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for the whole community



**GUIDANCE NOTE**

for

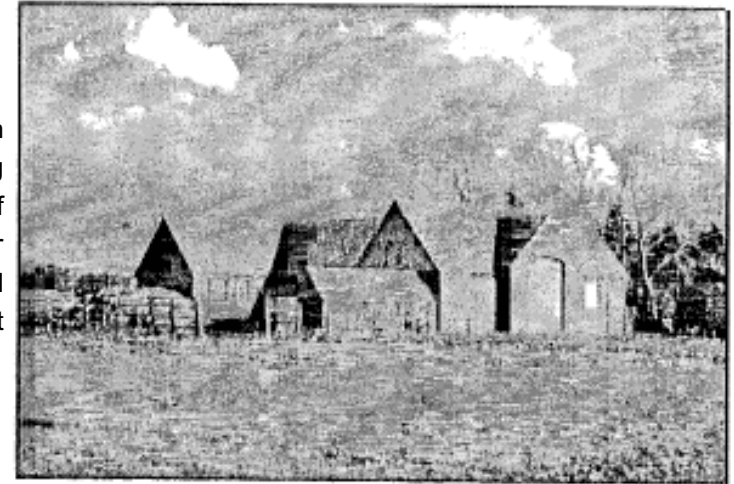
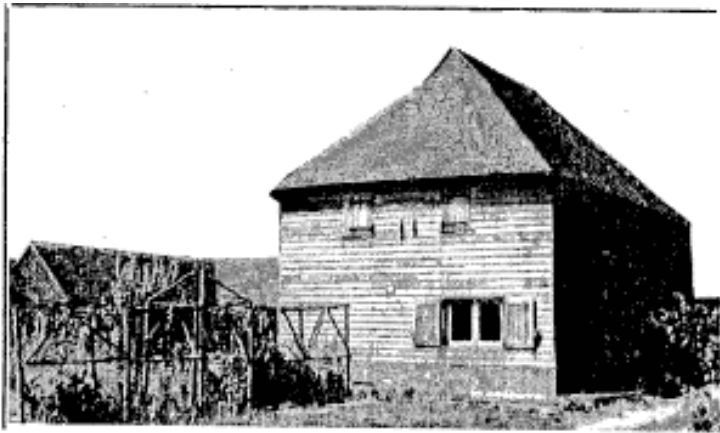
***FARM BUILDING & BARN CONVERSIONS***

# A GUIDANCE NOTE

## FARM BUILDINGS

### CONVERSIONS

This Guidance Note is intended to provide owners and prospective purchasers with information solely relating to the key architectural issues, which the District Planning Authority may take into account when considering applications for the conversion of barns, or other traditional farm buildings, to new uses. For policy information and further guidance, potential applicants should refer to the Chichester District First Review Local Plan (adopted April 1999), to the County Structure Plan and to Central Government guidance, particularly Planning Policy Guidance Notes 7 and 15 (for listed buildings).



*Unconverted estate barns*

Traditional farm buildings, because of their recognised character, are important within the countryside. They may have visual qualities both in their own right and as part of the landscape, and they may have archaeological or historical value giving an indication of previous farming practices. Therefore, the careful conservation of barns and farm buildings should be an objective of all those involved in considering their future.

# RE-USED FARM BUILDINGS

With changing agricultural practices and changes in land ownership, traditional farm buildings may no longer be required for their original use. If such buildings are of sound construction and are considered to have architectural merit (intrinsic merit and environmental value) their retention by conversion to a new use could be a means of saving them from falling into disrepair. Uses other than for residential purposes tend to be favoured, such as business uses, which may provide benefits to the rural economy. Residential conversions are usually most damaging to the farm building itself and to its surroundings.

- The following uses could be considered as alternatives to residential:
- |  |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| 1 continued agricultural use, perhaps for storage;   | 7 restaurant;     |
| 2 stabling;  | 8 museum;         |
| 3 storage of objects where some form of protection is required; for example, vintage cars; | 9 studio for art; |
| 4 light industrial or workshop use;  | 10 swimming pool; |
| 5 office or business use;  | 11 gymnasium      |
| 6 community or meeting hall;   |                   |

Although Local Plan policies may vary, district planning authorities will need to be satisfied that other less damaging uses have been fully explored before considering the possibility of a residential conversion.

## PERMISSIONS

Planning permission for conversion and change of use of the building will, in most cases, be necessary. If the building is listed, then Listed Building Consent will be required for an alteration affecting its character.

