

Conversion of Rural Buildings



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Planning and
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Bromsgrove District Council
www.bromsgrove.gov.uk

Planning Policy Guidance Notes

This Supplementary Planning Guidance Note is one of a series, published to help those preparing planning applications produce good designs. The Guides do not aim to remove the need for skilled professional advice but to supplement the services of the professional.

This series of Supplementary Planning Guidance Notes are to be treated as described in central government advice note PPG12 entitled "Development Plans and Regional Planning Guidance" published by the Department of the Environment in 1992. The contents of this series have been cross-referenced to the Bromsgrove District Local Plan policies where appropriate, have been prepared in consultation with the public and have been formally adopted by the Council.

Topics covered in this series are:

- 1 **Residential Design Guide**
- 2 **Shopfronts and Advertisements**
- 3 **Car Parking Standards**
- 4 **Conversion of Rural Buildings**
- 5 **Agricultural Buildings Design Guide**
- 6 **Agricultural Dwellings and Occupancy Conditions**



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PLEASE NOTE

This document was originally published in December 1994. Guidelines may well have been updated or changed since this date and therefore we take no responsibility for any inaccuracies contained herein.

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Contents

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION	
Policy Background	1
Planning Permission	1
Green Belt Policy	1
SECTION 2: DETAILED PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS	
Alternative Uses	2
Quality of the Existing Buildings	3
Structural Condition	5
SECTION 3: QUALITY OF THE CONVERSION	
Roof Lights and Dormer Windows	6
Door and Window Details	6
Wagon Arches	6
Ventilation Holes/Materials/Extensions	7
Existing Features	8
Chimneys	8
Heating	8
Rainwater Goods	8
Surface Materials	8
Curtilages	8
Garaging and Parking	8
SECTION 4: IMPACT ON THE LANDSCAPE	
Landscape Considerations	9
SECTION 5: NATURE CONSERVATION INTEREST	
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	9
SECTION 6: ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST	
Survey and Recording Work	9
SECTION 7: LEGISLATION AND POLICIES	
Plans and Illustrations/Planning Obligations	9
Hereford and Worcester County Structure Plan	10
Bromsgrove District Local Plan	11
BIBLIOGRAPHY	12
CONVERSION OF RURAL BUILDINGS PROCESS	13

SECTION 1

Introduction

Policy Background

Planning Permission

Green Belt Policy

1.0 Current agricultural policy seeks to reduce agricultural production and to encourage wider diversification of farming enterprises. This has led to a large number of rural buildings becoming surplus to requirements. These buildings are the legacy of social, economic and agricultural change in the countryside taking place over many decades and it is felt to be desirable to save the best examples of these buildings by re-using them where possible. This document sets out some of the factors the District Council will be looking at when determining planning applications where alternative uses for rural buildings are proposed.

1.1 Planning permission is required for the conversion of rural buildings to uses other than for agriculture, even if there are no structural alterations. The key factors are acceptability of use for the particular site and the condition and nature of the buildings. They must be reasonably capable of being converted to the proposed use. In addition the impact of the conversion on the form of the building and its setting in the landscape, the choice of materials to be used, parking, access, garaging and delivery arrangements and whether the building is listed or not will all be matters taken into consideration.

1.2 Government guidance (PPG7) makes no distinction between agricultural and other rural buildings which may be considered for conversion and alternative uses. However, such buildings in the rural areas of Bromsgrove District are likely to be subject to Green Belt policy where development is not normally allowed except for a limited number of uses. The preservation of the Green Belt remains of paramount importance to the Council and schemes involving the re-use of existing buildings will be judged, initially on the likely harm they would have on the principles of Green Belt policy. At the same time one of the reasons for allowing conversion schemes is to preserve the character and basic integrity of the original rural building. To achieve this some uses are more appropriate than others. One particular difficulty which the District Council has experienced is the re-use of a barn as a dwelling. Where it is intended that the internal form of the building is to be radically altered or the external surroundings changed to a domestic style then the simple rustic form and setting of the building can be swamped. Schemes that take conversion this far will not normally be acceptable. The Council can provide advice on how best to achieve a sympathetic conversion and welcomes the opportunity to discuss schemes at an early stage.

1.3 The continued use of rural buildings is encouraged where their original character can be retained and their form, bulk and general design are in keeping with their surroundings. Each proposal will be considered on merit and not every rural building will be suitable for conversion to other uses. Buildings which have become so derelict that they could be brought back into use only by complete or substantial reconstruction fall outside the scope of the policy which the Council operates.



