbent natural finishes,

reducing solar gain and heat loss by using baffles, heavy curtains or minimising the sizes of any new openings depending on orientation and shading.

In less sensitive locations, for instance on hidden roof slopes it may be possible to locate photovoltaic panels for the generation of electricity or solar thermal panels for the generation of hot water, subject to planning permission and or listed building consent. In appropriate circumstances such panels can be ground mounted and detached from the main building, including the storage cylinders associated with thermal stores or batteries for the storage of electricity generated on site.

Further guidance can be found within the Historic England publication “Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings – How to Improve Energy Efficiency” which can be accessed via the Historic England website using the below link,

<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/energy-efficiency-historic-buildings-ptl/heag014-energy-efficiency-partII/>

## PART 6: DETAILED DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS PART 2: THE LANDSCAPE SETTING

### GENERAL LANDSCAPE ISSUES

The functional informality that can characterise a farmyard and the wider settings of traditional rural buildings is an integral part of their interest and character. Therefore, along with the buildings themselves, it is how the buildings are experienced in their setting that can be considered significant in conservation terms. Consequently, for every scheme of conversion being considered, one of the primary objectives should be to retain the visual and spatial characteristics of the building's setting and well as any surviving features of interest, such as boundary walls or drinking troughs.

A traditional rural building's relationship with its immediate surroundings and landscape should be therefore remain unspoilt by prominent car parking, commercial signage, gardens and domestic boundary treatments, as part of any adaption.

Some farmyards may have been permanently sub-divided in the past to create small folds or pens. While it may be desirable to retain these for their historic interest, the creation of more subdivisions should be avoided, especially where the space concerned is open to public view.

In the majority of cases the conversion of rural buildings pose the challenge of retaining the continuous flow of landscape up to the building without any visible boundaries that might be considered to define separate ownerships or vehicular routes.



**FIG.20** An example of an open and informal farmyard, the character of which should be retained as part of any conservation and not lost through



**FIG.21** Another example making the same point about the positive and material contribution the informality of setting makes to the character and authenticity of a building. Although a degree of change is inevitable if these buildings were to be converted, the introduction of car parking would be significantly intrusive. The formalisation, demarcation and enclosure of this space as part of providing defined residential curtilages could also prove to be more harmful to the wider character than, for example, interrupting the catslide roof of the building to the right with a number of rooflights along with all the standard domestic paraphernalia. Therefore, while any conversion should require a considered and controlled response to the treatment of the external envelope of the buildings, just as much regard should be given to its setting which may include its historic relationship with its neighbours as a defined building group

## BOUNDARY TREATMENTS/ MEANS OF ENCLOSURE

Existing boundary structures like hedge banks, walls and traditional fences and gates, which enclose spaces around a farmstead possess historical interest and are usually features of particular character in themselves. They nearly always have aesthetic value 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). The conservation of the existing boundary structures is therefore fundamental to achieving an acceptable scheme and so where they exist they should be retained and where necessary repaired in a like for like manner.

When considering schemes of multiple conversion to create a number of separate residential units, there is often a tendency to try and apply a standardised approach to residential subdivision, demarcation and amenity provision. In each instance the impact of applying such an approach would be harmful, as any features that artificially divide the farmyard into separate areas, such as domestic fencing and other suburban solutions would result in a significant loss of existing setting and landscape character.

Overall, the less units the better as the more units into which the buildings are divided, the greater level of alteration and the more historic value of the buildings is obscured. Therefore, intensive subdivision will be resisted and the optimum number of units should be driven by the ability of the building(s) to accommodate the change of use (both internally and externally) without causing material harm.



**FIG.22** An existing barn pre-conversion. The open and informal character of its curtilage makes a positive and material contribution to its significance and should be preserved

## **STRUCTURES/ OUTBUILDINGS AND DOMESTIC PARAPHERNALIA**

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Structures and features that are inherently associated with residential properties such as garden sheds, summer houses, greenhouses and garages, are unlikely to suit the non-domestic character of farm buildings and their settings. Unless shielded away from view by existing walls or buildings or otherwise located in an inconspicuous position, their introduction is unlikely to be acceptable on the grounds of loss of character through the domestication or taming of the functional, rural character of the site. Oil tanks, swimming pools, gardens, washing lines, prominent security and domestic lights are also not acceptable, especially in prominent locations for the same reason.