### BUILDINGS MOST SUITABLE FOR CONVERSION

The building should have been in agricultural use and,

- reasonably close to existing services and a means of access;
- a farm building which has positive environmental value or intrinsic merit;
- capable of conversion without undue loss of character;
- in a good state of repair, capable of conversion without extensive rebuilding (a reconstructed or new building in the countryside is obviously not the objective of planning policies which seek to conserve or preserve suitable buildings and resist excessive new development).

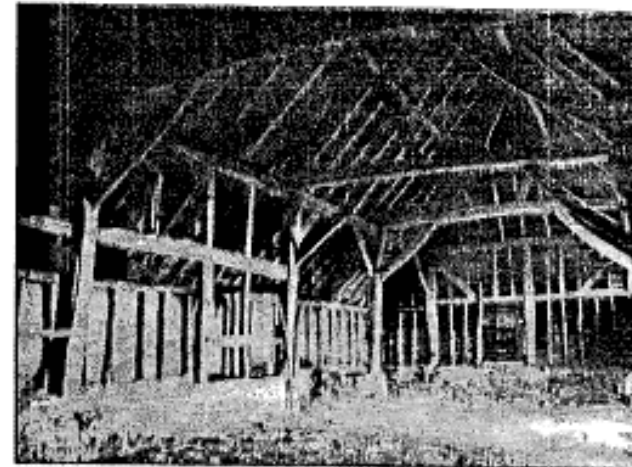
Government advice to local planning authorities encourages the re-use or adaptation of agricultural buildings provided:

1. the existing buildings are in keeping with their surroundings;
2. there is no legitimate planning objection, for example on environmental grounds, and
3. that complete or substantial reconstruction is not required (see (d) above).

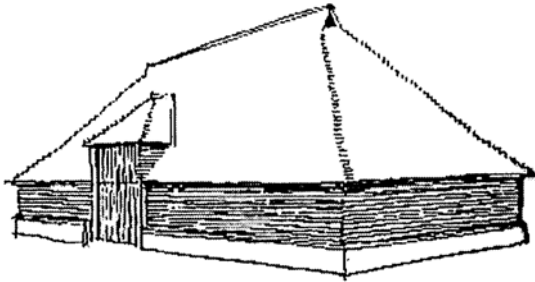
It also states that it might be appropriate to impose strict control over residential conversions, similar to the “control” (resisting approval) of new housing in the countryside, particularly if the agricultural buildings would be subjected to extensive alteration, rebuilding and/or extension (reference Planning Policy Guidance note 7)

## ALTERATIONS

Farm buildings are, by their nature, simple, functional structures built by local workmen using local materials. They are, therefore, vulnerable to excessive change, although many such buildings have survived previous centuries without alteration. *The interior of a barn, for example, may be particularly important there are few traditional buildings where the whole structural “skeleton” is visible from one point. The volume of the interior itself may contribute to the character of the building; also a structural frame might be indicative of its history revealing its time of construction. Once infilled, the quality of the interior is lost as effectively as if the building had been demolished.*



The external appearance is vulnerable to change .a single brick chimney and a few incongruous windows could give a barn the appearance of a modern house or bungalow, which is contrary to good conservation practice.