SECTION 2

Detailed Planning Considerations

Alternative Uses

1.4 Apart from agricultural buildings, Bromsgrove District has an unusually large number of older buildings often with extensive grounds. Many of these are located in the Green Belt. The original use for these buildings may no longer be appropriate to current needs. For instance, a number of former hospital sites in the District are already in the process of being redeveloped. Government guidance concerning redundant hospital sites in the Green Belt locations is set out in the D.o.E Circular 12/91.

2.0 The first factor when assessing a planning application for the re-use of a building is whether the proposed use is acceptable. The re-use of redundant buildings in the Green Belt will not normally be refused unless there are specific and convincing reasons which cannot be overcome by attaching conditions to a planning permission. It is important that the visual amenities of the Green Belt are not injured by proposals which although not prejudicing the Green Belt's main purpose, might be inappropriate by reason of their siting, materials or design.

2.1 One of the main purposes in allowing conversion schemes is to ensure the survival of the character and form of traditional rural buildings. The best way to do this is to retain a building in its original use. Since this is rarely possible, the subsequent objective is to retain quality buildings by conversion, to uses such as workshops, meeting halls, indoor sports facilities, holiday accommodation, storage or camping barns. These will normally require less fundamental alteration to the fabric of the building and therefore are more likely to retain the original features and character of the buildings and spaces around them. Proposals for residential use will be considered but applicants should realise that this form of re-use can produce unsatisfactory results.

2.2 Residential use may be more suitable within existing settlements rather than in the open countryside. Their assimilation in a rural landscape is more difficult to achieve although the demand for residential conversions is high. It is also important that proposed new uses do not conflict with continuing agricultural work in the vicinity and where a proposal relates to an individual building within a group, details on the future use of the remaining buildings should be included with the planning application. If necessary the District Council will seek independent advice on any information submitted in support of the application.

Quality of the Existing Buildings

2.3 In some cases alternative uses will be considered where farm diversification is proposed or comes about in the rationalisation of agricultural activities. Farm diversification schemes can attract grant aid and must normally provide a realistic source of income for the farm. Acceptable uses in these cases may be recreational, holiday use, workshop or office use provided that these are of a scale and type which will not damage the landscape and will not overwhelm the farm enterprise. Successful diversified ventures such as these may generate long-term employment and contribute to the social and economic balance of the rural community. The benefits to farmers, providing buildings are let rather than sold, are that such ventures provide continuing income and control over the farm holding which may in the long term prove more important than the immediate capital gains and convenience of residential conversion.

2.4 Employment uses can lead to more acceptable conversions as they are often less destructive to the original features of a building and result in a more sympathetic elevational treatment. At the same time they can provide a source of new jobs in the countryside. This can be of considerable benefit to the local economy and the community. In certain circumstances small scale offices and workshops located in and around settlements may be suitable uses providing that they do not have detrimental amenity effects on the open countryside and Green Belt.

