

# Conversion and Renovation of Rural Buildings



Supplementary  
Planning Guidance

April 2018





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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. Many of the rural buildings in the Vale of Glamorgan are of considerable architectural and historic interest and act as reminders of our heritage. Rural buildings add to the visual interest and character of the countryside and these buildings are important assets in the Vale of Glamorgan and every effort should be made to preserve them or find a suitable new use.
- 1.2. Changes in the patterns and methods of farming, as well as changes in lifestyles over the years, have resulted in many of these traditional rural buildings becoming economically redundant or functionally ill-suited to modern needs. The result has been for the owners of such buildings to look for alternative uses. At the same time an increasing number of people are seeking to live and work in the countryside and this has generated increasing demand to convert rural buildings.
- 1.3. Whilst the majority of proposals for the conversion of existing buildings involve agricultural buildings, other buildings such as churches, former schools and community buildings located within a rural setting have also been the subject applications for conversion to alternative uses. In such cases the Council's principal policy objectives associated with agricultural buildings will also apply.
- 1.4. This document provides guidance to those seeking to convert existing rural buildings to alternative uses, and identifies the key policy requirements used in the determination of planning applications where the conversion of rural buildings is proposed.

## **2. Purpose of the Supplementary Planning Guidance**

- 2.1. This Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) has been produced to support and add detail to the Vale of Glamorgan Local Development Plan (LDP) 2011-2026. It is intended to provide clear guidance on the interpretation and implementation Policy MD11 Conversion and Renovation of Rural Buildings in particular it provides guidance on the conversion of rural buildings in the countryside to new uses and advice on design principles for rural conversions.
- 2.2. This SPG represents a material consideration in the determination of planning applications, appeals and listed building consent applications. Policy MD11 (Conversion and Renovation of Rural Buildings) primarily relates to initial proposals for the re-use of rural buildings. Nevertheless, both the policy and the guidance contained herein are equally applicable to subsequent applications to extend or alter rural buildings that have already been converted.
- 2.3. It is not intended to repeat guidance covered sufficiently within national planning guidance. Applicants are therefore advised to refer to relevant sections of Planning Policy Wales (PPW) and Technical Advice Note (TAN) 6: Planning for Sustainable Rural Communities (2010); TAN 23: Economic Development (2014); TAN 12: Design (2014) and TAN 24: The Historic Environment (2017), although the most relevant sections are referred to below for ease of reference.

### **3. Status of the Draft Supplementary Planning Guidance**

- 3.1. Draft guidance was approved for public consultation by Cabinet on the 18th December 2017 and the Council undertook a six week consultation exercise between Monday 22nd January and Friday 2nd March 2018 with the relevant documentation being made available at the main Council offices and on the Council's web site. The Council considered the representations received during the consultation exercise before finalising this document, which was approved by Cabinet on 16th April 2018. This guidance will now be a material consideration in relevant planning decisions.
  
- 3.2. Planning Policy Wales advises that SPG may be taken into account as a material consideration where it has been prepared in consultation with the general public and interested parties and is consistent with the Development Plan. Once adopted, the SPG will be a material consideration in the determination of future planning applications and appeals in the Vale of Glamorgan.

## 4. National and Local Policy Context

### 4.1. National Planning Policy

4.1.1. Planning Policy Wales (PPW) sets out the land-use planning policies of the Welsh Government, and emphasises the role of planning in the promotion of sustainable development in respect of development within rural areas, emphasising that local planning authorities should adopt land use strategies and policies for “minimising the need to travel and increasing accessibility by modes other than the private car” (paragraph 4.7.4), and for rural areas “the majority of new development should be located in those settlements which have relatively good accessibility by non-car modes when compared to the rural area as a whole” (paragraph 4.7.7).

4.1.2. Notwithstanding this, PPW recognises the need to balance the protection and enhancement of the countryside with economic, social and recreational needs and therefore promotes a positive approach to the conversion of rural buildings for business re-use. The sensitive refurbishment and re-use of historic buildings presents particular opportunities for tourism and leisure facilities<sup>1</sup>. However, it also recognises that the cumulative effects of development including conversion and adaptation, should not be allowed to damage an area’s character or amenity, including impacts on neighbouring dwellings, such as serious loss of privacy or overshadowing<sup>2</sup>.

4.1.3. In respect of the conversion of rural buildings within a designated Green Wedge, of which there are seven identified in the Vale of Glamorgan LDP (Policy MG18 refers), PPW advises:

*“The re-use of buildings in a Green Belt or green wedge is not inappropriate development provided that: the original building is substantial, permanent and capable of conversion without major reconstruction; the new use will not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt or green wedge and the purposes of including land within it. Strict control will need to be exercised over the extension, alteration or any associated use of land for re-used buildings; and the building is in keeping with its surroundings.”<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Planning Policy Wales (Edition 9, 2016, paragraphs 7.6.5 and 11.1.9 refer)

<sup>2</sup> Planning Policy Wales (Edition 9, 2016, paragraph 9.3.3 refers)

<sup>3</sup> Planning Policy Wales (Edition 9, 2016, paragraph 4.8.17 refers)