Before

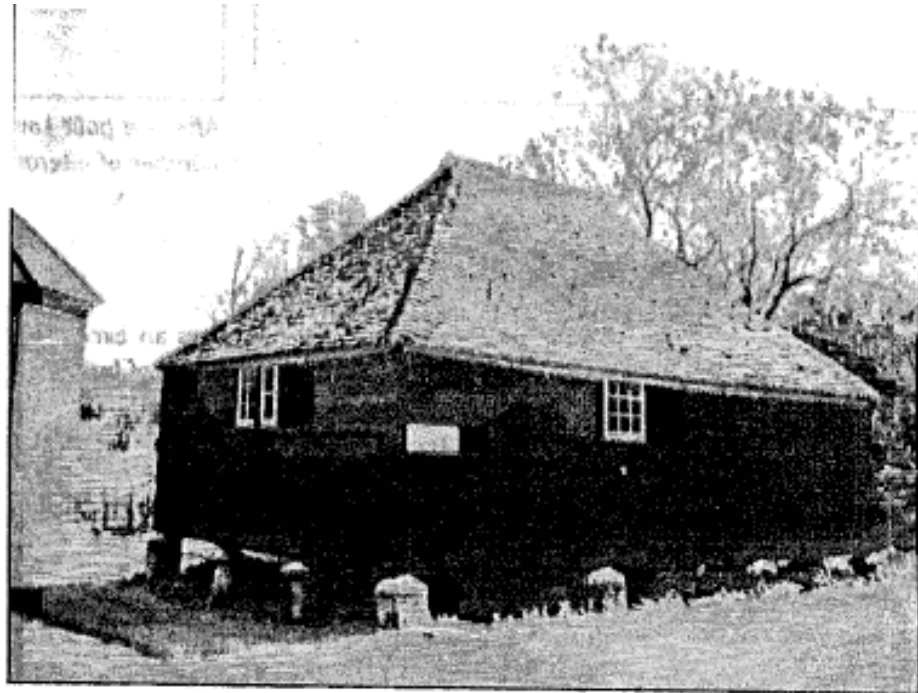
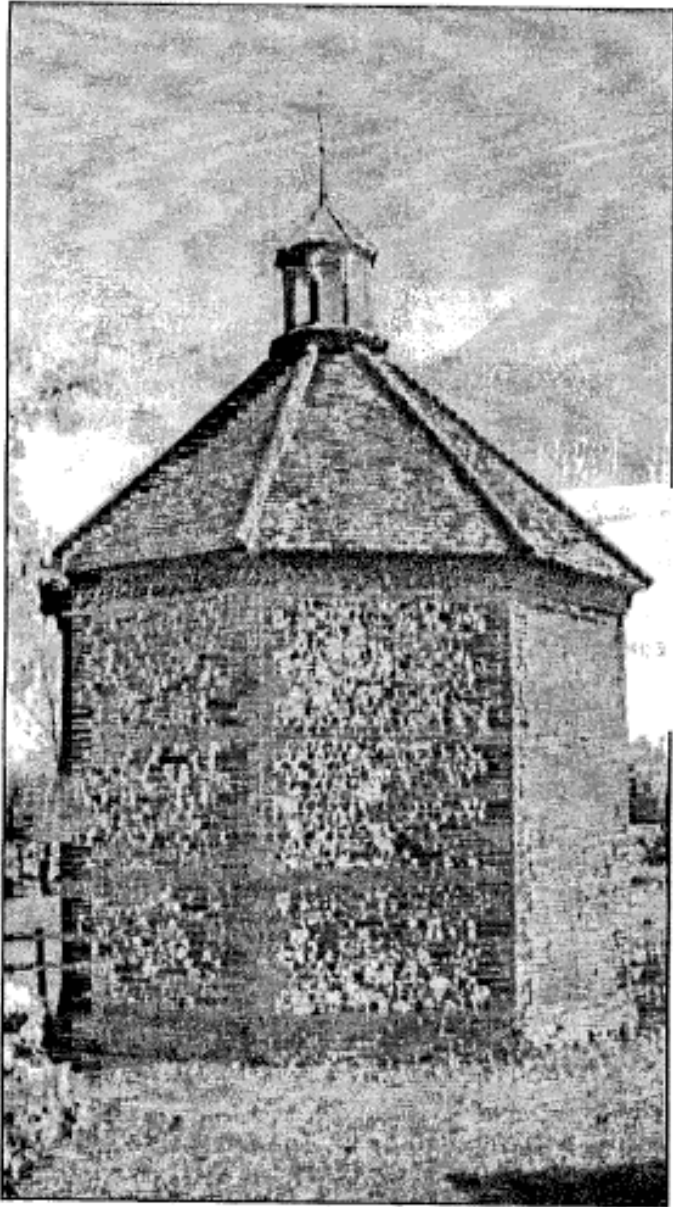


*After, a poor conversion scheme with an excessive number of alterations*

Permission for the conversion of farm buildings is usually seen as an *exception* to normal planning policies, which discourage new development within the countryside .this allows the conservation and retention of buildings with a distinctive agricultural identity. If, however, the distinctive identity is to be lost by excessive or inappropriate alteration then it follows that there is no justification for permission to be given or to make an exception to normal planning control in respect of development in the countryside.

A publication by English Heritage, *The Conversion of Historic Farm Buildings*, has expressed concern about the quality of listed farm building conversions. The problems of residential conversions, in particular, are described.

For these and other reasons, controls over the nature of farm building conversions may be strictly imposed by local planning authorities and *some farm buildings are likely to be unsuitable for residential conversion.*



*A granary building and a dovecote unsuitable for residential use*

# ALTERATIONS IN DETAIL

## EXTERNAL CHANGES

### **A New Openings**

There should be minimal change to the external appearance of the barn. New openings should not be introduced unless they contribute to or reflect the existing character and quality of, the building. Where there is a prominent or main front elevation this should be retained without alteration but glazing within existing openings would usually be acceptable. If the existing building is of timber framed construction, the position of new windows and doors should relate to frame members.

