

Farm Steading Conversions

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE NOTE NO. 11

Introduction

Clackmannanshire, in common with many other parts of Scotland, has a number of fine traditional farm steadings, which either form part of a formal architectural composition or a more informal group of farm buildings linked through function. Some of these have been listed as being of special architectural or historic interest, more commonly known as listed buildings. The majority, however, whilst having made a contribution to the agricultural economy of the area, are now increasingly under threat as modern methods of farming and the realities of a changing economic climate result in some of these buildings no longer being suitable for their original productive use.

Many of these structures can and should be re-used to keep the look and character of rural farm buildings. Adapting architecturally or historically valuable buildings to appropriate new uses is a means by which they can continue to contribute to the area's landscape, meet the needs of the community and assist in meeting sustainable development criteria through the re-use of structures. A balance has to be struck between the needs to accommodate the requirements of any new use and the retention of the character of the building and its setting. Whilst most of the pressure is for housing, other uses can be appropriate. The purpose of this note is to amplify the circumstances where the Council as the Planning Authority is likely to support the re-use of the whole or parts of these structures. The Background papers including the Development Plan and Central Government guidance are detailed at the end of this advice note.

Given the growing importance of this issue, the Review of the Local Plan, which has just commenced, will reassess the relevance of the existing policies. This advice note therefore seeks to add to the current planning policies in the Development Plan and amplify national planning guidance and will remain in place as interim policy guidance until the Review of the Development Plan is complete.

Development Plan Position

Both the Central 2000 Structure Plan and the Clackmannanshire Local Plan state clearly that there is a strong presumption against non-essential development in the countryside. However, against this context, and consistent with National Planning Policy Guideline 3 "Land for Housing"; Policy HP04 of the Structure Plan states that proposals for the conversion to housing of traditional redundant buildings which are structurally sound and substantially intact may be acceptable in certain circumstances. Policy GEN 6 of the Local Plan goes on to explain that the sensitive restoration and improvement of traditional buildings will be favoured in preference to proposals which involve the loss of countryside.

In addition, Policy ENV 5 states that approval will normally be granted for the sensitive restoration or conversion of redundant traditional buildings in the countryside, which would extend the life of an attractive building and result in a positive contribution to the landscape, where a safe access, and water, drainage and other services are available. Within the context of this Development Plan Policy Framework, the evaluation of the proposals must demonstrate that the buildings are of a traditional nature, that the proposals for re-use are of an appropriate scale and sensitive to the character of the buildings; that a safe access can be provided; and that services are readily available.

It is therefore not automatic that a farm building should be retained and converted.

Condition and Merit of Conversions

The Council will not support the re-use and conversion of redundant farm buildings. If they are in such an advanced state of decay or dereliction that few structural elements remain extant or where they are structurally unsound and would require complete or extensive demolition and consequent re-building of potential structural problems, the Council will require the submission of a Structural Engineer's report as part of the evaluation.

The Council will need to be satisfied on the intrinsic merit and character of the farm buildings and their contribution to the landscape. Buildings of no intrinsic architectural or historic merit will not be supported for alternative re-use. As such, an initial character assessment will be carried out by the Planning Authority at the start of the appraisal process. Where a building is statutorily protected, then the presumption is in favour of retention (see the section below on listed buildings). For others however, the buildings will have to have intrinsic merit. Applicants are advised to contact the Planning Service at the earliest stage of their evaluation as this may save them time and money.

Alternative Uses: Non Housing

The priority should be to retain the buildings for their original purposes and it is clear that there are still many farm buildings that can continue to be used as part of the agricultural operations. In addition, it is acknowledged Scottish Office Planning Advice Note 39 "Farm and Forestry Buildings" that there are certain circumstances where there is demand for new farming accommodation in which it may be possible to rehabilitate or convert existing buildings to accommodate modern processes and new activities. It notes that this may be less expensive than erecting a new building and can offer the additional advantages of retaining a mature setting and conserving traditional materials and finishes. However, care must be taken to ensure that additions or alterations are in sympathy with the existing buildings as consistent with the detailed guidelines given below.

In the case of redundancy, this is obsolescence in farming terms, then the form, character and internal structure of farm steadings, particularly their open plan layout, are such that light industry, craft workshops, studios or other tourism or countryside related activities may be more appropriate and help to diversify and support the rural economy. In particular, there is a demand for kennels, stabling and such like and attempts should be made to ensure a best fit between existing resources and appropriate uses. The internal space requirements of such uses are less likely to require substantial subdivision that might effect the external fabric.

