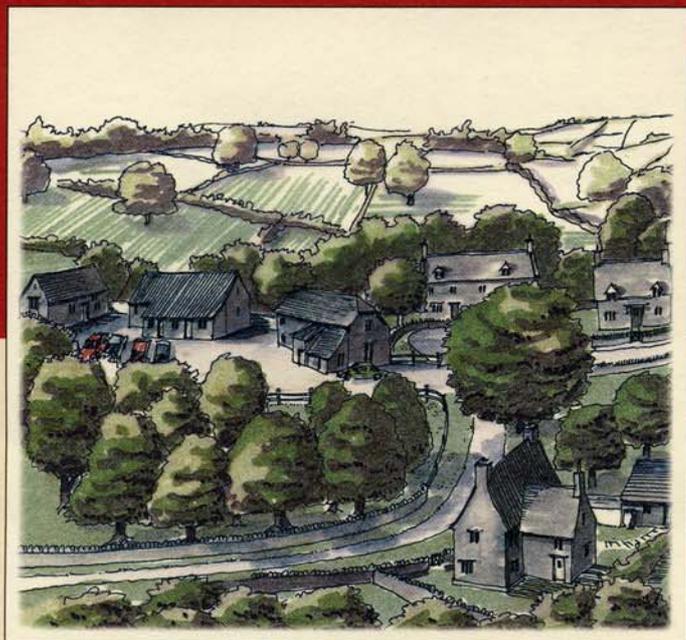


# A Guide to the Conversion of Historic Farm Buildings: to employment use



*Farm buildings in the Cotswolds are a key part of our heritage, and important features in the landscape. When they no longer have a farming use, their careful conversion to employment uses is encouraged by the Council.*



Cotswold District Council

November 1998

CARING FOR THE COTSWOLDS

## PLANNING POLICY

The re-use of farm buildings can help the rural economy and reduce demands for new buildings in the countryside. They can often continue to be used if given a new lease of life (eg. as a workshop, farm-shop or office).

The Cotswold District Local Plan, which sets out planning policies and proposals for the District, supports the principle of the conversion and re-use of such buildings for employment uses, for short stay, low-key holiday accommodation or for uses of benefit to the community.

Planning permission will be needed for the new use and for the conversion work. Local Plan Policies 7 (Conversion of Rural Building Outside Development Boundaries) and 28 (Conversion of Historic Agricultural Buildings of Traditional Design) deal with the re-use of existing rural buildings.

To be considered suitable for conversion, a building should be structurally sound and acceptable in its appearance both in itself and within the countryside. Buildings should also be large and sound enough to be converted without extensive rebuilding, alteration or extension. The conversion should be just that and not amount to the erection of a virtually new building in the countryside.

It is important that new uses are sympathetic to the rural character of the area and do not create environmental problems, for example, too much noise or traffic. Some employment uses may be quite acceptable close to housing, subject to appropriate controls over noise, car parking, outdoor storage and other potential adverse effects. The Council will usually impose such control through conditions on the planning permission.

In the Cotswolds, many redundant farm buildings are significant features in a landscape of very high quality. Most of Cotswold District is within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or protected by some other designation. The buildings themselves and the farmsteads in which they are located are often very attractive and historic. The design of the conversion is therefore very important. This guide is intended to give advice on these issues.

## LISTED BUILDINGS

Many farm buildings are listed as being of special architectural or historic interest. It is very important to check on this. If the building is listed then in addition to planning permission, Listed Building Consent will be required for the conversion works.

We will be pleased to advise you on the procedural and design issues involved. A guide on Listed Buildings has also been produced by the Council.

## THE CONVERSION

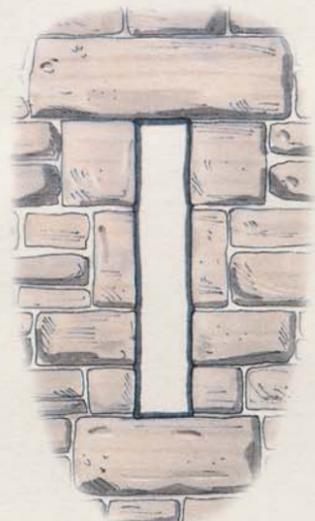
The conversion of redundant farm buildings opens up exciting possibilities for owners and future occupiers. Converted farm buildings offer a unique and attractive place to work.

Most historic farm buildings are of traditional materials and design. Conversion should continue and conserve the character, setting, details and materials of the building.