### **B Existing Features**

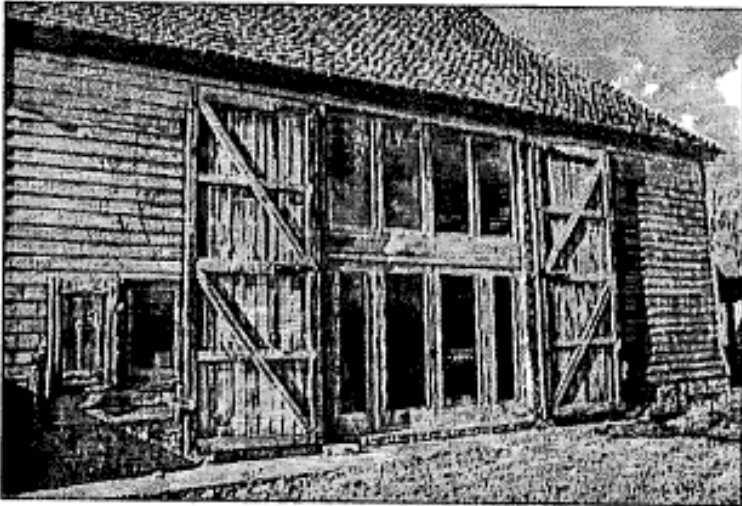
Existing features such as external stairs, hoist doors, hoists and existing openings (unless recent) should be retained.



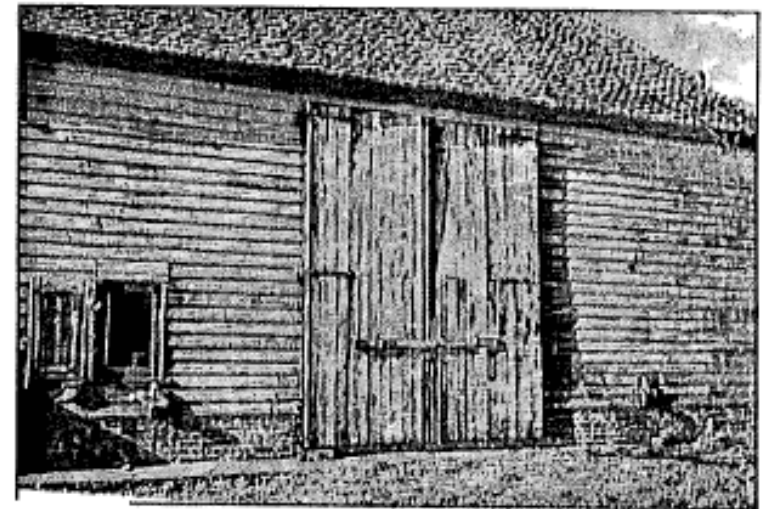
*Steps to an upper level should be retained*

### C Existing Doors

Threshing doors and/or stable doors with vertical boarding should be retained or reinstated (to function) after conversion. Glazing or glazed doors could be constructed behind the boarded doors within the existing opening. New floors crossing barn door openings are generally unsatisfactory. Existing openings should be used wherever possible for new fenestration.