2.5 Factors to consider include:

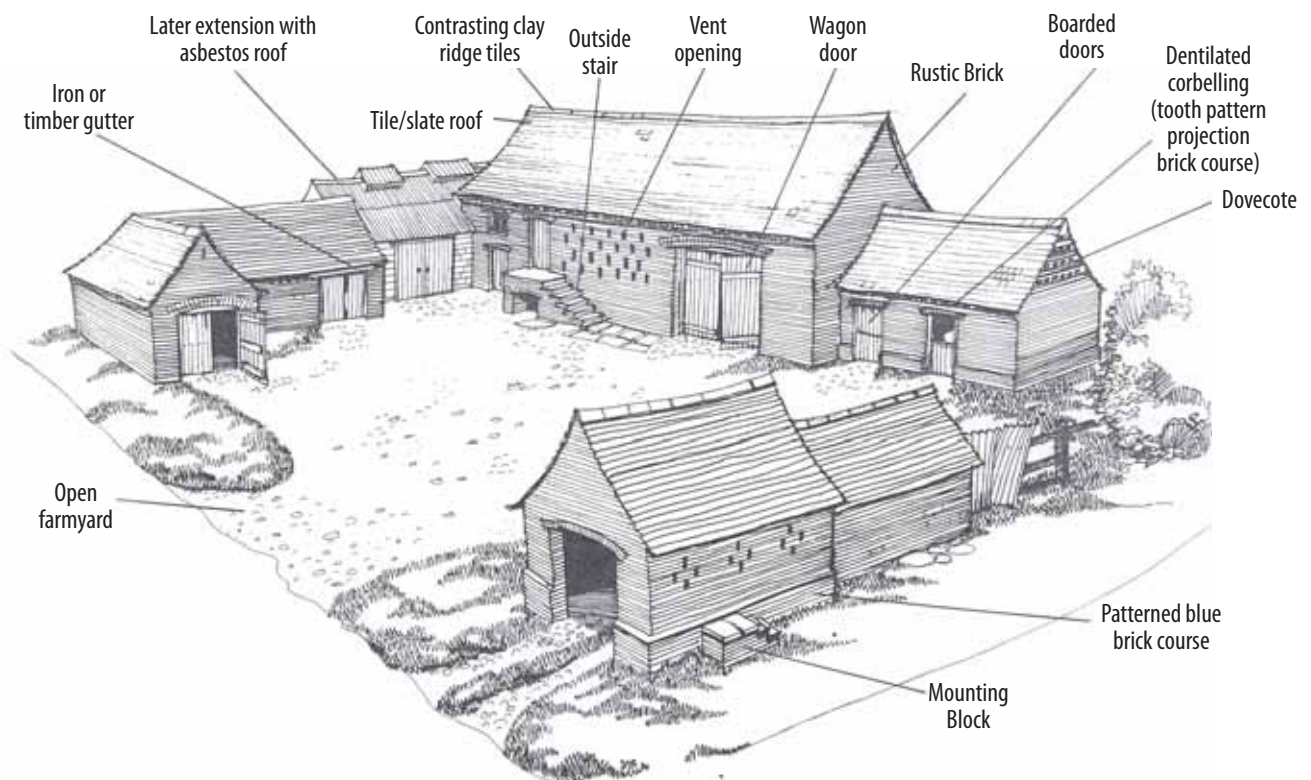
- a) The building should have some intrinsic conservation value and should be suitable for conversion. The new use should conserve the form and character particularly where buildings are listed, are of listable quality or form part of a particularly fine group of traditional buildings.
- b) The building should be large enough for the proposed use without the need for significant enlargement or alteration.
- c) The building should be structurally sound and capable of conversion without the need for major rebuilding.
- d) The building should have safe and adequate access to a public road and its conversion should not materially increase traffic on narrow country lanes leading to a demand for their improvement.
- e) The re-use should not lead to the provision, improvement, renewal or extension of utility services which would be damaging to the landscape.

2.6 Where an existing building is dilapidated or derelict, the quality of the original building can be erased where substantial new work is required. It is not the aim of the policy to allow conversion schemes where substantial rebuilding is necessary. Likewise 'modern' farm buildings are not suitable for change of use in most cases since they are not of traditional character, are normally of utilitarian design and have limited architectural merit.

Fig 1

BEFORE

Typical Traditional Worcestershire Barn and Outbuildings



Main Characteristics

Simple Shapes

Limited number of openings - solid dominates over void

Absence of over-elaboration - details kept simple at eaves, verges and openings

Simple and open agricultural setting

Structural Condition

2.7 To accompany the planning application, a statement on the stability and soundness of the building will normally be required, including details of the extent of any rebuilding which is necessary. A structural survey should adequately detail the physical condition of the building and it should, if necessary, be updated to remain valid until the development is commenced. To ensure consistency the structural survey must be carried out by a competent structural engineer. It should consist of a written report with drawings to illustrate the existing condition of the building and the works necessary to carry out the conversion including all necessary remedial works.

2.8 The Council's Building Control Section will be asked to comment on the report. These comments will be reported to the Planning Committee when the application is considered. In appropriate cases, the Council will also ask for an assessment by independent structural engineers.

2.9 In the event of planning permission being granted, it will be a condition that the works shown in the structural survey are the maximum permitted. If additional works are sought later a further consent will be required. Where this situation arises during the conversion, work shall stop until the matter is resolved. A note attached to the permission notice will clearly make this point.

2.10 Normally an applicant has 5 years in which to commence the development on the granting of planning permission. However, rural buildings can deteriorate in that time so permission for the conversion of rural buildings will be subject to work having commenced within 12 months of the date of the permission. It is always open to the applicant to apply for a further period but a current structural survey would need to be submitted with that application.