- 4.1.4. Technical Advice Note (TAN) 6 - Planning for Sustainable Rural Communities (2010) promotes development that contributes towards a strong and diversified rural economy, and in this regard favours the re-use of existing rural buildings for business use over residential conversion. The TAN recognises that the conversion of existing commercial or industrial buildings to dwellings may have an adverse impact on the local economy<sup>4</sup> and also favours tourism uses recognising that conversions for holiday use can contribute to the rural economy and may reduce pressure to use other houses in the area for holiday use<sup>5</sup>.
- 4.1.5. TAN 6 also provides advice regarding potential abuse of the planning system by constructing a new farm building with the benefit of permitted development rights, with the intention of early conversion to another use, which would be resisted (paragraph 3.2.1 refers).
- 4.1.6. Technical Advice Note (TAN) 12 Design (2016) emphasises the value of good design in all developments, and provides advice and information on the design process. In respect of the conversion of rural buildings, TAN 12 highlights the importance of their sensitive treatment so to ensure that the character of such buildings and surroundings is maintained:
- “Character retention will often involve the least amount of change possible to external appearance. Solidity and simplicity in design and relationship of built form with landscape provide the distinctive character of many Welsh rural areas.”* (Paragraph 5.8.4)
- 4.1.7. Technical Advice Note (TAN) 23 - Economic Development (2014) recognises the important role that the re-use of rural buildings has in meeting the needs of rural areas for commercial and industrial development, tourism, sport and recreation. In recognising this, local planning authorities are expected to adopt a positive approach to the conversion of rural buildings for business uses, especially those buildings located within or adjoining farm complexes. However they must be suitable for the specific use and the conversion would not lead to the dispersal of activity on such a scale as to prejudice town and village vitality, and, the form and general design is in keeping with their surroundings. However it recognises if the buildings are in the open countryside, they should be capable of conversion without major or complete reconstruction and where the building is of historic and / or

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<sup>4</sup> TAN 6: Planning for Sustainable Rural Communities (July 2010), paragraph 3.5.1 refers

<sup>5</sup> TAN 6: Planning for Sustainable Rural Communities (July 2010), paragraph 3.6.1 refers

architectural interest conversion shall not result in unacceptable impacts upon its structure, form, character or setting (paragraph 3.2.1 refers).

- 4.1.8. The TAN also sets out how local planning authorities may use Development Plan policies to establish when residential re-use of such buildings will be permitted, which is covered below under Local Planning Policy. It emphasises that if the existing building is unsuitable for conversion without extensive alteration, rebuilding or extension, or if the creation of a residential curtilage would have a harmful effect on the character of the countryside, the same considerations relating to new house building in the open countryside will apply<sup>6</sup>.
- 4.1.9. Technical Advice Note (TAN) 24 - Historic Environment (2017). The TAN provides guidance on how changes affecting the historic environment are managed through the planning system, which will be relevant to the consideration of applications for the conversion or renovation of historic buildings or buildings in close proximity to heritage assets.
- 4.1.10. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 came in force in April 2015, and places a duty on public bodies like the Council to act a sustainable way, making sure that when making their decisions they take into account the impact they could have on people living their lives in Wales in the future, and provides a clear definition of sustainable development: "Sustainable development" means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the well-being goals." The publication of this SPG by the Council is considered to support the delivery of the well-being goals.

## **4.2. Local Planning Policy**

### **The Vale of Glamorgan Adopted Local Development Plan (LDP) (2011- 2026)**

- 4.2.1. Policy MD11 Conversion and Renovation of Rural Buildings reflects the policy position set out in national policy, with preference being given to alternative business, community or tourism uses over residential use and is set out below:

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<sup>6</sup> TAN 23: Economic Development (February 2014), paragraph 3.2.3 and PPW paragraph 9.3.6 refer

## **POLICY MD 11 - CONVERSION AND RENOVATION OF RURAL BUILDINGS**

Proposals for the conversion or renovation of existing rural buildings for rural enterprise, tourism, community or residential use will be acceptable where:

1. Conversion of an existing rural building would not give rise to the need for a replacement building; and
2. Reuse can be achieved without substantial reconstruction, extension or alteration that unacceptably affects the appearance and rural character of the building or its setting;

Proposals for conversions to residential use will only be permitted where it is demonstrated that:

3. The building has been appropriately marketed for other alternative uses such as farm diversification, business, community, tourism, or recreational uses and it has been demonstrated that such alternative uses are not viable; and
4. The location of the building is sustainable in terms of access to local services, public transport and community facilities.

4.2.2. The supporting text to this policy states that for both traditional and modern rural buildings, the Council will favour reuses which can make a positive contribution to the rural economy, such as rural enterprises, farm and craft shops, small scale commercial and light industrial enterprises, or tourism and recreation facilities.

4.2.3. The Council will also ensure that the conversion of a building would not give rise to the need for additional buildings in the countryside to replace it. This will be particularly relevant to buildings currently or recently used for agricultural or rural enterprise purposes associated with an established business, where replacement facilities are likely to be required. Where a farm building proposed for re-use was constructed under permitted development rights, applicants will be required to provide evidence of the original agricultural justification for its construction and of its subsequent agricultural use to demonstrate those rights are not being abused<sup>7</sup>.

4.2.4. Where a building is in active agricultural use, applicants should not assume that permission will be granted for a new building to accommodate the use which has been displaced, unless this is reasonably justified. Accordingly, it is advisable that permission be sought for replacement buildings in advance of the conversion of existing structures. In such instances the Council may deem it appropriate to withdraw permitted development rights for new buildings on the holding to

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<sup>7</sup> TAN 6: Planning for Sustainable Rural Communities (July 2010), paragraph 3.2.1 refers

safeguard against a proliferation of additional buildings that could have a seriously detrimental effect on the landscape<sup>8</sup>.

- 4.2.5. In order to ensure that conversions make positive contribution to the rural economy, Criterion 3 requires proposals for residential use to be supported by appropriate marketing evidence to demonstrate that the building has been marketed for other alternative uses for at least 12 months. Information regarding demand for alternative uses to support a planning application could take the form of a marketing report or correspondence from the relevant property agent. Further advice is provided at Section 8.4 below.
- 4.2.6. Policy MD11 also recognises the harmful effect that the conversion of traditional rural buildings to residential use can have. Such proposals can lead to a dispersed pattern of dwellings which generates new and longer trips to settlements and services and also places additional pressure on the Council to provide essential services and facilities often in isolated locations. Therefore residential use will only be acceptable in locations which are sustainable and would not result in the occupiers being overly reliant on the private motor vehicle. In more isolated rural locations where residential development would otherwise not be acceptable, proposals for residential conversions will be limited to tourist accommodation and occupancy conditions will be imposed to prevent long term residential occupation.
- 4.2.7. In addition to the primary policy MD 11 set out above Policy MD2 Design of New Development sets out the key principles that developers should consider in respect of design, amenity and access:

## **POLICY MD2- DESIGN OF NEW DEVELOPMENT**

In order to create high quality, healthy, sustainable and locally distinct places development proposals should:

1. Be of a high standard of design that positively contributes to the context and character of the surrounding natural and built environment and protect existing features of townscape or landscape interest;
2. Respond appropriately to the local context and character of neighbouring buildings and uses in terms of use, type, form, scale, mix, and density;
3. Where appropriate, provide new or enhanced areas of public realm particularly in key locations such as town centres, major routes and junctions;
4. Promote the creation of healthy and active environments and reduce the opportunity for crime and anti-social behaviour. In the case of retail centres,

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<sup>8</sup> TAN 6: Planning for Sustainable Rural Communities (July 2010), paragraph 3.3.2 refers

developments should provide active street frontages to create attractive and safe urban environments;

5. Provide a safe and accessible environment for all users, giving priority to pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users;
6. Have no unacceptable impact on highway safety nor cause or exacerbate existing traffic congestion to an unacceptable degree;
7. Where appropriate, conserve and enhance the quality of, and access to, existing open spaces and community facilities;
8. Safeguard existing public and residential amenity, particularly with regard to privacy, overlooking, security, noise and disturbance;
9. Provide public open space, and private amenity space and car parking in accordance with the council's standards;
10. Incorporate sensitive landscaping, including the retention and enhancement where appropriate of existing landscape features and biodiversity interests;
11. Provide adequate facilities and space for the collection, composting and recycling of waste materials and explore opportunities to incorporate re-used or recyclable materials or products into new buildings or structures; and
12. Mitigate the causes of climate change by minimising carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions associated with their design, construction, use and eventual demolition, and include features that provide effective adaptation to, and resilience against, the current and predicted future effects of climate change.

- 4.2.8. The supporting text to the policy indicates that all development proposals will be required to fully consider the context and character within which the development proposal is located so as to ensure that it contributes positively to the local setting whilst providing for safe highway and pedestrian access. This is particularly important in a rural setting where rural buildings often define the character of the area.

### **4.3. Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)**

- 4.3.1. Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) is non-statutory guidance which supplements specific policies in a Local Development Plan (LDP). The following SPG are particularly relevant to this Conversion and Renovation of Rural Buildings SPG and should be read in conjunction with it. All SPGs are available on the planning pages of the Council's website.
- 4.3.2. **Parking Standards SPG** - This SPG sets out the Council's parking standards and explains the planning policy for parking requirements for new developments or change of use.

- 4.3.3. **Biodiversity SPG** - The Council's Biodiversity SPG provides additional guidance on how biodiversity will be conserved and enhanced in the Vale of Glamorgan through the planning and development process. It will assist developers in meeting the Council's proactive approach towards a high quality natural environment and addresses the statutory duties and social responsibilities required by legislation and national policy.
- 4.3.4. **Trees and Development SPG** - The guidance offers further information on how to fully consider trees and hedgerows as part of any development proposal. It clarifies the approach the Council takes when assessing development proposals that impact on trees, woodlands and hedgerows and details the powers the Council can use to protect trees and their setting.
- 4.3.5. **Householder and Residential Development SPG** – this sets out guidance and standards for all householder and residential development to protect residential amenity and privacy. The sensitive conversion of rural buildings to residential use may require a flexible approach to the application of these standards to ensure the character of the rural building is retained.

## **5. Definition of Rural Buildings in the Vale of Glamorgan**

- 5.1. National policy makes no distinction between agricultural and other rural buildings which may be considered for conversion and alternative uses. LDP Policy MD 11 and this SPG relate to all rural buildings in the Vale of Glamorgan, i.e. those existing buildings that are located in the countryside, outside settlement boundaries defined on the LDP proposals map.
- 5.2. Many of the Vale of Glamorgan's rural buildings are either traditional stone or brick built barns of some architectural merit (generally predating 1914). The Council will give favourable consideration to appropriate proposals which retain and re-use these traditional buildings that add to the character of the rural Vale of Glamorgan.
- 5.3. There are a number of rural buildings in the Vale of Glamorgan that are listed. In such cases there is a strong presumption in favour of their retention and appropriate re-use to maintain their long term preservation. These buildings have extra legal protection within the planning system<sup>9</sup>, meaning that great caution must be exercised when considering their conversion for new uses. This extends to internal as well as external features and the setting of the listed building.
- 5.4. More recent buildings, constructed in the post-war era tend to be prefabricated and at a larger scale reflecting the significant changes to farming practice during this period. They tend to be more 'industrial' in nature and opportunities for conversion and reuses tend to favour commercial and employment schemes rather than residential.
- 5.5. Therefore the range and type of rural buildings present both a challenge and an opportunity for both applicants and the Council. Particularly in terms of retaining the character and historic significance of the traditional building stock while enabling change and innovative reuses to both older and more contemporary buildings in the countryside.
- 5.6. Planning permission will be required for the conversion of rural buildings to new uses, even if there are no structural alterations. The key factors will be the acceptability of the proposed use for the particular site and its context and the impact of any alterations proposed including access, parking and other external works. The buildings must be reasonably capable of being converted to the proposed use without substantial

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<sup>9</sup> Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2016

reconstruction, extension or alteration. In this regard there are some buildings/structures that are unlikely to be suitable for conversion, these include:

- Buildings located within an area identified as being at risk of flooding;<sup>10</sup>
- Buildings in remote and isolated locations where the nature of the proposed use would result in unsustainable development;
- Ruinous buildings which require substantial reconstruction;
- Temporary buildings or buildings constructed in temporary materials; and
- Buildings of insufficient size to accommodate an acceptable alternative use without significant extension.