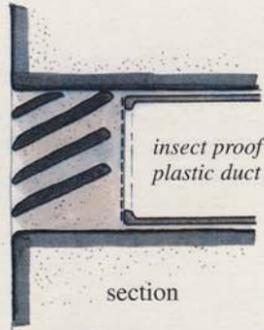
Several points need to be considered very carefully when planning the conversion:

- consider the building's relationship to others on the farm and its setting in the landscape;
- think about the building's original form and function. This should still be obvious after conversion;
- when surveying the building, note all the items of structural, architectural and historic significance, internally and externally;
- the surroundings of the building are nearly always as important as the building itself;
- the conversion must try to keep features such as wagon doors, mangers, feed walks, stalls and forestairs, incorporating them in the design;

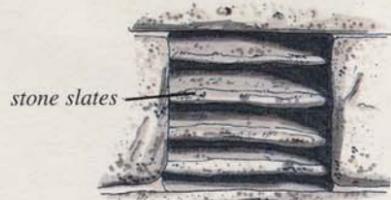
**DISGUISED EXTRACT VENT**



elevation

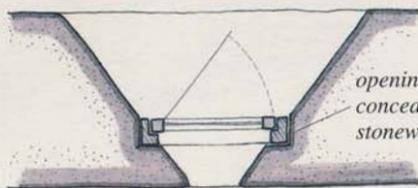


section



stone slates

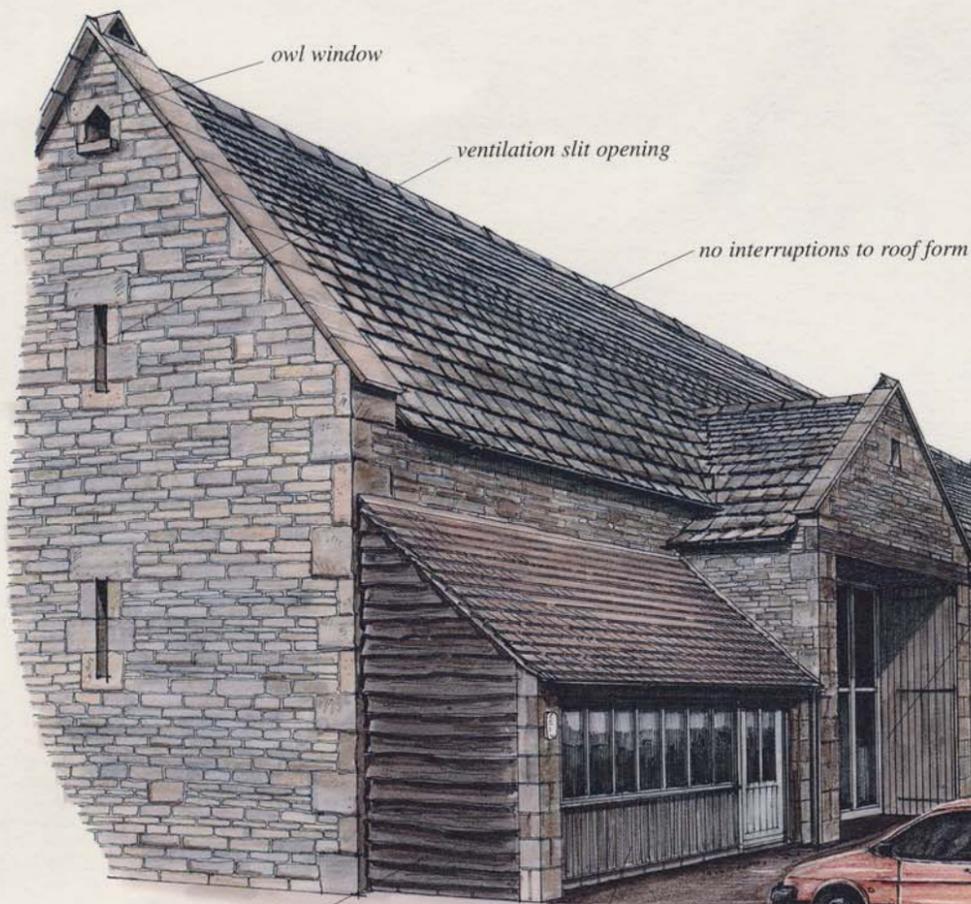
elevation



opening casement concealed behind stonework

section

**VENTILATION SLIT OPENING**



owl window

ventilation slit opening

no interruptions to roof form

creosoted, fine-sawn weather-boarding laid horizontally

vertical wide boarding with batten plants

traditional drystone walls retained

existing access to farmyard

retain existing enclosures

open courtyard

hedge forming boundary with adjoining farm land

enclosures for storage of bins, oil tanks etc.

**BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF A TYPICAL 'CONVERTED' FARMYARD**

large openings and barn doors to be retained and screens to be set back as far as possible

glazing set back behind existing openings

original form and function of building is clearly discernible

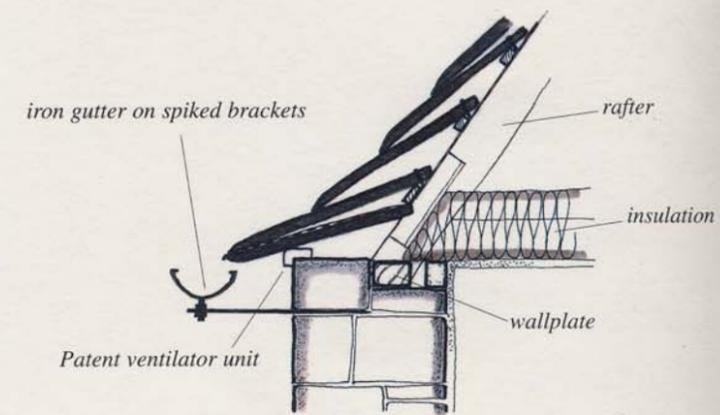
light fittings to be discreet and simple