SECTION 3

Quality of the Conversion

3.0 A building should be capable of conversion to its new use without loss of those characteristics which make it worth keeping. Proposals should seek to enhance the building or group of buildings and where there have been previous unsympathetic additions to an otherwise attractive building, the District Council will seek their removal. Most farm buildings have unbroken roof slopes, few windows and open interiors which show the roof structure. Such prime features should be retained. Conversions are least likely to be successful where:

Roof Lights and Dormer Windows

Door and Window Details

Wagon Arches

- ◆ Excessive original fabric is lost by the introduction of new openings;
- ◆ Unbroken walls are disrupted with new doors and windows;
- ◆ Rooflines are broken up by roof lights, dormer windows or chimney stacks;
- ◆ Interior spaces are sub-divided by the introduction of floors and partition walls;
- ◆ Enclosed gardens are created with garages, sheds that spoil the agricultural setting and the cohesiveness of the farm or the isolation of the field barn.

3.1 Where these problems can be avoided a scheme is more likely to be acceptable. Modern Building Regulations may compound the difficulties where regulations require inappropriate treatment for the form of the building. For example, it is now necessary to internally line walls to achieve acceptable weather resistance in residential conversion schemes. This would preclude exposing the inside of the wall structure in its original form.

3.2 Large unbroken roof slopes are often a characteristic feature of agricultural buildings. These should be respected especially as they are often seen at a distance and can dominate elevations. New roof openings will normally be opposed; dormers and upstanding roof lights can bring about a significant change in the character of a farm building. An alternative to roof lights may be a suitable opening in the gable end to supplement light levels. In special circumstances some alteration of roofs may be allowed, but only to a limited degree on less important slopes. Where this is acceptable flush fitting roof lights with concealed integral gutters that maintain the plane of roof will be required. Non-reflective glass to fit into roof lights is also desirable.

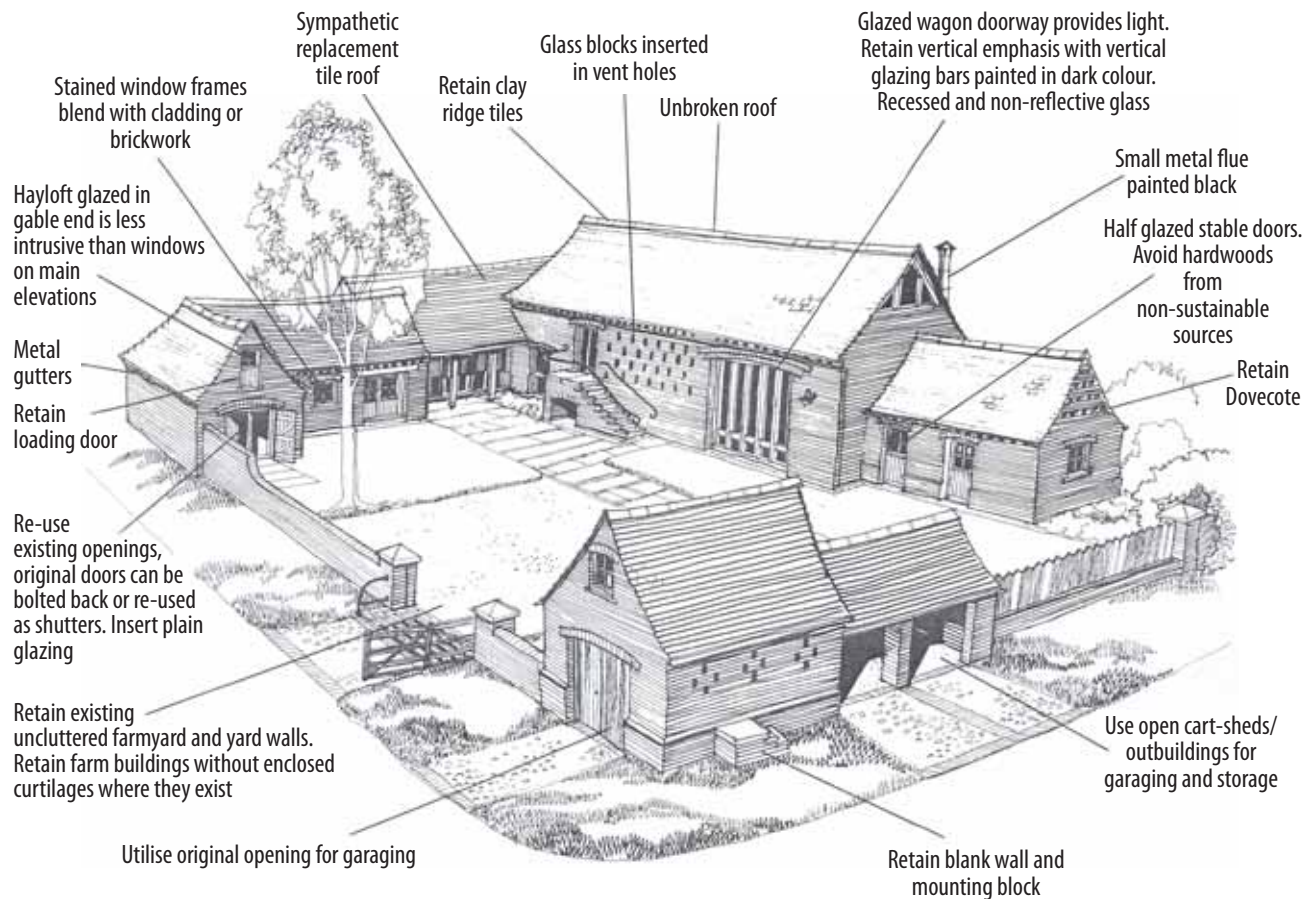
3.3 Agricultural buildings are characterised by few window and door openings. The re-use of existing openings is favoured. Additional doors and windows should be kept to a minimum and reflect existing patterns. New windows and door openings should preferably be located on the 'inside' elevations away from public view. Window and door frames should be painted/stained a dark colour to decrease visual impact and should be recessed behind the main face of the brickwork.