5.7. Additionally, the Council will not normally grant consent for conversion in respect of more recently constructed or reconstructed rural buildings including agricultural buildings which have been constructed through "permitted development" rights available to agricultural uses<sup>11</sup>.

**Figure 1: Successful conversion of rural buildings at Ty Maen Farm Buildings, Ogmore- By-Sea**



<sup>10</sup> Technical Advice Note (TAN) 15 Development and Flood Risk (2004)

<sup>11</sup> TAN 6: Planning for Sustainable Rural Communities (July 2010), paragraphs 3.2.1 and 3.2.2 refer



## 6. Structural Condition of Rural Buildings

- 6.1. In most cases a structural survey will be required to accompany the planning application for conversion of a rural building demonstrating that the building is capable of conversion without major or complete reconstruction<sup>12</sup>, which must be carried out by a competent structural engineer. Information submitted should be in the form of a written report with drawings and/or photographs to illustrate the existing condition of the building and the works necessary to carry out the conversion including all necessary remedial works. Where appropriate, the report should also state how the building will be supported during the construction stage and if any further works are necessary.
- 6.2. Where permission is granted, these support works must be undertaken or put in place prior to any other work commencing on the conversion of the building. The structural report should explain how the building can structurally accommodate the proposed development.
- 6.3. It is not uncommon for structural issues to arise during the conversion of the building which fall outside the scope of the works for which planning permission was granted. Under such circumstances a new planning application may be needed and therefore it is essential that the developer contacts the Council immediately and that all building works cease until the matter is resolved as it may not necessarily be acceptable if it is found that the building is no longer capable of being converted without substantial reconstruction. This reinforces the importance of ensuring that a robust structural survey is carried out in the first place, as set out above.

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<sup>12</sup> TAN 23: Economic Development (February 2014), paragraph 3.2.1 refers

## **7. Appropriate Re- Use of Rural Buildings**

- 7.1. One of the benefits of allowing the conversion of rural buildings to alternative uses is to ensure the survival of traditional rural buildings which add to the character and charm of the rural Vale of Glamorgan. Therefore, in such cases, it is necessary to ensure that alternative uses require a minimum of changes to the fabric of the building and its setting in order to retain its character and visual amenity in the rural landscape.
- 7.2. The other main benefit is the opportunity it provides to boost the rural economy of the Vale of Glamorgan. National planning policy emphasises the important role that the re-use of rural buildings has in meeting the needs of rural areas for commercial and industrial development, tourism, sport and recreation uses. Such uses include workshops, offices, farm shops, community halls, and holiday accommodation which can provide direct and indirect employment opportunities in the rural Vale and can have considerable benefit to the local economy and community.
- 7.3. Both benefits above support the policy preference in favour of uses other than residential use, which in itself has limited benefit to the rural economy, and can have more significant harmful effects in terms of alterations to existing rural buildings and their setting.
- 7.4. Where alternative uses are being promoted within an existing rural enterprise as part of a diversification scheme, the applicant will need to demonstrate that the proposal would not conflict with the existing enterprise, and remain ancillary to the main operations of the existing business. Accordingly, depending on the nature of the proposal it may be necessary to limit the scale of the proposed activity, via planning conditions or obligations.

- 7.5. Proposals for the conversion of rural buildings to alternative uses will also need to satisfy the other relevant LDP policies such as those relating to access arrangements and parking provision, impacts on neighbouring amenity, effects on protected habitats or species, and so on.

**Figure 2: Successful conversion of rural buildings at Rosedew Farm, Llantwit Major**



## **8. Conversion of Rural Buildings to Residential Use**

8.1.1. As set out above, the policy preference is for new alternative uses rather than residential use. However, there has historically been significant market demand for residential barn conversions in the rural Vale of Glamorgan. Therefore, the guidance below sets out how such proposals will be assessed and where they may be appropriate.

### **8.2. Location**

8.2.1. The conversion of buildings for residential purposes should be located within or close to established settlements within the LDP settlement hierarchy or be reasonably accessible to local services where walking and cycling is a safe, reasonable and realistic alternative to the car.

8.2.2. Proposals for the conversion of isolated buildings for residential purposes are generally unacceptable as they encourage private car use contrary to the principles of sustainability embodied in national policy and the LDP. There may be some limited exceptions to this where the proposal: forms part of a justified rural enterprise development; provides holiday accommodation in an area of identified need; addresses an identified local affordable housing need; or where the conversion relates to a listed building at risk which cannot be viably preserved other than through residential re-use.

8.2.3. Under these exceptional circumstances and where the development is considered acceptable it will usually be necessary to impose occupancy conditions to restrict the specific use or development to that justified in the application.

### **8.3. Rural Enterprise Dwellings- Justification Tests**

8.3.1. Where an application for a residential conversion is being made in association with the activities of an agricultural or forestry business, rural enterprise or farm diversification scheme, the Council will need to be satisfied that the residential use is essential to the existing or proposed business. Accordingly, such applications will need to be fully justified and supported by robust evidence as required by national planning policy contained within TAN 6. Where the need is demonstrated, there is a preference for the suitable re-use of existing buildings rather than new dwellings being built.

8.3.2. The Welsh Government has published a Rural Enterprise Dwellings Practice Guide (December 2011) and the Council recommend that

applicants refer to this document when preparing their submission. In such cases, the policy requirements for the submission of marketing evidence to support planning applications set out below would not apply.

