

Farm Diversification



Supplementary Planning Guidance

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Purpose of this Supplementary Planning Guidance

When a farm diversifies successfully, farming activities continue alongside other income generating uses. This guide is intended to help farmers and landowners within Eden District who wish to develop a farm diversification project. Its aim is to provide a simple guide to the planning system and it sets out the main issues that require consideration.



The Government recognises and supports the diversification of the rural economy and wishes to encourage the introduction of new business activities in rural areas whilst at the same time, taking account of the need to protect natural resources.



Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS7) issued by the government sets out the national guidance for farm diversification. Councils are encouraged to support well thought out farm diversification schemes for business purposes that are in scale with their rural location.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Farming has a key role in maintaining the quality of the countryside and diversification is becoming increasingly important to supplement farm incomes. Diversified uses can help broaden the economic base in rural areas and provide additional facilities and services for local communities and visitors alike.
- 1.2 PPS7 outlines the need to support the rural economy and support diversification whilst conserving and enhancing the landscape quality of the countryside. The Council wishes to ensure that farm diversification does not lead to a reduction in the landscape quality of the countryside and does not create problems such as access, congestion, noise, pollution and loss of amenity.
- 1.3 Diversification schemes should remain additional to the main agricultural function of the land and agriculture should remain the dominant land use, in order to preserve the landscapes which have resulted from farming activity.
- 1.4 The Council will endeavour to consider favourably those projects which are able to demonstrate close links with ongoing farm activity and deliver benefits to the local economy or environment. Not all proposals will be appropriate in all circumstances but no activity is ruled out in principle. The SPG (Supplementary Planning Guidance) allows flexibility to assess each proposal on its merits and location.
- 1.5 Farm diversification schemes will be subject to the normal considerations common to all proposed developments which try to balance private interests with the interests of the wider community and environment. All schemes will be assessed to:
 - a) Establish the extent to which the project falls within the control of the planning system, particularly whether planning permission is required.
 - b) Ensure compatibility with Structure Plan and Local Plan policies.
 - c) Satisfy any requirements the planning system may need to impose on the scheme by condition or by legal agreement.

2.0 Making the most of what you already have

- 2.1 It is always useful to think about the assets of your farm before you decide what project to undertake, as certain resources may lend themselves towards specific types of development. Think about:

Buildings

Size, age, condition, current use, dimensions, heritage interest, spaces, access, screening, problem activities nearby. Remember if your buildings are listed specialist advice will be needed.



Land

Amount, parcels, locations, slope, drainage, vulnerability to flooding, access, prominence, sensitivity, nature conservation.



Resources

Streams, ponds, old quarries or other workings, wind, views, footpaths or bridleways, woodland, archaeological features or Scheduled Monuments, special crops or animals.



Location

Access, adjacent to main or minor roads, served by public transport, seclusion, tranquillity, views, proximity to neighbours and towns. Is the farm in a Conservation Area or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)? Does it contain a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or other sites of nature conservation importance? If it does then there will be additional considerations.

Think about the benefits your project may bring as well as the problems that need to be addressed.

3.0 Planning Issues

- 3.1 In broad terms “diversification” activities can be split into two areas. Firstly, there are those which have may little effect on the landscape and allow farming to continue largely unchanged, for example farm sales (e.g. food), direct sales of manufactured farm products (e.g. garden furniture), re-use of farm buildings for tourism (e.g. bunk barns, B & B), workshops or business uses, kennels or catteries. Secondly, there are those activities which have a much greater impact on the countryside and involve change of use of farm land, for example, haulage (unless this is an integral part of existing farm business) riding stables (especially where there are major proposals involving indoor facilities and all weather surfaces), caravans, clay pigeon shooting and other outdoor pursuits which can have a serious effect on the ecology of an area, such as driving ranges, motor sports and outdoor storage.



- 3.2 There are a number of issues common to all farm diversification schemes and these are described below.