3.4 Wagon arches should be fully glazed and if possible the great doors should be retained and sealed. If glazing is used, the vertical dimension should be emphasised with no obvious signs that the conversion forms two floor levels. The glazing of wagon arches can often provide illumination to the main internal spaces of the building and borrowed light to other rooms.

Fig 2

A PREFERRED SCHEME

Sympathetic conversion scheme retaining simple, agricultural character of buildings



Ventilation Holes

3.5 Ventilation holes often form distinctive patterns on farm buildings and can be retained. For example, it is possible to insert recessed dark coloured bricks with a weather fillet of dark mortar or glass blocks in order to retain the pattern and create interesting patterns of illumination.

Materials

3.6 Rebuilding should be minimised but where some is inevitable then existing materials should be re-used or new traditional materials incorporated that blend harmoniously with old.

Extensions

3.7 Extensions will not normally be permitted as these would detract from the plain, simple and utilitarian appearance of most rural buildings.

Where consent is given for conversion of a traditional rural building the District Council may negotiate planning obligations under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to restrict further extensions.

Existing Features

Chimneys

Heating

Rainwater Goods

Surface Materials

Curtilages

Garaging and Parking

3.8 Existing features of interest should be exploited and incorporated in the design of the conversion wherever possible. This includes items such as external steps, lanterns, dovecotes, ventilation slits, barn door openings, lean-tos etc.

3.9 Chimney stacks are inappropriate since they damage the character of a traditional working building by introducing domesticity. Alternative treatments such as a small metal flue may be acceptable provided that it is set away from prominent facades.

3.10 Small balanced flues are acceptable for oil or gas fired heating but fuel tanks sited to comply with Health and Safety Regulations can be intrusive features. Conventional central heating can also cause movement in timber framed buildings due to the high surface temperatures of radiators. Underfloor, low temperature heating or fan convector heaters are kinder to timber buildings. Potential problems need to be considered carefully and a solution must be found which is appropriate to each building.

3.11 Rain was often allowed to run directly off the eaves of farm buildings. Any gutters and downpipes should therefore be discrete, of a dark colour and made of metal.

3.12 The re-use of existing stone, setts or stone blocks is encouraged. These are more likely to be in keeping with a farm building. For larger areas bond gravel and areas of clay bricks are commended.

3.13 Traditional farm buildings are sited with yards or in open fields. To avoid domesticity, the curtilage of a converted farm building should remain open and uncluttered. There may be scope for private areas, but these should be screened with hedging and walls of old bricks.

3.14 Where residential use is proposed garaging requirements should be carefully considered. It may prove possible to incorporate an integral garage, perhaps by making use of an existing opening in a lean-to. Alternatively it may be possible to use an ancillary building such as an open cart shed for garaging. Subsequent garage development will normally be precluded through the use of a planning obligation under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, attached to the original planning permission. Parking for schemes involving conversions to small business, craft or light industrial uses is particularly important. Parking, loading and manoeuvring areas must be unobtrusive yet remain convenient for the new use. Screening will often be needed but should be implemented so as to minimise the effect on the character of the building, setting or surrounding area.