Barn Doors Open

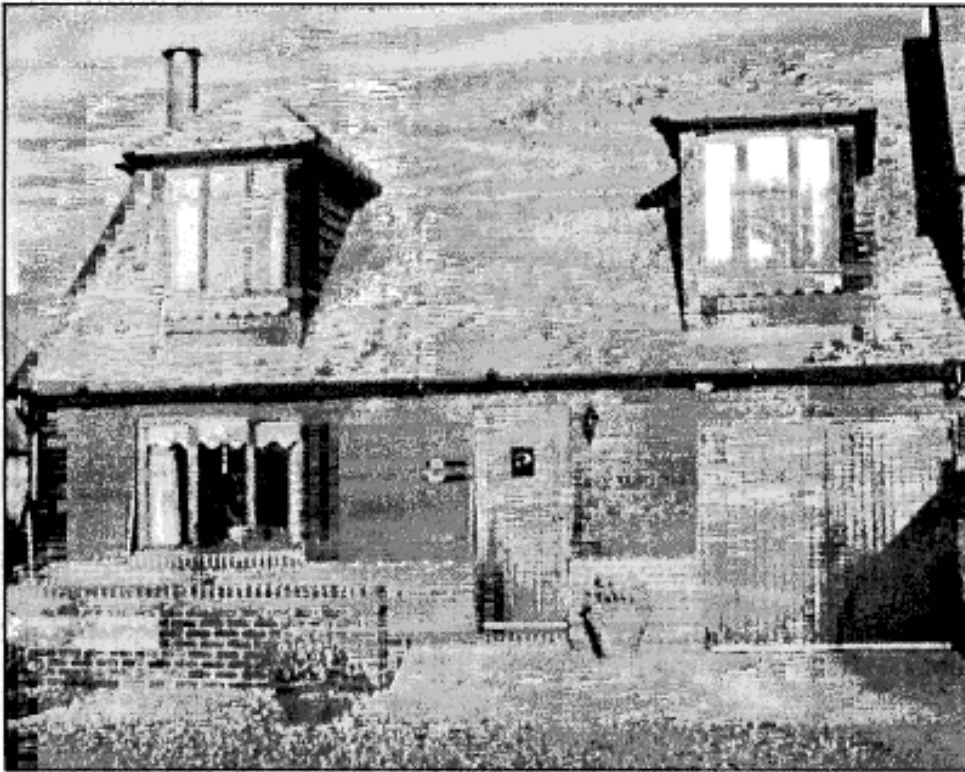


Close – also providing security



## D Additions

Chimneys, flues, dormer windows, standard rooflights, porches or other incongruous additions result in a loss of the agricultural building character undermining the quality of the conversion. In exceptional circumstances, all-metal conservation type rooflights might be acceptable.



*Oversized dormers (in particular) detract from this building*



*An unsightly metal flue*

The conversion should take place within the existing traditional buildings as extensions and additions will not normally be allowed, either at the time of conversion or at a subsequent future date. Purchasers should therefore consider carefully whether their requirements (e.g. provision for car parking) can be fully met by the space available within the building or its curtilage.

The raising of roofs to provide additional headroom is rarely acceptable in design or policy terms. The main barn or main structure would be particularly vulnerable to loss of character in these circumstances.

### **E Brick, Stone or Flint Farm Buildings**

Existing eaves and verge detailing should be retained. Existing ventilation slits should not be concealed or removed. To ensure that the robust character of the building is respected, new windows should be set back from the face of the building with reveals of at least 100mm.

### **F Materials**

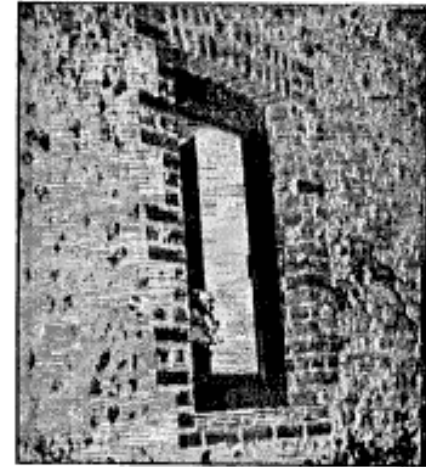
Existing or matching materials should be used (unless modern sheet materials have replaced older cladding). Handmade clay tiles, thatch, Horsham stone or peg tiles (or Welsh slate if barns are of 19th century construction) should be used as roofing materials.

### **G New Joinery**

New joinery should be oak, black stained or painted softwood. Mahogany, other tropical hardwoods or timber stained to imitate these wood types tend to be inappropriate.

### **H Light Fittings etc**

Overly-decorative light fittings, brass door furniture etc should not be used as they will detract from the agricultural quality of the existing buildings.



*“Robust” window detailing for a new window in a flint wall*

## J Requirements of the Building Regulations

It is important that attention is given at an early stage to the requirements of the building regulations, as there may be design implications. The means of escape, in case of fire, needs to be considered particularly if a building in excess of two storeys is proposed.

On occasion, external vent pipes, flues, meter boxes etc have been constructed as part of the conversion work without planning permission or listed building consent being obtained. Enforcement action for their removal might be taken if approval has not been given.

NB: Ridge vents and internal one-way vents are a reasonable alternative to unsightly pipes projecting through the roof.

