

Development Advice Note

NEW USES FOR REDUNDANT RURAL BUILDINGS

Traditional rural buildings make a significant contribution to the character and quality of the countryside of the Stirling Council area. In recognition of this, Stirling Council policy generally supports the conversion and reuse of redundant rural buildings. The purpose of this leaflet is to provide advice and design guidance on the sensitive conversion of such buildings to a new use.

Introduction

In recent years, changes in rural life and farming practice have led to many types of rural building becoming redundant and falling into disrepair, for example barns, stables, mills, churches and schools. Many of these buildings contribute positively to the character of the countryside and to avoid their loss, or their becoming derelict eyesores, Council policy generally supports their conversion and reuse. Insensitive conversion of these buildings can be equally damaging to the character of the countryside. It is therefore essential that conversions retain the architectural character of the building and its rural setting.

This Advice Note explains and illustrates principles for dealing sensitively with the adaptation of redundant rural buildings to new uses. It is based on the strict criteria identified in the Council's Policy E2 of the Stirling Council Local Plan, a copy of which can be seen on the Council internet site at www.stirling.gov.uk or obtained from the Council's Environment Services.

A variety of new uses may be acceptable, such as housing, holiday accommodation, outdoor education, retail, catering, light industry and craft workshops, provided that the use is compatible with the character and location of the existing buildings and adjoining land uses. Proposals for a particular new use will be assessed against Local Plan policies.

Advice

Converting a redundant rural building is rarely a straightforward exercise. We strongly recommend that you seek professional design and structural advice from the outset.

The Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland can provide you with a list of Architects. The Institution of Structural Engineers can provide you with a list of engineers.

Valuable advice can also be obtained by discussing your proposals with a Planning Officer **before** submitting your application.

Relevant addresses and telephone numbers are listed on the back page of this leaflet.

Suitable Buildings

A building that is suitable for conversion must be:

- **Structurally sound, complete in its present form and capable of conversion** without compromising its existing structural integrity. A detailed structural survey report will be required including detailed plans illustrating the extent of any dewatering and rebuilding required.

- **Visually worth retaining**, due to its traditional appearance and contribution to the rural landscape; This excludes modern infill buildings, sheds, and derelict or ruinous structures.
- **Redundant**, with no requirement for the previous or a related use, nor for a similar replacement building, in the foreseeable future;
- **Capable of being serviced** with water, drainage, electricity and vehicular access to the satisfaction of the relevant authority.

Proposals to re-use ruined buildings that have no roof or are structurally unsound, are unlikely to be considered favourably by the Council. Exceptions may be made where the building is Listed, is of particular architectural or historic merit, or makes a positive contribution to a grouping of buildings, and where a sensitive scheme for its restoration and reuse is proposed.

Design Guidelines

The majority of redundant rural buildings are farm buildings. Whilst the design principles set out in this leaflet can be applied generally to the conversion of other rural buildings, the examples used and detailed advice given relate to farm buildings.

Farm buildings in the Council area tend to be simple traditional structures built in stone, with few openings and plain pitched roofs, usually covered with slates. Most form part of a steading complex where individual buildings such as the barn, cart shed, granary, horse mill, and farmhouse are laid out in an arrangement, usually around a courtyard. There are also some large estate farms and other estate buildings, tending to be more architecturally elaborate and having more impressive external elevations.

In order to convert a farm building to a new use in a manner that respects the form and character of the existing building, the conversion should aim to minimise the level of alteration required. Proposals should avoid over-development, particularly in conversions to housing, as this often requires a more intrusive level of alteration. The new use should adapt to the character, scale and location of the existing building rather than the building's character and setting being altered to suit the new use. The following design principles will apply:

- **Retain and reuse openings**

Farm buildings tend to have large areas of plain, unbroken masonry or harled wall, particularly on external elevations. This is perhaps the most important feature of traditional farm buildings. Openings tend to be on the inner faces of the building towards the protected courtyard, and vary in size and shape according to their use.

In conversion, the existing openings should be retained and reused in their existing form and new openings should be kept to a minimum. Where new openings are required, they should respect the size, proportions and detailing of existing openings. For example, where the pattern of existing openings is informal then the regular spacing and sizing of new openings should be avoided. In some instances it may be less intrusive to make a single bigger opening rather than a number of smaller openings.