SECTION 4

Impact on the Landscape

4.0 The effect of a scheme on the landscape is of critical importance including the impact of any new access, overhead wires or other features. Regard will be had for the materials used to create an access. No access will be permitted to run over open fields where this would be especially visible in the open countryside. If the building is a fine isolated feature, important to the landscape, then any adverse effect that conversion might have on this quality could mean that permission is refused.

SECTION 5

Nature Conservation Interest

5.0 Old farm buildings are commonly used as roosts for owls or bats and provide valuable habitats for other birds and animals. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 provides protection for such habitats where protected species are involved. Advice will be sought from English Nature or Worcestershire Nature Conservation Trust. Where the nature conservation interest is considerable, permission could be refused.

SECTION 6

Archaeological Interest

6.0 Some farmsteads have been settled for many years and contain a wealth of historical interest. Where a building is of archaeological interest or is within or close to a site of archaeological interest, advice will be sought on any survey or recording work that may be needed to further knowledge of the site. This will be taken into account when determining a planning application or in attaching conditions to any planning permission.

SECTION 7

Legislation and Policies

Planning Permission

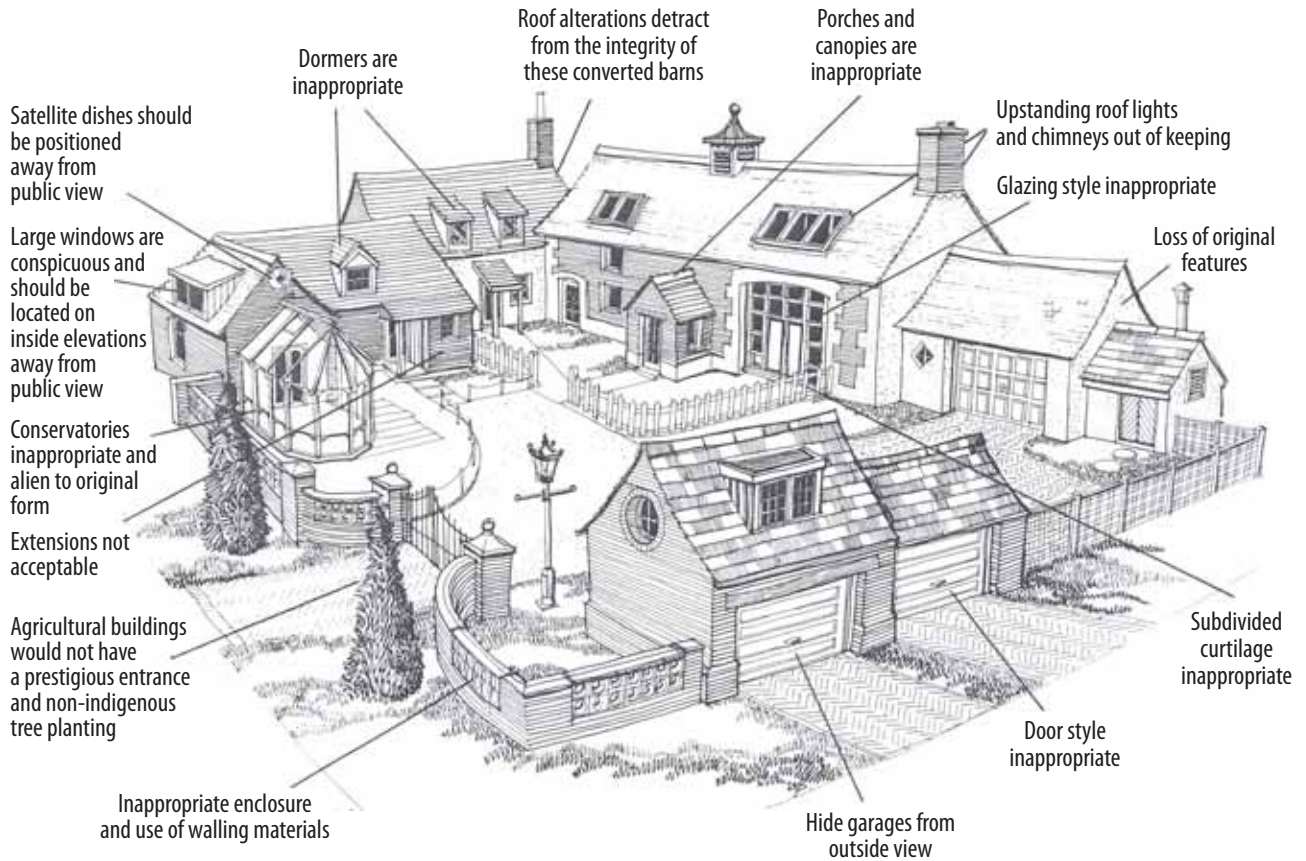
7.0 The District Council will only consider proposals for conversion if a detailed planning application is submitted. Measured drawings of a recognisable scale to enable design details to be considered must be provided for the existing building as well as the proposals for conversion, means of access and provision of services. Photographs are helpful. Applicants should note the requirements for a structural survey which must be submitted with the application.