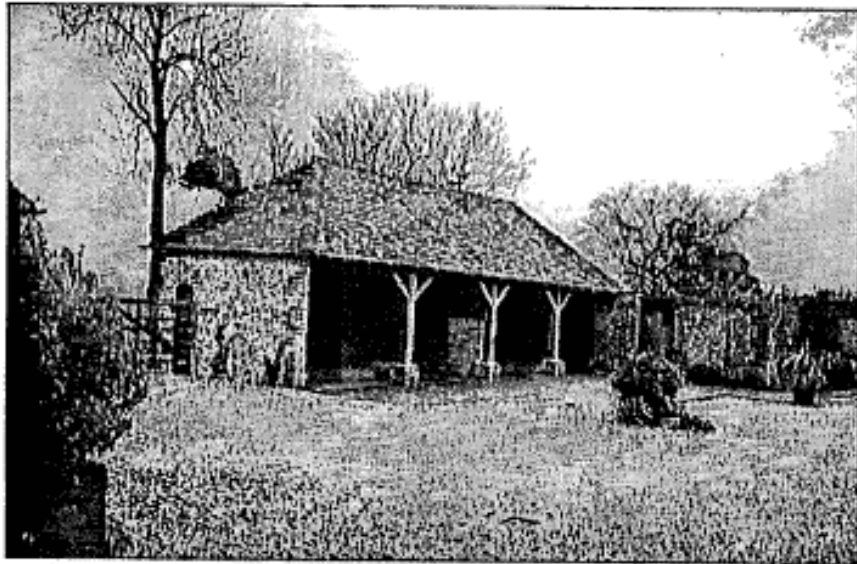


*Unsightly ventilation pipes and flue pipes*

# EXTERNAL WORKS AND LANDSCAPING

Simplicity is desirable. One single paving material, such as stone chippings, is often the best way of dealing with yard areas. If existing block paving is found it should be retained. Artificial stone paving or tarmac (bituminous mastic) paving should *NOT* be used, as the nature of these materials is unsatisfactory in an agricultural context. Full details of landscaping and external works should be submitted to form part of any application.

With residential conversions in particular, curtilages should be restricted to the traditional farmyard. Where yards are not defined by walls or other existing features then the local planning authority will expect to see residential curtilages drawn tightly around the existing buildings, to preserve both the agricultural character of the buildings and to preserve their landscape setting.



*A simply landscaped area with pea shingle or stone chippings*

The sub-division of farmyards, or courtyards enclosed by farm buildings, with new walls constructed to define boundaries to separate units, is rarely acceptable. The quality of the courtyard is often dependant upon the existing relationship between the buildings and the space they enclose and this should not be changed.

# INTERNAL ALTERATIONS

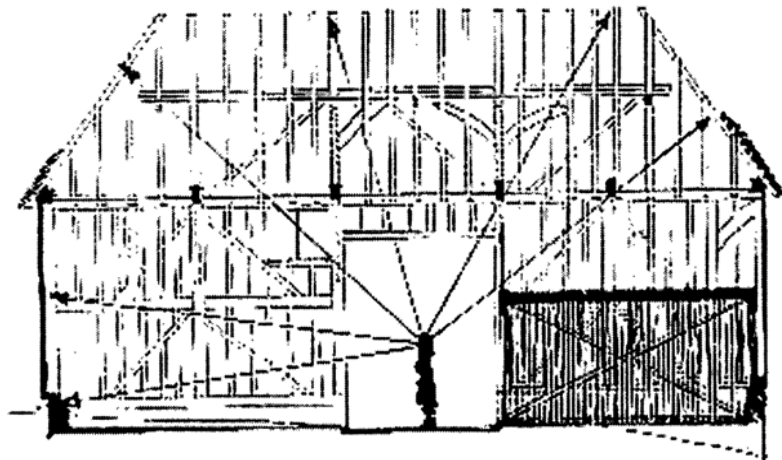
## A Compartmentation

Compartmentation within the building should not be excessive. English Heritage advice suggests that the subdivision of barn interiors as a result of an inappropriate new use (usually a residential use) is unacceptable.



*The quality of the barn interior is retained*

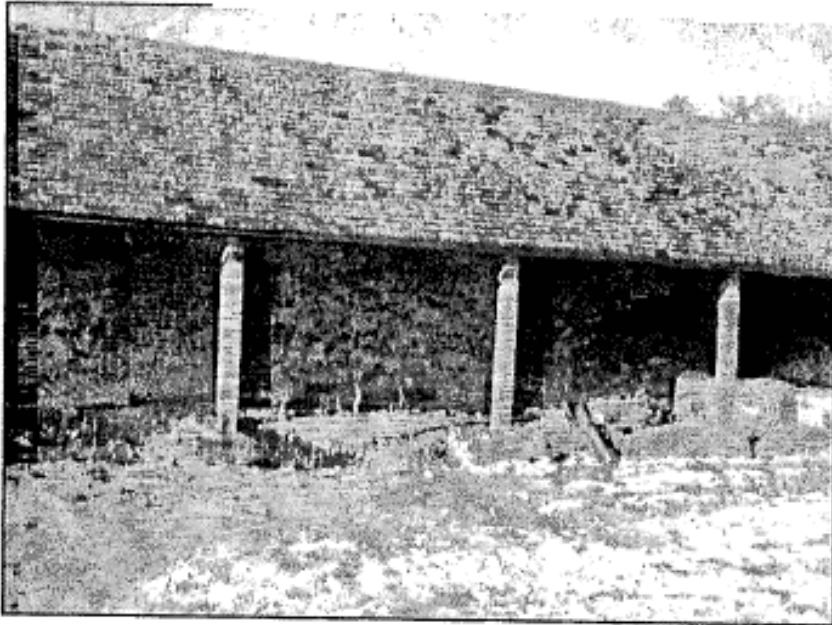
Therefore, particularly in timber framed barns, gable to gable visibility should be retained as the quality and character of the building depends upon the retention of the whole barn interior *AS A SINGLE VOLUME*. A simple gallery, with enclosed rooms below, may be acceptable at one end of a barn.