4.0 Policy constraints and relationship of scheme to existing farm business.

- 4.1 A source of misunderstanding between applicants and the Council can be what constitutes farm diversification. Applicants can feel that any activity or development which injects funds into a farm is valid diversification and will automatically receive support. However, merely injecting income into a farm will not necessarily achieve the underlying objective of sustaining existing farm business in a way which enables them to continue to deliver wider environmental, economic and social benefits.
- 4.2 Schemes which can show the connection between on-going farm activity and any consequential benefits to the local economy or environment are the most likely to be considered favourably. When submitting a planning application for a diversification scheme it is advisable to include a farm plan. This is a useful tool and although not a requirement, they can provide helpful and necessary information to the planning authority. An example of the type of information included in a farm plan can be seen in Appendix A. One example of the kind of information useful to the Council would be the likelihood of jobs being created or secured. If the proposal involves the creation of new jobs then the Council has to consider the consequential effect of possible pressures for the provision of additional dwellings.
- 4.3 Farm diversification is not a justification for securing additional dwellings, government guidance is clear on this point. The only exception relates to circumstances in which it is essential to the proper functioning of an agricultural enterprise for a worker to be readily available on site at most times, and a house in the nearest village is either unavailable or inappropriate. Further guidance on the Councils housing policies is available on the Councils website and from the Planning Policy section (see Appendix B).
- 4.4 As soon as possible, the environmental opportunities and constraints facing individual applicants must be made clear. Protection of certain environmental features places constraints on development opportunities.

5.0 Re-use of buildings / New build

- 5.1 The changing nature of agriculture has left many traditional buildings redundant or less suitable for modern farming methods. The re-use and adaptation of these buildings has an important role in meeting the needs of rural areas for commercial and industrial development, as recognised in PPS7.
- 5.2 The Government's position is that there should be no reason for preventing the conversion of rural buildings for business use provided that:
- a) they are of permanent and substantial construction;
 - b) their form, bulk and general design are in keeping with their surroundings;
 - c) reasonable planning conditions can overcome legitimate planning objections which would otherwise outweigh the advantages of re-use;
 - d) the buildings are capable of conversion without major or complete reconstruction.



- 5.3 When listed buildings are the subject of re-use, the restrictions are more stringent. Because the objective of the listing is to safeguard the character and historical/architectural merits of the building, it may be difficult to accommodate space requirements or features such as doors and windows. It is important to balance the effect of any changes on the special interest of the listed building against the viability of any proposed use and of alternative, and possibly less damaging uses. Many listed buildings can accept some degree of sensitive alteration or extension to accommodate new uses.

However, some may be sensitive even to slight alterations and it has to be recognised that minor works of indifferent quality, which may seem individually of little importance, can collectively be very destructive of a building's special interest.

- 5.4 In all cases of conversion a structural survey will be required to demonstrate the building's capability of conversion, these details will be required at the planning application stage.
- 5.5 Rural buildings may be the habitat of bats and owls. Roosts for bats and owls are protected by the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and EU Habitats Directive 2000. It is important that buildings are surveyed as early as possible – English Nature can give further advice. (see Appendix B)



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- 5.6 It is preferable that development is accommodated within existing buildings. However, if new buildings are necessary, they should be closely related to the existing farm group and their siting, form, scale, design and materials should be in harmony with existing traditional buildings and the surrounding landscape. For example, a single large building may have a greater impact on the countryside than one or two smaller buildings, which can be more easily incorporated into an existing group. The Council has additional guidance and advice notes available (see Appendix C).

6.0 Scale of activity

- 6.1 Consideration has to be given at the outset to the possibility of small scale proposals which are acceptable, having the potential to grow into significant businesses which generate additional requirements and have longer term adverse effects in the wider environment and community. The issues which can give cause for concern are: traffic generation and parking, noise and other pollution related to increased levels of activity, problems with signage and advertisements, outside storage of equipment, packaging and materials and ad hoc alterations to the external appearance of buildings.
- 6.2 To minimise these potential problems, projects should be limited to those which are small in scale and are unlikely to expand in a significant way over the longer term.

7.0 Access and Transport Issues

- 7.1 Traffic generation can be one of the main potential adverse effects of a proposal. The scale and intensity of traffic generation are important considerations when looking at specific proposals. This issue relates to individual proposals and also to the cumulative effect of a number of developments close together.
- 7.2 Details should be made available of the proposed means of access onto the public highway, the number and location of parking spaces, the hours of delivery, etc. It may be that sight line or junction improvements are necessary and that a financial contribution from the developer needs to be secured via a formal agreement. If parking facilities are not adequately catered for then this could lead to parking on the public highway and possible damage to highway verges.
- 7.3 Consideration also needs to be given to the approach roads to ensure that they have the capacity to cater for the type and level of traffic likely to be generated by the proposed development.