7.1 When permission is granted for an acceptable proposal, the District Council may negotiate a planning obligation under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to secure the future protection of the building and its setting. Planning permission granted for conversion of a rural building is designed to retain a building of merit. Any subsequent applications for significant extensions would be contrary to the principles of this guidance note.

Fig 3

SOME COMMON MISTAKES

Introducing features that more properly relate to modern estate developments



Development Plans

Structure Plan

HWCC Structure Plan Policy CTC13

7.2 The Hereford and Worcester County Structure Plan Written Statement (1986–2001), published in June 1993, had regard to Government Policy prior to publication of PPG7 and prior to several legal interpretations of PPG2. Government policy now opposes local plans which contain policies that seek to limit conversions to certain types or qualities of building.

ALTERNATIVE USES WHICH ASSIST IN THE RETENTION OF BUILDINGS OF SPECIAL ARCHITECTURAL OR HISTORIC INTEREST WILL BE SUPPORTED PROVIDED THAT THE BUILDING AND THE PROPOSED USES ARE COMPATIBLE AND APPROPRIATE TO THEIR SPECIAL ARCHITECTURAL AND/OR HISTORIC CHARACTER, SETTING AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL CHARACTER OF THE AREA.

HOWEVER, CONVERSIONS TO RESIDENTIAL OR OTHER USE OF LISTED BUILDINGS WHICH ADVERSELY AFFECT THE SPECIAL ARCHITECTURAL AND/OR HISTORIC CHARACTER OF THE LISTED BUILDING WILL NOT NORMALLY BE ALLOWED.

HWCC Structure Plan Policy CTC14

Local Plan

BDLP Policy C27

BDLP Policy C29

BDLP Policy C30

PROPOSALS FOR CONVERSIONS OF BUILDINGS IN RURAL AREAS TO OTHER USES WILL BE JUDGED AGAINST THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA:-

- I) THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE FORM, BULK AND GENERAL DESIGN OF THE CONVERTED BUILDINGS IS IN KEEPING WITH ITS SURROUNDINGS;
- II) THE AVAILABILITY OF SERVICES INCLUDING ADEQUATE VEHICULAR ACCESS;
- III) THE EFFECT ON WILDLIFE;
- IV) THE EFFECT ON ARCHAEOLOGY.

APPLICATIONS FOR CONVERSION TO RESIDENTIAL USE WILL BE EXAMINED WITH PARTICULAR CARE AND WILL NOT NORMALLY BE PERMITTED UNLESS THE BUILDING CAN BE RESTORED AND RETAINED WITHOUT EXTENSIVE ALTERATION, REBUILDING AND/OR EXTENSION

(This policy should be read in conjunction with policies H17b, E8 and GB2c of the Approved Structure Plan 1986-2001 although in some respects those approved policies have been superseded by PPG7 advice).

7.3 The Bromsgrove District Local Plan policies take account of more recent Government advice contained in PPG7 and are set out in the chapter entitled "The Countryside" and the "District Strategy". These should be referred to prior to the submission of any application. The policies are as follows:

The re-use or adaptation of existing redundant rural buildings for alternative uses compatible with Green Belt designation will be favourably considered particularly where the building has architectural or historic interest or has group value.

Where the proposed use involves the conversion of Grade I, II* or II Listed Buildings the District Council will not normally allow conversions which have a detrimental impact on either the internal or external character of the building.

Where permission for conversion of a barn or farm building for non-agricultural purposes is forthcoming it will be limited to 12 months only and may incorporate a condition removing permitted development rights.

BDLP Policy DS2

Permission for development in the Green Belt will not be given, except in very special circumstances, for the construction of new buildings or for the change of use of existing buildings unless one of the following instances applies:

- a) development is for the purposes of agriculture and forestry, outdoor sport, cemeteries, institutions standing in extensive grounds, or other uses appropriate to a rural area;
- b) development is for housing in accordance with the special circumstances set out in policy S9;
- c) proposals are for the re-use of redundant rural buildings, in accordance with policy C27;
- d) proposals are the re-use or redevelopment of sites and buildings of redundant hospitals. Preference will be given to proposals for uses compatible with the Green Belt, but failing that, consideration will be given to other uses. Preference will also be given to the proposals for buildings or parts of them, are unsuitable for conversion, any redevelopment should not normally occupy a larger area of the site nor exceed the height of the existing buildings.