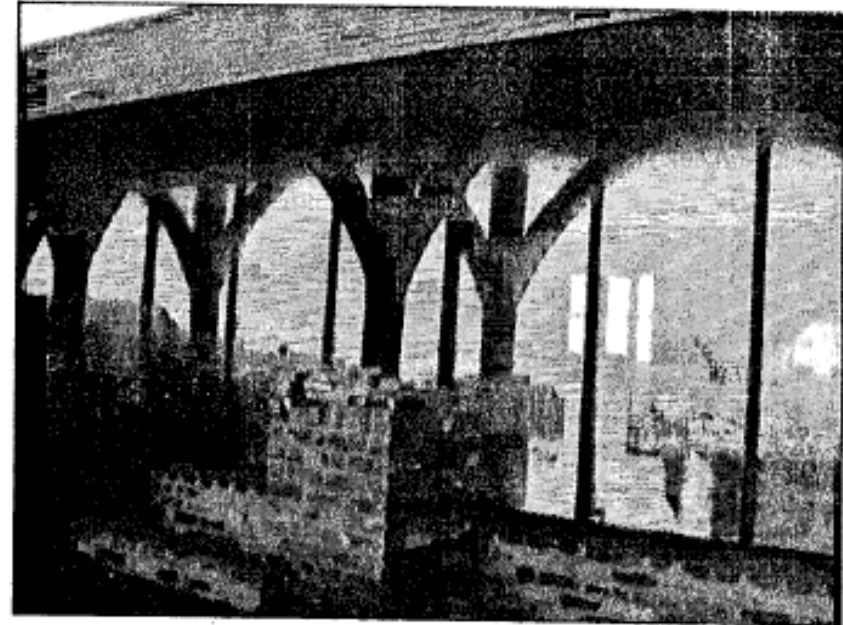
*Full gable to gable visibility*

Where there are secondary outbuildings, it might be possible to use these buildings for a number of smaller rooms, allowing the main barn to be retained without subdivision, this would allow a barn conversion that would otherwise not be permitted.

However, it should be noted that infilling open-fronted byres and cart barns is usually unsatisfactory resulting in a loss of their agricultural character.



*Cart barn*



*In filling a cart barn with glazing or a solid wall tends to result in an unsatisfactory appearance*

Cart barns should be used, where possible, for garaging. New garages may not be acceptable in relation to traditional farm buildings.

Internally, the structure of a barn should remain exposed - the trusses or structural frame members should not be concealed behind plasterboard and cladding or visually dissected by new walls.

### **C Cutting Timbers**

In order to ensure the preservation of the historic structure as a single entity, structural timbers (purlins, ties, posts, collars and wall plates in particular) should not be cut or removed except for small scale repairs agreed with the local planning authority.

### **D Structural Integrity**

The structural integrity of a timber-framed building should not be undermined by the extensive use of steelwork, by the construction of new walls outside or inside an existing timber frame or by the excessive use of new timbers. If the building is not capable of standing in its own right, it is not usually suitable for conversion. If a new gallery is to be provided within a barn then it should be constructed independently to avoid excessive loading of, or constructional alteration to, the existing frame.

### **E Heating**

The use of conventional central heating may cause structural problems and shrinkage of timber. A gentle, underfloor heating is usually best at providing the heat where it is required, and avoids localised problems of more intensive heat (it also might obviate the need to provide chimneys and flues).

### **F Existing Features**

Existing internal features, for example, stalls within stable buildings or fixed threshing machinery should be retained.

# SUBMISSIONS TO THE LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY TO SUPPORT AN APPLICATION FOR FARM BUILDINGS CONVERSION

## **Listed Farm Buildings**

In order to assess fully an application for listed building consent, more detailed information now needs to be submitted to the local planning authority. The listed building application should not be simply an identical application to the planning application. It needs to show the detailed construction of all new elements and how they relate to the existing structure. *Also, the extent of all repairs identifying which timbers are to be retained and which repaired (see below).*

If the local planning authority agree and if the planning application is sufficiently detailed to assess the acceptability of a proposal, the listed building application with its full working drawings may be submitted at a later stage, for example when the building regulations application is submitted. This allows time for the preparation of information to the level required after the acceptability of development has been established in principle.