#### **8.4. Marketing Requirements for Residential Conversion Proposals**

- 8.4.1. As set out above, the policy framework establishes a clear preference for uses other than residential use for the conversion of rural buildings in the Vale of Glamorgan. Therefore, proposals for residential use should only be pursued once other more appropriate uses have been fully explored and proven to be unviable.
- 8.4.2. Other than rural enterprise exceptions dwellings, all proposals for conversion to residential use (including affordable housing), must be supported by appropriate marketing evidence to demonstrate that the building has been appropriately marketed for other alternative uses. Marketing should be active and overt rather than silent, and be undertaken using a range of appropriate marketing tools (e.g. advertising on site, on-line and in appropriate local press / commercial publications etc.) ensuring that the advertised price is appropriate for a commercial use in that location.
- 8.4.3. The supporting text to Policy MD 11 suggests a minimum 12 month continuous period for marketing. However, during recessionary periods a longer period may be required.
- 8.4.4. The marketing period should expire no more than 3 months prior to the submission of the application. It is recognised that previous marketing of the property may have occurred, and although this may be taken into account it will be only possible to give significant weight to up-to-date results that reflect current demand when determining the application.
- 8.4.5. Planning applications should be supported by the following information outlining what marketing has been undertaken and when, including (but not necessarily limited to):
  - Details of the previous use of the building and the length of time that the rural building has not been in use;
  - The relevant contact name of the commercial property agent and a statement of their professional view as to the commercial viability of the site for alternative uses;
  - Details of the types of uses that the building has been marketed for;

- The extent of the marketing, including copies of all adverts (with dates), when and for how long the advert was in the agent's window, websites etc. and copies of the marketing particulars;
- The price at which the property has been marketed with evidence to demonstrate that it reflects the market value for uses for which it has been advertised;
- Written details of any enquiries received, including any firm offers (conditional or unconditional); and
- Any other relevant evidence to demonstrate alternative uses have been fully explored.

8.4.6. The Council will need to be fully satisfied that the property has been genuinely marketed and that all realistic alternative uses have been explored, in the absence of robust evidence outlined above it is likely that planning permission will be refused.

## **9. Design Standards for the Conversion of Rural Buildings**

- 9.1.1. The following guidance generally applies to the conversion of traditional stone built buildings where traditionally materials and building techniques will need to be utilised; whilst for modern buildings it may be more appropriate use modern materials. Nevertheless, when converting any rural building to an alternative use the goal should be to ensure that the conversion is sympathetic to the fabric of the existing building(s) and preserves or enhances the building and surroundings.
- 9.1.2. The main principle to adopt when designing a conversion scheme is that the building and surroundings should still appear to be used for its original purpose, i.e. an agricultural building rather than a dwelling.
- 9.1.3. The following design principles are intended as a general guide to the renovation and conversion of rural buildings. These should not be regarded as an exhaustive design checklist as each building will have its own unique character and will present different design opportunities and constraints.

### **9.2. Setting**

- 9.2.1. Proposals for the conversion of rural buildings should pay due regard to the wider landscape and the building's setting in this context. It is therefore important that rural developments do not result in the domestication or urbanisation of their countryside setting. In order to ensure that this does not occur the following should be given careful consideration:
- The Curtilage of a rural building should generally remain open and uncluttered. Proposals should seek to minimise the extent of land required to support the proposed new use to minimise the extent of visual intrusion, particularly in sensitive rural areas. The application should include a plan clearly defining the proposed curtilage and this should respect the position of the established boundaries. The incorporation of agricultural land into the building's curtilage constitutes a change of use and will require planning permission. Proposals which seek to artificially enclose adjacent areas of land within the curtilage of the building could erode the character of the surrounding rural landscape and will be resisted. Where planning permission is granted for the conversion of rural buildings to a dwelling, the residential use

and any associated permitted development rights will only extend over the land within the approved curtilage.

- Open courtyards should not be subdivided to create artificial curtilages. Traditional stone walls or natural hedges should be used to define edges of gardens or outside areas, and provide screening for items such as cars, bin stores and oil or LPG storage tanks. The planning application should include plans clearly defining the extent of the curtilage areas and showing detailed boundary treatments.
- Boundary treatments should be appropriate for the context of the area and should ensure that the area remains open in character where this was traditionally the case. Where boundary treatments such as gates, walls or native hedges already form part of the traditional character of the countryside location, these should be incorporated into any scheme. Opportunities for the repair of boundary structures where necessary will be favoured over their replacement.
- Boundary treatments more common to urban areas such as close board fencing, brick walls or concrete will not usually be appropriate for a rural site. Security fencing may be required by some businesses, but this should be of a type that has a minimal visual impact. Palisade fencing or concrete post and panel fencing should be avoided. Natural screening measures should be used to mitigate the visual impact of security fencing. Access gates should be simple in design, preferably in a traditional five bar gate style.
- Surfacing - Traditional stone paving or stable block setts should be retained. It will not be appropriate for large areas of hard surfaces to be introduced where these did not exist previously. Non-traditional materials such as tarmac should be avoided in access roads, paths and vehicle hardstandings. A grass / concrete system (e.g. grasscrete) may however be acceptable for vehicle hardstandings.
- Landscaping - Existing trees, hedgerows and walls should be retained and protected, wherever possible. Where new planting / screening is proposed, this should comprise indigenous species that complement the character of the area. Conifers in particular should be avoided as an incongruous feature in the rural landscape. All planning applications should be accompanied by a fully detailed landscaping scheme. Conflicts may also arise between the need to retain hedgerow features and the provision of safe highway vision splays, in such cases, an appropriate balance will need to be struck to minimise hedgerow loss.
- Ancillary structures and outbuildings can cause the domestication or urbanisation of the setting of rural buildings and will therefore be strictly controlled. Such structures include pergolas, garden buildings and garages. The siting of these structures needs to be carefully considered to retain the character of the area and may be resisted.

Where necessary permitted development rights for such development will be removed to protect the rural character of the site.

### **9.3. Alterations / Extensions**

- 9.3.1. If a building merits conversion then it must be of a scale which is capable of conversion to a new use in its own right. Accordingly, proposals that rely on substantial new-build elements in order to make them work will not be permitted.
- 9.3.2. Where justified, minor additions may be acceptable where this is designed with sensitivity for the existing building and does not conflict with other planning requirements. Extensions should enhance the character and appearance of the building and, where possible, should make a positive contribution to the wider environs. Favourable consideration will be given to glazed lightweight extensions which retain the distinction between 'old' and 'new'.
- 9.3.3. Consideration may also be given to proposals for extensions where reconstruction of a previously demolished element would beneficially reinstate the completeness of a group of buildings. In such cases it will be important to establish beyond doubt the nature and particularly the size of any demolished element, therefore photographic, cartographic or other evidence should be provided to support such proposals.
- 9.3.4. In all cases, where an extension is deemed acceptable it should be subordinate in scale to the existing building and respectful in its design detailing to the parent building.