In this context, it is a concern to the Planning Authority that steadings may be run down in whole or part and then justification is sought for new agricultural buildings and houses within the same farm unit. It is reasonable for the Planning Authority to apply a form of sequential test and to prefer if such uses can be accommodated within existing structures of the farm unit.

Alternative Uses: Housing

With the requirement for subdivision and the creation of new internal spaces, housing conversion is more likely to have an effect on external form. This will only be considered where it can be demonstrated that the building is worthy of retention and a conversion consistent with the character and integrity of the existing buildings and setting can be achieved and a reasonable attempt has been pursued to market the premises for a potentially suitable non-housing use. The proposal must also have no detrimental impacts on the heritage and be able to meet amenity and road safety thresholds.

In addition, where the conversion would only involve part of the steading group, and would hereby create the potential for conflict between uses, it is not likely to be supported. As will be demonstrated below, there is an issue related to the intensification of use and the consequent effect not only on the character of the buildings, but the impact on its setting, amenity and road safety. In some instances, dependent on the scale and layout of the buildings, a larger unit with a demand for associated stabling and countryside requirements may be easier to accommodate.

Major issues tend to arise in terms of amenity and public safety from extensive subdivision and advice to planning authorities stresses the avoidance of creating suburban type developments and traffic problems, in a countryside setting, particularly in roadside situations (Scottish Office Planning Advice Note 36 "The Siting and Design of New Housing in the Countryside"). It should be recognised that there may be instances where road safety issues alone preclude the possibility of subdivision to housing.

Compatibility

Conversion of a steading to a non-housing or housing use will not be supported where it could be demonstrated that it would be detrimental to existing residential amenity.

However, irrespective of the alternative use proposed, where existing legitimate farming activities near the application site would result in an adverse impact on the amenity of the new uses if uncontrolled, these applications will only be considered favourably if the Council and all other interested parties are prepared to enter into a voluntary agreement under Section 7 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 limiting nearby farming activities through the use of exclusion zones.

Design Criteria

Given the significance and complexity of many of these structures, it is recommended that an applicant seeks the services of a registered architect or building surveyor in developing the proposals.

Detailed proposals will require to conform to the following criteria. These criteria are of even greater significance where the buildings are listed and Listed Building Consent will not be given for proposals which are insensitive and adversely affect the character of the listed building. All applications, however, will be required to incorporate and be assessed against these general criteria as consistent with Scottish Office Planning Advice Note 44 "Fitting New Housing into the Countryside".

- (i) The shape, layout and form of the development and its impact on the surrounding area.
- (ii) The choice of material, with colours and textures that complement the locality.
- (iii) Well designed schemes that respect both the local environment and the landscape setting.
- (iv) The visual impact of the development as seen from roads.

More specifically, attention is drawn to the following detailed criteria.

- (v) The design, fenestration, detailing, materials and finishing of any conversion works must respect the architectural characteristics and qualities of the steading.
- (vi) Inappropriate structures will be removed as part of the proposals.
- (vii) Existing door and window openings should be re-used wherever practicable; existing cart sheds openings, ventilator slots, distinctive detailing and ancillary structures of merit retained and re-used. The number of new openings should be limited by comparison and care taken in terms of the composition and relationship of solids (walls) to voids (openings).
- (viii) Projections above the existing ridgeline, raising ridges or eaves, and introducing new porches and new dormers will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances where this can be demonstrated as reinforcing the character and integrity of the steading, probably as supported by documentary evidence.
- (ix) Conservation rooflights, subject to limitations on the size, shape and number, can often be successfully integrated into a steading but the need for attic floor accommodation will probably be limited owing to issues of intensification.
- (x) The scope for sensitive adaptation will not only depend on the intrinsic character of the steading, but its location and siting, and the relationship of public to non-public elevations. Preference will be given to accommodating change on non-public elevations. The whole design however will have to have an integrity.
- (xi) Extensions of new build as part of the initial conversion works will only be allowed in exceptional circumstances where they form part of the need to reinforce the architectural integrity of the existing steading but without compromising its existing character. New build for garaging will not be permitted. All storage should be built into the original buildings to offset the need for garden huts and ancillary buildings.
- (xii) Extensions after the conversion will be discouraged and only allowed in exceptional circumstances. Normal permitted development rights for such later extensions will be removed by condition.
- (xiii) Open courtyards should normally be subdivided by fences or other structures but should be held in common as one space, simply detailed in materials appropriate to traditional steading courts. Traditional courtyard finishes such as cobbles, setts and central walled or sunken middens should be retained and repaired where considered appropriate by the Planning Authority.
- (xiv) The design should take the opportunity to incorporate good standards of energy efficiency in shelter, layout, materials and U values.
- (xv) Landscape design and specification (both hard and soft) must be appropriate to the architecture of the steading and its countryside setting. Existing trees, if appropriate to the setting, should be retained and protected. Where common landscape areas are proposed, proper arrangements must be made to ensure their future management and maintenance. Individual garden areas will only be approved where appropriately designed and detailed in relation to the architecture and setting of the steading. New tree and hedge planting around the steading and along its approaches will be encouraged where this will enhance its landscape setting and ecological value. All plants must be of native species (Scottish Genetic provenance) and a period of protection and establishment built into the management regime.
- (xvi) Particular care and sensitivity must be taken with boundary treatments and enclosures to ensure that they reinforce and do not detract from the countryside location. Stone dykes, stob and wire fencing, native hedging can be appropriate, but each location needs to be analysed with care.