open courtyard retained

doors and windows to be simply detailed

key features to be retained

**ARTIST'S IMPRESSION OF A TYPICAL 'CONVERTED' HISTORIC FARMSTEAD**



**SPROCKETED EAVES DETAIL**

lime mortar fillet

stainless steel reinforcing mesh

lead soaker

rafter

**ABUTMENT DETAIL**

- farm buildings are usually “simple” structures with a small number of wall openings. This must not change significantly on conversion. New openings will usually only be acceptable where absolutely necessary and very well designed;
- some features which are common on modern buildings look out of place in converted farm buildings. These include: chimney stacks, flue pipes, dormer windows, ‘cottage’ style windows and rooflights. Rooflines should not be interrupted with dormers or rooflights that stand proud;
- a simple design, keeping as much of the original as possible, is often the best - and the cheapest! For example, retain, if possible, existing windows, doors and their frames. Use of extensive areas of glazing in prominent positions should be avoided. External glazed screens must be used sparingly and be very well designed - they should not spoil, for example, the appearance of cart shed columns or the wagon entrances to corn barns;
- external spaces need to be handled with great care. The farmyard character should be maintained. The emphasis should be on maintaining the existing simplicity of hard and soft landscaping. Where traditional hard surfacing treatments exist, such as stone pitching, clay paviors or stone flags, they should be kept, as should stone boundary walls;
- new features such as oil and gas tanks and external storage will need to be sited with great care and will probably also need planning permission; and,
- traditionally, external timber was always painted and where estate colours exist, these should also be used in the conversion. Where untreated external timber is used, oak is by far the best and should be left to “silver” naturally. The use of creosoted, fine-sawn weather boarding is a traditional treatment laid horizontally as featheredge boarding or vertically as wide boards with batten plants. Planed, grooved weather boarding, widely specified for modern building today, is generally out of keeping in traditional farmyard complexes.

## THE BUILDING REGULATIONS

As well as considering the design aspects of the conversion, it is also important to think about the implications of the Building Regulations. The Regulations deal with matters such as structural stability, drainage, insulation and similar very practical matters. In most cases, approval under Building Regulations will be needed before conversion works can start. Particular points to consider include:

- internal walls, if plastered, should be insulated to the required standard;
- if walls cannot be insulated, floor and roof insulation should be increased instead;
- energy efficient glazing should be considered for all windows and are recommended on barn door infill panels;
- as a general rule, escape stairs to non-domestic buildings will need to be in a fire protected zone and ideally located within the building;
- buildings which require disabled access will need to fully comply with the provisions of the Building Regulations;
- hard surfacing will be required from disabled parking bays to the principal entrance; and,
- there are solutions to roof void ventilation which can alleviate the need for ridge and/or eaves ventilators.

## NATURE CONSERVATION

Redundant farm buildings are often homes to wildlife, including bats and Barn Owls, both of which are protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. They should be accommodated when considering renovating or converting farm buildings.

Where bats or their roosts (even if empty) are likely to be affected, English Nature must be consulted before work begins. The earlier this happens, the easier it is to produce design ideas to accommodate bats and minimise delay to the project.

Where there is evidence of bats in a building to be converted, the following will need to be considered: the timing of conversion works; the treatment of roof timbers; the preservation and protection of roost space; and, the provision of suitable entry and exit routes at the gable apex or close to the soffit. English Nature can offer advice on these issues.



*View of an owl loft and window*

Where there is evidence that Barn Owls have occupied a building, alternative nesting and roosting sites must be provided. This should take the form of an 'owl window'. This is an opening built high up in the end wall of the barn, backed by a specially constructed owl loft, insulated against noise. Many old barns were designed and built with 'owl windows', however in some cases these have been blocked up.

## **FURTHER INFORMATION;**

- English Nature (Tel: 01733 340345)  
Northminster House,  
Peterborough, PE1 1UA
- The Hawk and Owl Trust  
c/o Zoological Society of London,  
Regent Park, London, NW1 4RY

## **GRANT AID**

Your proposal may qualify for grant aid. To help identify possible sources of grant aid you may like to contact Business Link Gloucestershire (BLG), who operate a 'Grant-Finder' service. 'Grant Finder' aims to identify and facilitate the take-up of UK Government and European Union initiatives. The number to call is 01452 509560.

If your proposal will result in a local community benefit you may be eligible for grant assistance from the Cotswold District Council's Community Projects Fund. Enquiries should be made to the Community Liaison Officer, Ged Cassell on extension 3310.

If the building is 'listed' and is in a poor state of repair, you may also be eligible for a grant from the Council's Historic Building and Areas Grant Scheme. Please contact the Conservation and Design Section for details of this scheme, and the relevant application forms.

**For further advice and information contact:**

**The Economic Development Section  
The Conservation and Design Section**

**Directorate of Development and Heritage  
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Cirencester  
Gloucestershire  
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