### **9.4. Access and Parking**

- 9.4.1. Proposals for the conversion of rural buildings should make provision for safe pedestrian and vehicular access without any unacceptable impact on the appearance of the countryside. Additional traffic created by the development must be capable of being accommodated by the existing road network without detriment to the area or highway safety, or otherwise mitigated through off-site highway works secured by condition or Section 106 agreement.

- 9.4.2. Where access is from a narrow country lane, entrance gates should be set back from the main road to ensure that entrances can be used as passing places where necessary. However, entrances should maintain their rural character and the introduction of formal walls, ornate or inappropriate gates and surfacing will be resisted. Long driveways across open fields are unlikely to be acceptable. The use of appropriate informal material to establish wheel tracks only, retaining grass to the driveway will help to minimise visual intrusion.
- 9.4.3. Where a rural building is to be converted to a suitable small scale industry, its use should have no detrimental effect on the environment and should not generate unacceptable levels of traffic.
- 9.4.4. All proposals must include satisfactory parking provision within the curtilage of the site. It is important that the parking area does not detract from the rural setting of the building. Parking provision should be in accordance with the Council's Parking Standards.
- 9.4.5. Garage parking should be accommodated within the rural building itself or other existing buildings within the curtilage, new garages will rarely be acceptable.

## **9.5. Roofs**

- 9.5.1. Roof structures are a dominant visual feature of rural buildings and should be left uninterrupted wherever possible. In particular the roof pitch, ridge height and eaves should not be altered. Insertions such as dormer windows are always disruptive visually and are unacceptable. However flush 'Conservation Style' rooflights may be acceptable where no alternative exists but should be kept to a minimum and on secondary elevations. The number and location of any rooflights proposed will need to be justified by a daylight factor calculation submitted as part of the planning application. New brick or stone chimneys are unacceptable; however a modern ridge vent may be an appropriate alternative in certain situations.

**Figure 3: Photograph: 'Conservation Style' roof lights in natural slate roof**



9.5.2. The roof is generally the least likely element of a rural building to remain totally intact due to dereliction or vandalism. Where re-roofing is required, natural slate should always be used where new roofing is necessary, or where other traditional materials have been used, e.g. Roman clay tiles, these should be replicated. Ridge tiles should be plain clay not concrete. In some circumstances other modern materials such as standing seam metal roof or corrugated sheets commonly used in utilitarian agricultural buildings, may be appropriate where they help to retain the rural character of the building.



9.5.3. Verges and eaves details are often overlooked when converting a rural building. Verges often comprise simple slate on stonework with a maximum 40-50 millimetre overhang. Modern bargeboards / soffit details with overhangs are not appropriate. Careful consideration should be given to an appropriate eaves detail which replicates the original character of the building.

9.5.4. As roofs on agricultural buildings are rarely served by rainwater goods their installation for the subsequent re-use of such buildings should be as unobtrusive as possible, with the minimum down pipes necessary. The securing of gutters to the base of open rafters by a bracket is preferable to securing them to a fascia. Rain water gutters, downpipes and brackets should be metal and not plastic.

## **9.6. Architectural and Historic Features**

- 9.6.1. Features of particular architectural interest should always be preserved and not removed or concealed. Such features can include dressed stone corbels, finials, coping or string courses, slit or cruciform ventilators, moulded or chamfered timbers, flagged flooring, old mullioned windows and date stones. On more formal buildings the interesting features might be symmetry in the layout of buildings or the arrangement of openings, semi-circular arches, decorative brickwork, dressed stone, ornamental slate roofing, ventilation slits and fixed machinery should be retained and incorporated.
- 9.6.2. External staircases to a first floor are common to rural buildings in the Vale and these should remain intact along with the openings to which they lead. These openings can often be used for new windows with timber panelling beneath if a door entrance is not required.
- 9.6.3. In some cases, there may be historic features within the grounds of the building such as walls, pigsties or other structures pertaining to the previous use of the land. The retention of these features can make a welcome contribution to the character of the development. Where there are such historic features or buildings that are not themselves suitable for conversion, their repair or restoration should be considered from the outset and form part of the development proposals. It may be necessary to secure this by planning condition or obligation.

## **9.7. Walls**

- 9.7.1. Original walling materials should always be retained although where necessary second hand materials can be utilised for replacement or new walls. In instances where new materials are necessary, these should match the existing in terms of size, colour, texture etc.
- 9.7.2. The restoration of walls should utilise traditional methods and materials including lime based mortars and render mixes. Render or limewash are major parts of the character of buildings within the Rural Vale and as such should be restored. It is vitally important that walls are not raked out and repointed in an inappropriate manner as this will unacceptably damage the appearance and character of a building.



- 9.7.3. Re-pointing should never attract more attention than the stone that it surrounds. Pointing should be marginally recessed from the face of the stonework, or buttered in areas of roughly cut stone and rubbed over with sacking to give a traditional finish. However, new mortar should not be artificially 'aged'. "Strap" and "recessed" pointing is not suitable as this will provide undue emphasis on the coursing of the stonework.
- 9.7.4. It is essential that the mortar mix used is aesthetically as well as technically compatible. The original mortar mix should be analysed to provide the best guide to what mix is the most appropriate.
- 9.7.5. Where timber boarding or cladding is used, it should follow a simple vertical pattern. Ornate/decorative styles, including diagonal boarding, are unlikely to be appropriate. Full details of timberwork and its finish should be provided with the planning application. The use of UPVC cladding is not acceptable in any circumstances.
- 9.7.6. The use of glazing for walls to retain existing openings, to connect groups of buildings or to extend buildings, may be appropriate, and can help to retain the distinction between 'old' and 'new' whilst maintaining the rural

character of the building. However, it requires simple detailing, to ensure it does not domesticate the appearance of the building and should be of a scale that does not harm the character of the building.