- (xvii) Car parking, gardens, access and services should be accommodated within, or be well related to, the steading. These factors are crucial to the successful conversion of steadings and are often undervalued in the process. Applicants should ideally seek professional landscape advice in the design of these factors as these are often undervalued by applicants. The cumulative impact of these factors is all the more evident where extensive subdivision is pursued to provide a significant number of planning units.
- (xviii) Incorporation of the principles of Security by Design as detailed in Scottish Office Planning Advice Note 46 subject to reconciliation with the other needs of the scheme.

Access, Road Safety and Services

The access, parking, traffic matters and the provision of services must all be to the satisfaction of the Council in consultation with the relevant authorities. As highlighted above, the issue of safety is a key consideration as there can be difficulties in securing safe access.

Particular considerations are :-

- (i) Any development must be capable of being serviced by a water supply, surface and foul drainage and sewage treatment by the relevant authorities.
- (ii) All services should be provided underground wherever practical.
- (iii) The development should be capable of being accessed from the nearest public highway. Where, if the density is low enough to be served by a private road (i.e. 2 or fewer dwellings), the Council will require to be satisfied about arrangements for its future maintenance.
- (iv) In many instances, where multiple housing units are proposed, (i.e. 32 or more individual dwellings), there will be a need to provide a minor access road which is suitable for adoption. This will require Construction Consent and the submission of a road bond for private housing. The exact provisions will be determined in consultation with Environmental and Contract Services, Roads and Transportation section, and take due account of the Development Roads Guidelines and Specification 1998.
- (v) Before any consent is issued, applicants will be required to demonstrate that they have, or can secure, control over all land to provide satisfactory access including, where relevant, that needed to meet planning conditions concerning the formation of a junction with a public road.
- (vi) Where served by a narrow or single width access, adequate provision of passing places will be required.
- (vii) The standard of access road construction should allow for a pothole and water free route and allow for the passage of refuse collection and emergency vehicles. Suitable turning provision will be required.
- (viii) Full residential parking standards will be applied.
- (ix) The Planning Authority will seek to achieve the above, but to take cognisance as expressed in Scottish Office Planning Advice Note 36, of the need to provide less formal design solutions which are appropriate in a countryside location.

Completion

It is important that elements such as car parking and landscaping of roads and footpaths are completed timeously. The Council will, in addition to the use of bonds as required, apply conditions designed to secure this.

Listed Buildings

The criteria outlined above will be taken into account when assessing proposals for the whole or parts of a steading which are statutorily listed by the Secretary of State. In these instances, there is a presumption in favour of their retention. Evaluation of the proposals

will be even more rigorous and based on the sound conservation principles of minimum intervention, respect for the external and internal character of the complex and honest repair, and the guidelines contained in the Memorandum of Guidance on Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas. Proposals will require to be of the highest quality both in terms of the design and in the specification of repair.

In most instances, the Council will seek the advice of Historic Scotland on the proposals and in most cases they have a role as a statutory consultee. The Secretary of State has the ultimate power to determine any development proposal involving a listed building should the Council's decision be considered inappropriate.

Further Advice

Applicants are strongly advised to seek pre-application advice in order that the initial appraisal as detailed above can be carried out. The background references utilised in the production of this Advice Note are the statutory Development Plan for Clackmannanshire Council (Central 2000 Structure Plan, Written Statement (July 1997) and the Clackmannanshire Council Local Plan.

NPPG/3 Land for Housing
 PAN 36 Siting and Design of New Housing in the Countryside
 PAN 39 Farm and Forestry Buildings
 PAN 44 Fitting New Housing into the Countryside
 Memorandum of Guidance on Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas
 Farm Architecture: The Listing of Farm Buildings.
 Farm Steading Conversions: East Lothian.

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