8.0 Landscape / Environmental Issues

- 8.1 A fair proportion of Eden District consists of nationally or regionally important landscapes. The implications of new development and changes of use in such areas are important considerations. Government policy indicates both that the countryside should be safeguarded for its own sake and that priority for rural economic diversification should complement this through the quality of design and the appropriate scale and location of developments.
- 8.2 Within the AONB, farm diversification schemes will only be acceptable for uses which do not compromise the landscape quality or quiet enjoyment of the area.
- 8.3 Consideration also needs to be given to the quality of agricultural land that could potentially be lost to a proposal. PPS7 states:
- “the presence of best and most versatile agricultural land (defined as land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification), should be taken into account alongside other sustainability considerations (e.g. biodiversity; the quality and character of the landscape; its amenity value or heritage interest; accessibility to infrastructure, workforce and markets; maintaining viable communities; and the protection of natural resources, including soil quality) when determining planning applications. Where significant development of agricultural land is unavoidable, local planning authorities should seek to use areas of poorer quality land (grades 3b, 4 and 5) in preference to that of a higher quality, except where this would be inconsistent with other sustainability considerations.”**
- 8.4 The effect of a development on specific interests such as sites of nature conservation, archaeological or historic importance has to be taken into account. Trees of recognised importance need to be considered carefully as they make a valuable contribution to the landscape, both singly and in groups.



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- 8.5 The effect of a proposal on the general visual amenity is important. The combination of siting, design, materials and colour can be a significant influence on the degree of visual intrusion. If the proposal involves new buildings these should form part of a group rather than be isolated and where possible use existing landscape features and topography to blend into the landscape. The design and colour of the new buildings should reflect those in the locality. See Appendix C for details of relevant advice notes and SPG.
- 8.6 It may be necessary to attach conditions relating to the provision of landscaping schemes to minimise visual impact, even a well sited development may benefit from additional screen planting.

9.0 Neighbourhood Amenity

- 9.1 Potential neighbour and pollution problems are a material consideration in a planning decision. Changes of use or scale with proposals can give rise to neighbour problems about noise, air and water pollution, dust, odour and hours of work. Care has to be taken to ensure that any development will not have a significant adverse impact on the amenity of local residents and it may be necessary to impose conditions to control certain aspects of the proposal.

10.0 Water Supply / Sewerage Issues

- 10.1 The protection of water resources is an important objective and can be found in the Eden Local Plan Policy SE1 which states that:
- “development proposals that will not have a significant adverse impact on either the efficiency of the sewage disposal system or on the local environment as a result of foul or surface water drainage will be permitted.”**
- 10.2 This is an important issue in that many farm properties are not connected to mains sewerage systems. In many cases it will not be either practical or feasible to discharge into a public sewer. Recent government guidance indicates it is now a requirement that where a non-mains disposal system, particularly one involving a septic tank, is proposed, the developer is required to submit a full drainage assessment with a planning application to show that there is no risk to the environment, amenity or public health.

11.0 Signposting and Display of Advertisements

- 11.1 For many diversification schemes that involve attracting customers or visitors to a particular location, signs need to be erected to advertise the presence of the business and give directions. Consideration needs to be given to the scale, nature and siting of a sign or advert and details are covered in policies BE23 and TM4 of the Local Plan.



12.0 Use for Residential Purposes

- 12.1 Farm diversification is not a justification for securing an additional dwelling. Outside the key service centres of Penrith, Appleby, Alston and Kirkby Stephen there will be a policy of strict control over development. Exceptions to the policy may include development essential to enable farm workers to live at or near their place of work (see Eden Local Plan Review - Housing Policies). Permission will not be granted where the agricultural justification is undermined by the absence of any evidence of economic viability in the enterprise and where the need is for a retirement home for a farmer.

13.0 Examples of Diversification Projects

13.1 It is not possible to list every potential diversification scheme as projects are only limited by the imagination, skills and resources of the individual applicants.

Farm Shops

Issues:

- Impact on road safety and flow of traffic.
- Access and car parking facilities.
- Signage.
- Impact on existing village shops.
- Is there sufficient storage space within buildings to avoid storage of goods and packaging outside?



Agricultural Services (Machinery repairs etc)

Issues:

- Adequate access to the site.
- Car parking facilities.
- Amount and type of traffic generated.
- Neighbour amenity – problems with noise, traffic levels.
- Are sufficient buildings available to store /maintain equipment?
- Need to avoid outside storage



Bed and Breakfast

Issues:

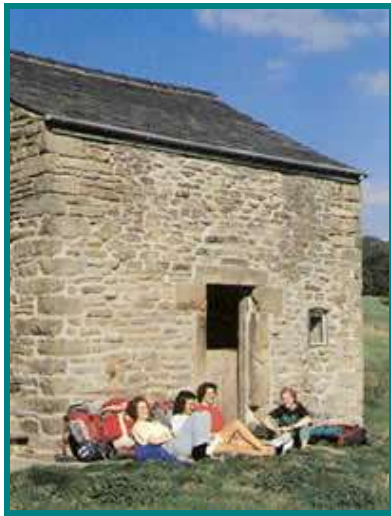
- Access to farm.
- Car parking facilities.
- Signage.
- Scale of business and impact on residential character and nature of area.
- Conflicts with existing farm business.