The style and material used for new windows and doors is important. Generally they should be constructed in timber and have a painted finish. The use of materials such as PVC or aluminium or of stain or varnish finishes is generally not appropriate. Windows should be sash and case, fixed units or side-hung casement, with their details determined by existing fittings or those on nearby farm buildings. Doors should be simple boarded or half-timber/glazed doors.

Where cartshed openings or ventilation slits need to be infilled, they benefit from a very simple approach with the glazing recessed into the opening.

- **Retain roof Form**

The simple, plain roof form is a fundamental characteristic of the traditional farm building. The existing roof should be retained and repaired and only where absolutely necessary replaced with a new roof to exactly match the original. Where re-slating is required, the existing slates should be salvaged and reused in a pattern to match the existing.

The form and character of the existing roof should be retained. Dormer windows are not traditional features of working farm buildings. Instead, use should be made of carefully proportioned and positioned rooflights set flush with the roof slope since these are less disruptive to the building's character. Where hayloft openings exist these can be reused effectively as dormer windows. Proposals to raise wallheads to create additional space within the roof will not normally be acceptable since this alters the building proportions and character.

The insertion of additional ventilation, flues, and service pipework all require discreet handling. The use of modern fascias and vents should be avoided and alternative means of ventilation considered. The introduction of metal flues may in some instances be more appropriate than a new masonry chimney stack.

- **Convert existing buildings**

The conversion should generally retain all of the structurally sound, traditional buildings on the site. The demolition of structures such as modern sheds, infill to courtyards and derelict structures, where it restores the original courtyard or steading form, is likely to be acceptable.

Proposals that involve significant levels of doughtaking and rebuilding are unlikely to be acceptable. Where some doughtaking and rebuilding is required, plans illustrating the full details of the extent of doughtaking and the nature of the rebuilding, supported by a written justification will be required as part of the planning application.

Special features such as doocots, skews and gable details, and louvred roof vents should be retained.

Some farm buildings contain interesting interiors, for example timber and ironwork stalls in stables, or fittings and machinery associated with the production of power or the milling of crops. Where these features cannot be retained as part of the conversion there may be a requirement for them to be carefully recorded.

- **Avoid Insensitive Additions**

New extensions or additions should generally be avoided. In exceptional circumstances, where it can be shown to enhance the architectural composition of the building or group, small-scale extension not exceeding 10% of the external floor area of the buildings to be converted, may be considered. Where new work is introduced it should be sensitively designed in terms of scale location and materials. New extensions should avoid 'copying' existing farm buildings, e.g. creating a new horse mill or cart shed. Also, the suburban character of features such as conservatories, balconies, porches, canopies, bay windows, sun rooms etc jars with the simple character of farm buildings and should be avoided.

- **Repair work and materials**

Always take account of the materials and construction techniques that have been used in the existing building and ensure that repair work is undertaken in a similar way. New work and alterations should generally make use of traditional materials, typically stone, lime, timber, lead and iron.

Protecting landscape Setting

Rural farm buildings are usually located in exposed and open locations surrounded by farmland. During conversion there is great pressure, particularly from housing conversions, to alter and modify the external spaces around the buildings and the immediate landscape. It is essential that the impact of any

conversion on the landscape setting be minimised. This requires the sensitive design of access roads, parking, external lighting, gardens, planting, boundaries and service provision. The following guidelines should be followed:

- Steading courtyards should not be divided up but should be retained as a single communal space. Retain traditional stone slabs, setts or gravel surfacing and avoid the use of extensive areas of tarmac, slabs or pavements.
- The provision of private gardens in residential conversions is difficult to achieve. For a single house the courtyard or other spaces within the steading complex can become private ground. For multiple developments it is more difficult. The use of land around the outside of the steading for gardens will not generally be acceptable because of the impact on the landscape setting. The developer and future occupiers may have to accept limited, none, or communal garden space. It may be possible in some instances to identify discreet 'parcels' of land within the steading grouping or on unexposed elevations.
- Existing traditional boundary treatments such as stone dykes, estate fencing or hedges should be retained as far as possible. Where new boundaries are created these should be sensitively defined to respect those existing. New walls and fences of a suburban style will not be acceptable.
- Retain existing trees and planting. For new planting, use trees and shrubs that are in character with the rural setting. Fast growing conifers e.g. Leyland Cypress and exotic, ornamental shrubs are not generally considered appropriate, because of their suburban appearance.
- Most steadings are accessed by a simple farm track. Upgrading of the access may be required but efforts should be made to minimise the impact on the landscape setting. Modifications to provide improved access, entrance sight lines, lighting etc should be discussed with the Roads Authority and sensitively designed solutions achieved.
- Parking provision should be discreet. Vehicles can be accommodated in the open courtyard or sometimes within one of the farm buildings - cartsheds and coach houses provide ideal garaging. In some cases detached outbuildings can be readily converted to garaging. Where parking has to be provided outwith the courtyard and existing buildings it may have to be located remotely and screened from view.

Full details of access, parking, and the treatment of external spaces will be required with every application.

Applications are considered according to the particulars of each case. **Always** discuss your proposals with a Planning Officer at an early stage before you formally submit your planning application.

Wildlife Interests

Uninhabited buildings often support a variety of wildlife, including various plants, birds and mammals. Some, for example, barn owls and bats, are protected under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act. If you find, or suspect the presence of **any** wildlife in your building, contact the Scottish Natural Heritage office for advice **prior to starting any work**. Willful damage or destruction of legally protected wildlife or their habitat may result in prosecution.

Barn owls and bats are sensitive to human disturbance, and therefore susceptible to any work on the building they inhabit e.g. roof repairs, timber treatment, and pest control chemicals. Their survival depends on the preservation of their living environment, which may mean timing your work to avoid their breeding season. Consider designing owl or bat 'boxes' into your renovated building.

Permissions

The conversion and change of use of any rural building will require some or all of the following permissions:

- Planning Permission
- Listed Building Consent
- Scottish Environment Protection Agency Consent
- Building Warrant

Planning Applications

All applications for planning permission must be accompanied by:

- Full plans and elevational details of the buildings as existing and as proposed.
- A landscaping plan clearly highlighting existing features such as trees, walls, gates and fences, and indicating details of proposed new landscaping including boundaries, planting and surfacing.
- A detailed structural survey and plans clearly showing the extent and nature of any dismantling and rebuilding required.
- A schedule of work outlining the proposed phasing of work along with a detailed method statement indicating how the works will be undertaken.

Permitted Development Rights

Where an application for conversion to housing use is approved it is likely that consent will be subject to the removal of permitted development rights. This is to protect the rural and agricultural character of the farm buildings once conversion has been undertaken, and will require that any future proposals for alteration or extension be submitted to the Planning Authority for its approval.

Contacts

Planning Permission, Listed Building Consent and Landscape Advice

Planning and Environmental Strategy, Stirling Council, Viewforth, Stirling FK8 2ET. Tel: 01786 442453
Fax: 01786 443003. Email: planning@stirling.gov.uk.

Building Regulations

Building Control, Environmental Services, Stirling Council, Municipal Buildings, Corn Exchange Road, Stirling FK8 1AY. Tel: 01786 479000.

Architectural Advice

Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland, 15 Rutland Square, Edinburgh EH1 2BE. Tel: 0131 229 7205.

Structural Advice

The Institution of Structural Engineers, 11 Upper Belgrave Street, London, SW1X 8BH. Tel: 020 7235 4535 Fax: 020 7235 4294. Email: mail@IstructE.org.uk. WWW.IstructE.org.uk.

Wildlife Advice

Scottish Natural Heritage, The Beta Centre, Innovation Park, University of Stirling, FK9 4NF. Tel: 01786 450362

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, 10 Park Quadrant, Glasgow, G3 6BS. Tel: 0141 331 0993 Fax: 0141 331 9080. Email: Glasgow@RSPB.org.uk.

Scottish Environmental Protection Agency

SEPA East Region, North Division, Perth Office, South Street, Perth, PH2 8NJ. Tel: 01738 627989 Fax: 01738 630997

SEPA West Region, Rivers House, Murray Road, East Kilbride, G75 0LA. Tel: 01355 238181 Fax: 01355 264323