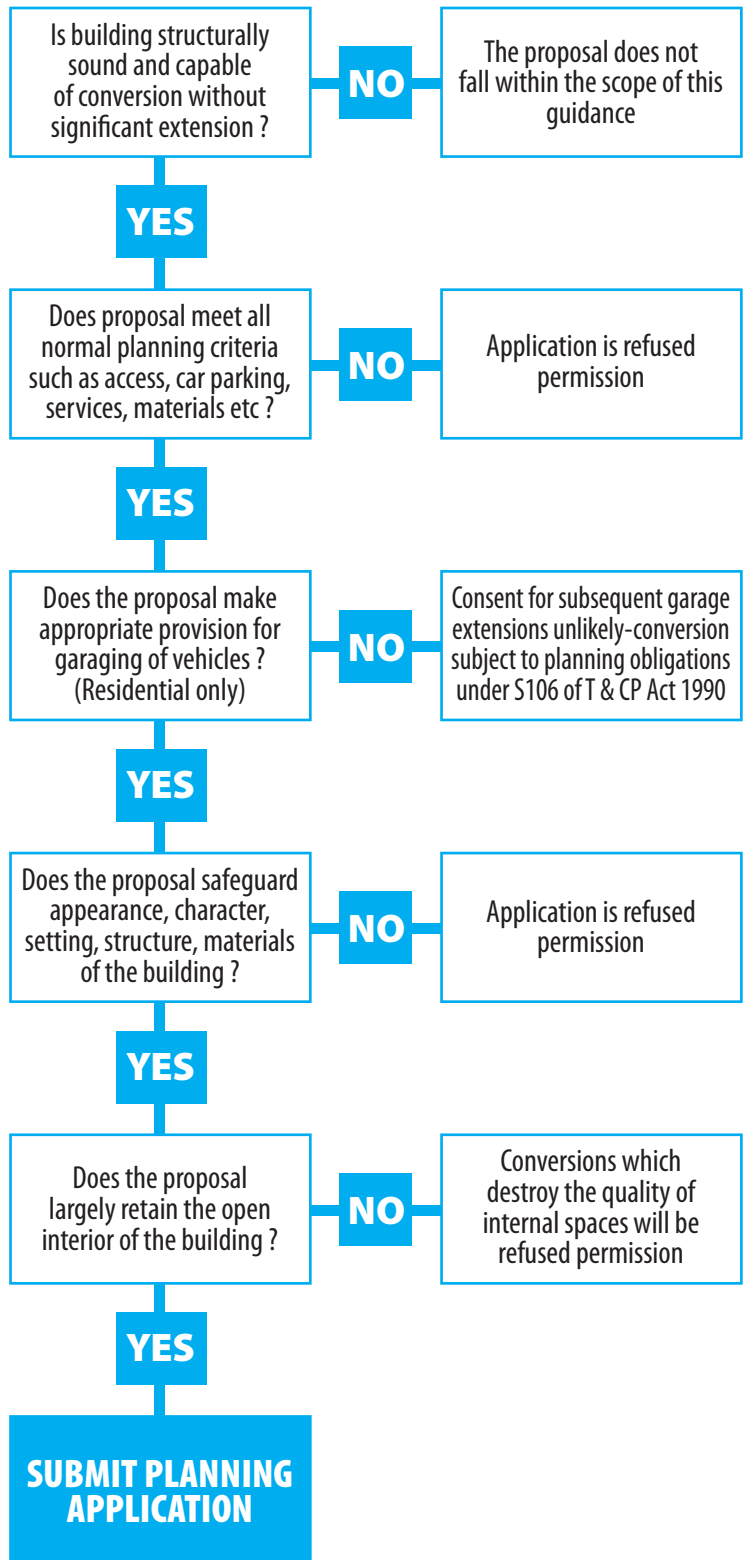
Proposals for development should be environmentally and ecologically acceptable and should not damage the visual amenities of the Green Belt.

Bibliography

1. Planning Policy Guidance (PPG7) 'The Countryside and the Rural Economy' DoE 1992.
2. PPG2 'Green Belts' DoE 1988.
3. PPG4 'Industrial and Commercial Development and Small Firms' DoE 1992.
4. PPG21 'Tourism' DoE 1992.



Conversion of Rural Buildings Process





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