## **ENTRANCES AND PARKING**

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Original gates, gateposts and railings should be retained in situ and refurbished where necessary. New gates and posts, where required, should be sympathetic to the wider rural environment and bucolic character of the site. The addition of large or ornamental metal gates will therefore be resisted, as they would simply add an intrusive domestic feature into a rural landscape.

Car parking should be considered from the outset of the scheme and should be provided as visually recessive as possible. For schemes of multiple conversions, this could mean that the parking is situated outside of the farm building group in an ideally well-screened area.

Existing paving materials such as cobblestones or flag stones should be retained. Internally stable pavements should also be retained and reused.

Courtyards need to be surfaced in a material that corresponds to the setting, but is not so formal as to detract from the building's character. Bonded aggregate dressed surfaces may be appropriate, as may be brushed concrete. In the interest of the informality of the space, car parking spaces should not be demarcated using white lines.

## PART 7: WILDLIFE

Wildlife considerations are of particular importance when considering the future of historic traditional rural buildings, as they can provide a habitat for protected species such as nesting birds, barn owls and bats.

The survival of all species is important in the interests of biodiversity but it is the protection of roosting bats (any of the 17 species found in the UK) and nesting birds (especially swallows, swifts and house martins) that need to be most carefully addressed in light of the protection afforded to these species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), the Habitats Regulations (2017) and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000).

The legislative regard that these animals should therefore be given is two-fold, as firstly, it means in considering any conversion, protected species are not disturbed during their nesting or breeding seasons. Secondly, it means making arrangements (commonly referred to as mitigation) to ensure the occupation of the building is sustained and not threatened by any works or actions.

It is necessary to resolve how these two objectives 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 interest to deal with these matters in advance, as disturbance is no less a criminal act as is killing, injuring or capturing a bat or bird, taking a nest or egg, or interfering with a nest or roost or obstructing a flight path to them.

Therefore, establishing whether any protected species are present is an essential first step so an ecological survey carried out by a specialist ecological consultant should be carried out at the earliest opportunity. It is the applicant's responsibility to have these surveys done and help in choosing a consultant can be found from CIEEM

Proposals affecting buildings where European Protected Species (bats) are found will require a mitigation licence from 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 the impact of any development are sufficient. The ecological survey should therefore show how the bats will be protected during the works, how damage and disturbance will be minimised, and what provision will be made to sustain their occupation in the long term.

Many traditional rural buildings are located in areas that are potentially ideal for supporting wildlife, so even if ecological surveys confirm the absence of protected species, it is always desirable to consider whether provision could be made to encourage native species, especially those which are in decline. This could be done through the providing new built in nesting or roosting opportunities.

## PART 8: LISTED BUILDINGS – INTERNAL FEATURES AND DESIGN

It is important to note that while a traditional rural building may not be listed in its own right, it may be that by way of its date and its historic functional and associative connection with a Grade II listed building (such as a farmhouse), is it considered to be curtilage listed, and thus the law provides that it is to be treated as part of the listed building during the consideration of the development proposals.

The planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 section 5 (b) states that a listed building can include “any object or structure within the curtilage of the building which, although not fixed to the building, forms part of the land and has done so since before July 1946”.

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga.1990/9/section/1>

For guidance on whether a building is curtilage listed and the implications of potential curtilage listed status of any building, advice can be sought from Conservation Officer at South Gloucestershire Council.

Where a traditional rural building is listed, along with protecting its external character and features, particular care will be needed to conserve its internal historic character and surviving internal fabric and fittings.

Applicants will be expected to support their proposals with a Heritage Statement describing the significance of the heritage asset and demonstrate how the proposals will protect that significance in their Design and Access Statement.

The conversion of listed buildings will often involve leaving key internal spaces open with all the roof framing retained and exposed. Where repair of the roof timbers is necessary, this should be undertaken using appropriate materials and methods in consultation with South Gloucestershire Council. If the timbers need cleaning, this should be limited to washing and brushing and they should be left unstained to retain as much as their functional character as possible. Sand-blasting or other abrasive techniques are not considered acceptable. Listed building consent will also generally be required for cleaning works.

Some higher status agricultural buildings, especially stables, have lime plaster ceilings. These should always be retained and repaired.

Where brickwork needs cleaning, the advice of South Gloucestershire Council should always be sought, but again inappropriate cleaning methods such as sand-blasting which would be likely to cause substantial damage would not be acceptable.