## **9.8. Windows and Doors**

- 9.8.1. Internal layouts should be designed around existing openings to enable sufficient natural light into a building, without the creation of a considerable amount of new openings (fenestration) which would seriously damage its existing character. Wherever possible, existing openings should be retained and new openings should be kept to a minimum. If existing openings are to be blocked up (wholly or partially), the fill should be timber faced or rebated masonry so that the original feature can still be distinguished to retain the character of the building.
- 9.8.2. New door and window openings and the blocking up of original openings can significantly disrupt the original character of the building and should be kept to a minimum and justified. Where new openings are proposed, these should be confined to discrete openings. The re-opening of former doors or windows that have been blocked up would be preferable to the creation of new ones. Large barn doors can provide an excellent source of light to interiors which should be utilised to the maximum. This may be, for example, through the creation of a light well/atrium internally. The old doors can be retained as external shutters. Additional light may be also achieved by the glazing of ventilation slits. Where new windows, doors or rooflights are proposed these should be justified with a day light factor calculation submitted as part of the planning application.
- 9.8.3. New windows and doors should preserve the character of the original openings and should be sympathetic in design, proportions and materials. These should be tailor made in timber to suit the individual building and not "off-the-peg".

**Figure 4: Photographs: simple timber windows, glazed ventilation slits, full height glazing in large openings with slim line frames**



- 9.8.4. All external timber should be painted rather than stained. Dark paint colours, such as black, or a matt or semi-gloss type best reflect this utilitarian tradition and allow woodwork to blend into the elevation. The use of stain, on the other hand, is not traditional and creates an artificial finish. Certain new timbers, for example, oak and European larch, can be left to weather naturally but should be treated with linseed oil.
- 9.8.5. In some cases, lightweight aluminium or other modern slim-line materials or frameless glass may offer an appropriate alternative to timber, but much will depend on the character of the existing building which should be retained.
- 9.8.6. Plastic UPVC windows typically appear bulky and out of character with a rural building and are therefore considered to be wholly inappropriate for use in rural conversions and will not be permitted.

**Figure 5: Photograph: Successful design details – shutters / stable doors and full-height glazing, natural slate roof, utilitarian flue, discrete eaves treatment**



## **9.9. External Features**

- 9.9.1. Inappropriate detailing to the exterior of the building should be avoided. External features such as satellite dishes and television aerials, alarm boxes and inappropriate wall mounted lighting, should be avoided where possible.
- 9.9.2. Satellite dishes and television aerials can be sited within the roof space, on a pole at low level or even at ground level. If there is a group of units in the conversion one satellite dish should be cabled into all the units rather than installing a separate dish to serve each. Burglar alarms and meter boxes should be sited sensitively, and weathervanes and other ornamental features should be avoided.
- 9.9.3. External lighting should be kept to an absolute minimum and ideally should be on a passive infrared system so that lights are activated only when needed. If an external light is necessary at all, it should be kept simple; a curved bracket and a cowl over the bulb are sufficient, and it should be possible to turn it off when not needed.
- 9.9.4. Although energy efficient conversions are encouraged, solar panels may be out of character and obtrusive on rural buildings. Where PV or solar thermal collection panels are used they should be located in discrete locations and be flush with the roof rather than surface mounted.

## 9.10. Interiors

- 9.10.1. Aspects of the interior of rural buildings can often be of great value such as full height interior voids, slit vents and structural timbers. Large interior spaces should not be over subdivided and roof structures of high quality should be left open to view without the insertion of domestic ceilings.
- 9.10.2. Interior heights of rural buildings are often too restricted to allow for two floors. False ceilings should not be inserted in buildings obscuring the roof frame. If adequate headroom cannot be achieved on a first floor, the design of the conversion should be revised instead of cutting the roof trusses. If the timbers need cleaning this should be done without abrasive sandblasting, and they should be left unstained (or otherwise 'improved') to retain as much of the agricultural/rural character as possible. The use of split staircases and galleries can overcome this problem whilst giving interiors character and interest. The treatment of the walls and inserted partitions should be carefully considered. Additionally interesting internal features should be retained in situ and should not be moved for convenience.
- 9.10.3. Where historic floor finishes still exist (such as flag stones, stables with cobbles or with setts or bricks), they should be retained in situ and not removed to incorporate modern standards and insulation. Where it is appropriate to add new floor surfaces a limecrete is most appropriate.
- 9.10.4. Solid masonry walls have very different physical and performance characteristics to modern cavity walls. Dry-lining a building to incorporate insulation is not generally necessary and is not considered acceptable. There are a number of appropriate finishes internally including limewash, lime plaster or exposed stone. Paint finishes contribute to the character of the interior and brilliant modern whites and gloss paints should be avoided in favour of flatter finishes and muted, earthy colours. Whatever the colour, breathable paints should be used rather than emulsions.

## **9.11. Heating and Ventilation**

- 9.11.1. In general, farm buildings historically did not need to be heated and so the introduction of heat and insulation for human occupation has to be carefully considered. Where roof insulation is required, breathable felt should be used. Breathable Roof Membranes (BRM) are unsuitable in buildings where bat roosts are present, a licence is unlikely to be granted by NRW for these. Bitumastic felt to BS747 should be used as an alternative in such locations. Under floor heating can be effective, although care should be taken to re-instate stone flagged floors.
- 9.11.2. There are modern ventilation systems that have minimal impact on historic character which can avoid the need for trickle vents and other prominent ventilators. When installing a boiler it is best to opt for a system that can vent through the wall that is not a primary or prominent elevation. It is best to avoid those that require venting through the roof but where this has to be done stainless steel flues should be kept as short as possible and painted black to make them less obtrusive.
- 9.11.3. Fireplaces and associated chimneys are alien features to farm buildings and so should never be introduced. Exceptionally, wood burning stoves may be acceptable following the advice above. Extractor vents and ventilation for the roof can often be successfully achieved with slate vents. Where vents are incorporated in external walls they should be terracotta rather than plastic.