Obviously work cannot be commenced until both planning permission and listed building consent have been obtained.

A CHARACTER STATEMENT, JUSTIFYING PROPOSED CHANGES IN TERMS OF THEIR AFFECT UPON THE LISTED BUILDING AND ITS EXISTING CHARACTER SHOULD USUALLY BE PROVIDED.

## **Survey Information**

In order to avoid situations where demolition takes place after permission has been granted for re-use (unlisted barns, on occasion, dismantled and replaced with a new building), any application for re-use of a historic farm building should be supported by:

- 1 A survey report by suitably qualified persons demonstrating that the building is capable of conversion without the need for extensive reconstruction, or supplementary structure. The extent of any reconstruction work should be clearly indicated on a survey drawing.
- 2 Accurate information relating to the extent of repair work. This may influence any forthcoming planning decision.



## Proposal Drawings

Working drawings should be prepared (to a scale of at least 1:50) to show:

- a any proposed alteration to the external walls and roof. The methods of insulating the building and the effect upon the existing structure;
- b repairs and alterations to the structural frame (including a schedule of timber frame members showing jointing methods for new timber) and to the masonry plinth walls;
- c any new foundations. The nature, construction and relative level of new floors, and
- d the position of proposed windows and other openings in relation to timber frame members.

Internal elevations are required if timber framed buildings are to be considered, showing the *SCHEME AFTER COMPLETION OF WORK*, rather than a simple survey of the existing barn. (Items a-d should be included)

## Conditions

If the scheme is approved, standard conditions may be imposed upon the approval. For example:

- a restricting any further development effectively removing the usual permitted development rights which would allow a degree of alteration or extension after approval;
- b restricting alteration to the timber structural frame without permission, and
- c restricting concealment of the structure by the construction of ceilings etc.

## Demolition or Collapse

It should be noted that the *demolition* or collapse of a farm building will probably negate any approval given for its *re-use*. The applicant would have to re-apply for permission to construct a replacement building and this permission might *not* be given. All possible measures should be taken to ensure that buildings are protected from partial or total collapse.

## Your application

It is important that your proposal is correctly described. For most cases the following description is suggested:

“Change of use of existing building to \_ \_ \_ \_ (eg dwelling) and associated works.”

If you propose any demolition this must be clearly identified on your application form and on the drawings.

# PROTECTED SPECIES: BARN OWLS AND BATS



## **Barn Owls**

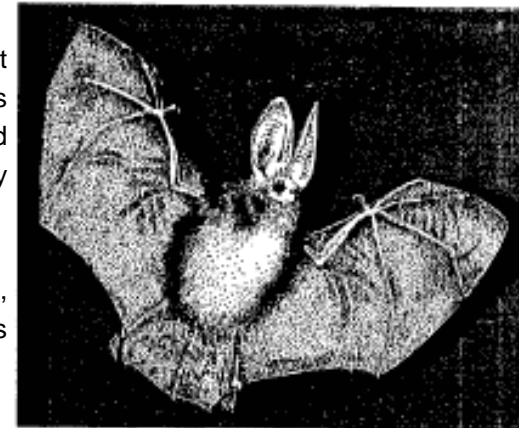
In West Sussex, many of our Barn Owls nest in farm buildings. Barn conversions and other changes in use of these buildings can lead to the loss of traditional breeding sites. However, this need not be the case. If Barn Owls are present it is often possible to make provision for them, even within a converted barn. Nest boxes can also be placed on trees.

Barn Owls, their nests, eggs and young are afforded full legal protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981, making it an offence to disturb them during the breeding season. Thus if Barn Owls are known to be present one must contact English Nature for initial advice (01273 476595). If this is done at an early stage, ideally before submitting a planning application, it may well be possible to make provision for the owls within the building or encourage them to use a nest box placed nearby, perhaps on a tree.

## **Bats**

Many species of bat are dependant on buildings for roost sites, though they may not be present throughout the year. Colonies are faithful to their traditional sites and will continue to return annually as long as the site remains. When roosting, bats are usually concealed in crevices, cavity walls, behind roofing felt or under ridge tiles. Although often found in roofs, contrary to popular belief, they are rarely visible in the roof space.

Like Barn Owls, they too are afforded full legal protection. If bats are found to be roosting in a building, one must seek advice from English Nature before commencing or continuing with any building works (01273 476595).



# CONTACTS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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