Camping Barns

Issues:

- Based in isolated rural buildings.
- No requirements for vehicular access or services beyond basic lighting and cooking facilities.
- Are the buildings large enough to accommodate the use without significant external alterations or rebuilding?
- Conversion should not cause adverse visual impacts on its character or setting or have adverse impacts on wildlife habitats.



Holiday Accommodation

Issues:

- Are buildings capable of conversion without major rebuilding?
- Access to and from site.
- Car parking facilities.
- Impact on nature conservation when converting buildings.



Camping and Caravan Sites

Issues:

- Location and visual impact.
- Need for additional screening/landscaping.
- Signage.
- Size of site and scale of proposal.
- Access to local road network.
- Amount of traffic generated.
- Neighbour amenity in terms of visual impact, traffic congestion, noise, safety etc.
- Provision of services – fire safety provisions, water supply, sewerage facilities.
- Impact on nature conservation, historic and archaeological sites.



Children and Education – Children’s Farm, Childcare Facilities, Nature Centre, Education Centre

Issues:

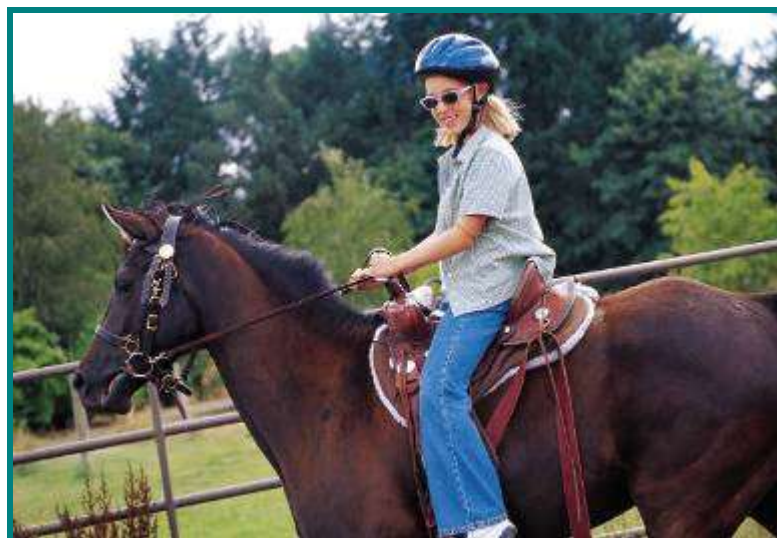
- Impact of noise on neighbours.
- Access to local road network.
- Car parking facilities – possibly for coaches.
- Safety implications.
- Provision of extra toilets and handwashing facilities will have drainage and effluent implications.



Development Involving Horses

Issues:

- Availability of buildings for conversion or land available for new build.
- Visual impact of new buildings.
- Neighbour amenity in terms of potential traffic, visual impact, noise, odour.
- Impact of floodlighting outdoor arena.
- Amount and type of traffic generated.
- Local road capacity.
- Access and car parking facilities.
- Access to local bridleway network.
- Adequate foul water drainage and adequate proposals for storage and disposal of manure.
- Scale of business and potential for expansion.



Industrial and Commercial Uses

Issues:

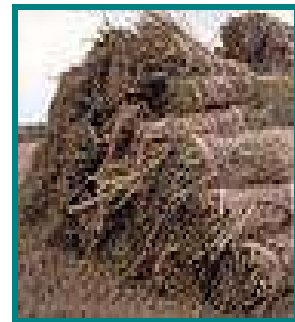
- Are buildings capable of conversion without major rebuilding?
- Visual impact of new buildings.
- Visual impact of outside storage and parking.
- Type and amount of traffic generated.
- Access to and from the site.
- Availability of land for car parking and vehicle turning areas.
- Neighbour amenity in terms of noise, light, dust, air or water pollution.
- Hours of operation.
- Impact on nature conservation when converting traditional buildings.



Renewable Energy – Bio-mass, wind turbines, solar power

Issues:

- Visual impact on surrounding landscape.
- Neighbour concerns / objections.
- Impacts on wildlife.
- Technical issues.
- You may wish to refer to PPS22 for policy guidance on renewable energy.