## **9.12. Utilities**

- 9.12.1. The location of many buildings suitable for conversion may not be convenient for supplying services such as electricity, water and gas. The provision of these services must have minimal visual intrusion on the surrounding countryside. Underground cables are encouraged to minimise their visual impact.
- 9.12.2. The disposal of waste water and sewerage may pose a challenge in rural areas, but environmentally acceptable methods should be utilised wherever possible. If installations such as septic tanks or cesspits are necessary, these should be located where they have minimal visual impact through undergrounding or appropriate screening. It may be necessary in certain circumstances for such equipment or plant to be sited within existing buildings in order to reduce the visual impact.

### **9.13. Advertising and Signage**

9.13.1. In order to protect visual amenity, signage should be kept to a minimum. Where advertising or signage is proposed these should reflect and be sympathetic to the character and appearance of the area and the building. Accordingly, care should be taken with regard to design, materials and locations. Simple traditional materials such as wood, iron and black paint are the preferred option. The use of large and/or illuminated signs is not considered to be appropriate.

### **9.14. Community safety**

9.14.1. Rural buildings can often be isolated and located in areas which are not well overlooked by other dwellings and buildings, as a result such developments can often be more vulnerable to crime. South Wales Police would recommend the principles of Secured by Design are applied which can significantly reduce crime risk. More information on Secured by Design can be found on [www.securedbydesign.com](http://www.securedbydesign.com) and advice on how security can be achieved through design in context of rural developments can be obtained from South Wales Police Design Out Crime Officers.

### **9.15. Removal of Permitted Development Rights**

9.15.1. Permitted development rights allow certain development to be carried out without needing to apply for planning permission, and can be significant for dwellings. In granting planning permission for residential conversions permitted development rights will usually be removed by the imposition of a planning condition. All subsequent alterations such as extensions, outbuildings, alterations to the roof etc., which would normally be permitted development, will require planning permission. This is to avoid the loss of the building's character through a series of small changes which cumulatively have an adverse effect. Similarly, it may be necessary to remove permitted development rights for enclosures and hard standings for rural conversions.

## **9.16. Planning Conditions**

9.16.1. Planning permission will usually have conditions attached to ensure the development is carried out during construction and in operation, in a way that satisfies planning policies. Whilst this is not an exhaustive list, typically conversions of rural buildings will have conditions relating to the following:

- Removal of permitted development rights for future alteration, extension, outbuildings and enclosures;
- Samples of materials, windows and doors, to be used in construction to be submitted and approved;
- Method statements and sample panels for restoration of existing stone walls or timbers;
- Method statements for the protection of protected species (where appropriate); and
- Landscaping scheme and implementation timescale.

9.16.2. It is essential that these conditions are complied with before, during and after the works to convert the rural building. If they are not, the Council has enforcement powers to rectify the breach of planning control. Failure to comply with pre- commencement conditions, for example, could render the whole development unauthorised, necessitating the submission of a further planning application which may not be acceptable, depending on the nature of the breach.

## **10. Protected Species/Habitat Preservation**

- 10.1. Many buildings in the countryside provide a suitable habitat for a number of protected species including bats, barn owls and nesting birds. The LDP has policies specifically relating to developments which affect protected species and further advice is available in the Biodiversity SPG.
- 10.2. It will therefore be necessary for an ecological survey, including a protected species survey, to be undertaken prior to the submission of an application for the conversion or replacement of a building in the countryside. The submission of bat and/or barn owl surveys is required prior to determination of a planning application. If these surveys are required by the local planning authority and are not submitted, the application may be refused on the grounds of insufficient information being provided to demonstrate protected species are not adversely affected. Bat surveys should be carried out by a suitably qualified, licensed professional between the months of May and September.
- 10.3. Trees and hedgerows should be retained as part of any development. Where necessary, the local authority will use their powers to protect trees and woodlands (e.g. Tree Preservation Orders). Applicants should refer to the Council's Trees and Development SPG for further guidance on the protection and incorporation of trees and hedgerows within developments.
- 10.4. Developments should also avoid any negative effects on dry stone walls as these form an important wildlife habitat, as well as being an important component of the landscape.

## **11. Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas**

- 11.1. Some rural buildings may be listed as being of special architectural or historic interest or may fall within the curtilage of a listed building. Others may be located within Conservation Areas of which there are 39 throughout the Vale of Glamorgan. More detail is available on the planning pages of the Council's web site [www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk](http://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk). In both cases conversions will require very careful consideration to ensure that the character, appearance and features of the buildings are retained.
- 11.2. Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plans will provide further guidance on development within Conservation Areas.
- 11.3. Some listed buildings will suit conversion to a new use where this would result in the retention of the building's architectural or historic qualities. Listed building consent will be required for any conversion works in addition to planning permission. Alterations to boundary walls, gates or any other structures within the curtilage of listed buildings will be subject to Listed Building Consent. Advice should be sought from the Council as part of the pre-application process.

## **12. Further information and Advice**

12.1.1. Early consultation with the Council's Building Control department is strongly advised prior to submission of a planning application as some building regulations may conflict with the aim of preserving the character of a building. These need to be considered and discussed with the Building Control and planning departments.

12.1.2. Further advice on all aspects of this guidance can be sought from the Planning Department on all stages of a proposed conversion. Prior to the formal submission of a planning application, the Council encourages applicants utilise the Council's pre-application services which can save unnecessary work, costs and delay through negotiation. Further information on the Council's pre-application advice services can be found on the Council's website [www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk](http://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk)

### **12.2. Contact us:**

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