Inserted partitions should be kept to a minimum. Where partitions are necessary, they should be carefully considered so as to retain the openness of the structure and detailed to complement the building.

Existing subdivisions and openings are often key to the functional interpretation and character of agricultural buildings and should be retained wherever possible. Non-standard floor plans and creative thought will often be required to work around and protect significant historic features.

Roof insulation should be placed between roof trusses and have a finished surface so as to avoid the need to plaster around the exposed rafters. Works to insulate external walls are likely to be required to meet current Building Regulations. Historic finishes should be retained or reproduced where possible; these may be tiles, panelling, lime plaster, exposed brick or stone, or limewash. Lime plasters and washes also allow the walls to retain their shape and individuality as well as allowing the building to breathe. In certain circumstances breathable paints with flat finishes could be used.

Where historic floors and finishes are existing, these should be retained and repaired in situ wherever possible. Floor strengthening and increased thermal or noise insulation can all be provided whilst retaining historic fabric in situ and often is not necessary considering the existing thermal mass of the existing fabric.

Where flooring is needed to make the building habitable, a gap should be left around the perimeter of slab to ensure ventilation. Limecrete is often considered suitable due to being breathable and its ability to deal with naturally occurring moisture by allowing water vapour to pass through it and not build up underneath with the subsequent pressure forcing the moisture up the walls through capillary action.

Every effort should be made to retain internal historic fabric, such as hay racks, plank doors, tether rings, and stall dividers. Ideally left in situ in the interests of authenticity, but if necessary and acceptable, relocation and reuse of these features would also be beneficial to the character and interest of any building.

The introduction of overtly domestic fixtures or features should be avoided to retain the historic functional character of the building.

As discussed under a previous section above, along with needing to ensure any proposed external and internal alterations to a building helps sustain or enhance its significance, the approach to landscaping can be of equal importance in preserving historic interest of a building. In the context of a listed building, this might impact on its direct setting or if the subject building is curtilage listed, then the proposed landscape treatment could impact upon the of a setting of a listed building or/and an associated curtilage listed building group that also contributes to the setting of a listed building.

## PART 9: PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS

The conversion of a rural building to a dwelling is considered to be something of an exception to rural planning policy, as it would not normally permit new houses to be developed in the countryside.

The retention of a building's character and setting in the long-term is considered to be the key element in the justification for conversion. A good architect, skilled in rural conversions, can help understand and explain the building and its relationship to its immediate surroundings and landscape character. This will help owners to achieve a sensitive and successful scheme.

However, in order to achieve its long term objectives of conserving both the building and its relationship with the landscape, the Council can use planning conditions to remove permitted development rights.

### JUSTIFICATION FOR REMOVAL OF PD RIGHTS

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Conversion schemes for rural buildings that are carefully designed in accordance with the principles outlined above, could be harmed at a later date by ill-conceived alterations or additions, many of which are classed as permitted development where the building is not listed and is used as a dwelling.

The removal of permitted development rights could potentially mean that the following works would require consent.

#### **Extensions including:**

- Conservatories, garden rooms and orangeries;
- Bay windows, porches and similar minor extensions

### **A variety of other detached buildings and structures including:**

- Garages and car ports;
- Sheds and summerhouses;
- Swimming pools, pool houses and sauna cabins;
- Oil and LPG tanks;
- Lych gates, columns, porticos, loggias and other kinds of structure for the purpose “incidental to the enjoyment of the dwellinghouse”.

### **Alterations such as:**

- Insertion of new doors or windows:
- Replacement and alterations of doors and window joinery or openings;
- Insertion of roof-lights and dormer windows
- Introduction of any flues or external vents
- Replacement of roofing materials
- Any changes to external elevations – application for render for example;
- Insertion of any solar panels / pv cells
- Installation of wind turbines

### **Walls, fences, gates and other means of enclosure**

In any materials but limited to a maximum of 2 metres in height (one metre next to a highway).

Such alterations, extensions and other buildings and structures individually or cumulatively could adversely affect the rural character and setting of the original. The removal of these rights brings such proposals within planning control and applied the need for planning permission for any alterations to the buildings external fabric or its curtilage. Planning applications for works which would otherwise be “permitted development” do not currently require the payment of application fees to the Council.

## PART 10: CONTACT DETAILS

Development Management Team  
Department for Environment and Community Services  
PO Box 1954  
Bristol

 [planningapplications@southglos.gov.uk](mailto:planningapplications@southglos.gov.uk)

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