Disturbance Sports – quad biking, paintballing / war games, military vehicle experience, clay pigeon shooting

Issues:

- Amount and type of land required for the proposal.
- Need for ancillary buildings for facilities, storage and hospitality.
- Type and amount of traffic generated.
- Access to and from the site.
- Adequate car parking is required.
- Impact on character of area, neighbouring uses and residents.
- Hours of operation, noise, dust, fumes, smell.
- Effect on sites of, or adjacent to, nature conservation, ancient woodland, historic or archaeological importance.
- Need for additional landscaping, screening.
- Scale of enterprise and potential for expansion



Appendix A: Farm Business Plan

Basic farm “profile”

Site area, type of farm, history, current operations, soil type, existing buildings, wildlife present on the site.

Details of activities

Livestock, woodland, employees.

Need for diversification

Problem, history of problem, future options.

Proposal

Change of use of buildings or land, new buildings, parking, employment, future vehicle movements, intentions for future expansion. Include landscape plans, traffic data and structural surveys.

Implications of the proposal

For the environment, for the rural economy, for the agricultural use of the land, economic implications.

It is also essential that the plans for the proposal are acceptable in order that an informed decision can be made on the proposal. Location plans showing the proposal in its wider area are available from Ordnance Survey. The detailed floor and elevational plans for the proposal will need to be drawn up by a professional agent to clearly show how any existing buildings will be adapted or extended, and how the floor space will be utilised as part of the proposal. The plans will need to be correctly scaled and annotated.

Appendix B: Useful Contacts

Eden District Council
Website: eden.gov.uk
Email: loc.plan@eden.gov.uk
Telephone: 01768 817817

English Heritage
Website: english-heritage.org.uk
Email: customers@english-heritage.org.uk
Telephone: 0370 333 1181

Natural England
Website: gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england
Email: enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk
Telephone: 0300 060 3900

Environment Agency
Website: gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency
Email: enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk
Telephone: 0370 850 6506

Cumbria Wildlife Trust
Website: cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk
Email: mail@cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk
Telephone: 01539 816300

Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership
Website: thecumbrialep.co.uk
Email: info@thecumbrialep.co.uk
Telephone: 0800 069 6444

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)
Website: gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs
Telephone: 03459 33 55 77

Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG)
Website: fwag.org.uk
Email: info@fwag.org.uk
Telephone: 07794 082860 (ELM Associates - Cheshire and the North West)

Sport England
Website: sportengland.org
Email: info@sportengland.org
Telephone: 0345 8508 508 (funding enquiries)

Appendix C: Advice and References

Available from the Council:

Eden Design Summary

The North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – Agricultural Buildings Design Guide

The North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – Good Practice in the Design, Adaptation and Maintenance of Buildings

Listed Buildings – A Guide for Owners and Occupiers

Conservation Areas – A Guide for Owners and Occupiers

General Planning Guidance for Farmers

Government Guidance:

PPG1 General Policy and Principles

Sets out the Governments commitment to sustainable development and calls on local authorities to integrate the needs of business with concerns for the environment and local communities

PPS7 Sustainable Development in Rural Areas

Sets out the Governments objectives for rural areas which include raising the quality of life and environment through promotion of sustainable patterns of development and encouraging competitive, diverse and thriving rural enterprise

PPG8 Telecommunications

Sets out the general policy for the location of telecommunication equipment, including phone masts.

PPG9 Nature Conservation

The framework of designations that seek to protect and enhance biodiversity. Currently under review.

PPG10 Planning and Waste Management

Tries to explain the relationship between the waste planning authority, the waste regulation authority and the waste collection authority. Relevant for any scheme that generates, stores, or treats waste products.

PPG13 Transport

Concerned to reduce dependence on the private car and stresses the need to seek alternatives to car use. Poses problems for rural areas with no real public transport network

PPG15 Planning and the Historic Environment
Government policies for dealing with listed buildings and conservation areas.

PPG16 Archaeology and Planning
Deals with the survey, recording and protection of archaeological remains. These can be crucial to a scheme if considered sufficiently important. Highly relevant in areas of known interest.

PPG17 Planning For Open Space, Sport and Recreation
Sets out framework for local authorities to secure adequate new provision and protect existing facilities. Possible relevance for outdoor recreation schemes.

PPG19 Outdoor Advertisement Control
A guide to advertisement regulations.

PPG21 Tourism
Policies to encourage tourist business. Especially relevant to rural areas.

PPS22 Renewable Energy
Government's statement on its aims to increase development of renewable resources to facilitate delivery of its commitments on climate change and renewable energy.

PPS23 Planning and Pollution Control
Relevant for schemes that give rise to a significant pollution threat.

PPG25 Development and Flood Risk
Guidance on a precautionary approach to development in areas at risk from flooding. Any development in such an area will require a flood risk assessment submitted with the application.

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