

Design of Converted Agricultural Outbuildings

Planning Guidance Note

Introduction

An increasing number of proposals are coming forward for the redevelopment and conversion of agricultural buildings to other uses, principally housing.

Conversions can be challenging and raise difficult design issues. Pre-application discussions with the Planning Service are therefore considered to be essential in order to achieve high quality developments.

Format of Guidance

All planning guidance notes are material considerations in the assessment of planning applications and shall be afforded significant weight in the decision making process. Failure to comply with Guidance Notes may be a reason for refusal of planning consent.

Planning Framework

East Dunbartonshire Local Plan 2, Policy GB2F Rehabilitation of Buildings, states that the conversion of existing buildings can be acceptable where the building is of architectural merit, makes a positive contribution to its surrounds, is of stone or brick construction, and is in a sound and reasonably wind and water tight condition.

In addition, where it can be demonstrated to the satisfaction of the planning authority, for example with reference to historic maps and/or other similar documentary evidence, that formerly wind and water tight barn buildings of the original farm steading have been removed or otherwise substantially altered, then these removed or altered buildings can also be deemed to have re-development potential, where this would allow the re-creation of the original courtyard layout.

Policy Guidance

For conversion to be supported, the building must be of historic architectural merit and be making a positive visual contribution to its locality. The converted building should respect that contribution and should therefore have strong regard to:

- the landscape setting of the area;
- the character and design of the original building and agricultural steading; and,
- the number of residential units within the conversion

There may be a temptation on behalf of applicants to achieve a high number of residential units within converted buildings. This can have a significant impact on the design of the conversion, because as more units are accommodated, more alterations to the external appearance of the building generally have to be accommodated. For example, more units will mean more door and window openings in the walls, more roof space accommodation and dormers being added and more parking being required. These alterations may significantly adversely affect the character of the building. For this reason, it may be that development proposals are considered to be 'over-development', and whilst conversion in principle may be acceptable, the detailed design may not. This may require planning applicants to reduce the number of residential units being accommodated in order to lower its impact and achieve a satisfactory design.

In general, the new use should adapt to the building rather than vice-versa, and attention to detail is paramount – simplicity, authenticity and robustness should prevail over ostentation and inappropriate ‘quick fix’ solutions. Traditional vernacular designs should generally be employed and ‘suburbanisation’ avoided. Some modest extensions to buildings may be permitted, but only where these reflect the character of the area – which is especially important in traditional and distinctive farm steading patterns.

The finished development should:

- respect the vernacular style of the building/farm steading and the area in terms of building detailing and proportions;
- retain original roof details, i.e. pitch, height and materials (normally slate, with diminishing sizes);
- minimise the number of dormer windows, particularly in outward facing roof slopes;
- dormers should, where possible, reflect the fenestration (window and door opening) pattern in the walls below;
- not significantly raise wall heads or significantly change roof heights/pitches or the proportion of wall to roof;
- minimise new fenestration, particularly on outward facing walls;
- retain traditional wall openings for windows and doors;
- retain important features and finishes in the original buildings, e.g. stepped gables, exposed stonework, gates, paved yards, etc.;
- use materials and designs appropriate to the vernacular style of the original building and the area, e.g. sash and case pattern of windows;
- minimise significant departures from the traditional building pattern, e.g. where a steading has a traditional courtyard, this vernacular style should be reflected in the design;
- minimise the effect of parking, particularly from outward views to the building, e.g. parking may be better accommodated within a relatively secluded courtyard rather than along outward facing elevations;
- reflect traditional wall finishes, e.g. avoid use of flat/even rendered finishes by using rough rendering, showing the pattern of random stonework or retention of exposed stone;
- be sensitive in their treatment of open space, which should be designed as an entity and with simplicity, e.g. communal garden ground and courtyards may be more appropriate than individual/compartmentalised ‘suburban’ garden patterns and, similarly, high garden fencing may not be appropriate;
- reflect the local countryside in any landscaping and planting; and,
- have regard to any ecological and wildlife interests at the site, e.g. bat or bird species in building roof spaces, particularly European and nationally protected species. In nearly all cases, an independent survey at the appropriate time of year (for bats, approximately mid-May to the start of September) will be required. Note that bat surveys will be required prior to an application being determined

The development should generally not give the visual appearance of a new modern building, or include predominantly modern features such as French windows and large dormer or picture windows.