

# Farm Diversification

A Planning Guide for Farmers  
in Lewes District



Lewes District Council  
[www.lewes.gov.uk](http://www.lewes.gov.uk)

# Farm Diversification – A Planning Guide for Farmers

**Lewes District Council recognises that the diversification of farm businesses is important to the health of the rural economy.**

This guidance note is intended for farmers and landowners within the Lewes District who are considering farm diversification projects.

There are many perceived obstacles in the way of a successful farm diversification proposal and it is hoped that this leaflet will assist farmers and landowners in preparing acceptable proposals. It aims to provide a simple guide to the planning system and set out the main issues that require consideration.

Government Guidance in draft Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 7 encourages diversification of the rural economy and recognises that rural buildings have an important role in meeting the needs of rural areas for industrial and commercial development as well as for tourism and community uses. Planning Authorities are encouraged to be supportive of well-conceived farm diversification schemes for business purposes that are consistent in scale with their rural location.

Local Plan Policy reflects the advice contained in PPS7 ([www.odpm.gov.uk](http://www.odpm.gov.uk)). This guidance note should be read in

conjunction with local plan policies. Relevant policies are E9 – Re-use of rural buildings and CT1 – Key Countryside policy.

The Lewes District Local Plan is available to view on the Councils' website at [www.lewes.gov.uk](http://www.lewes.gov.uk), at public libraries and the planning office at Southover House, Lewes.



## What diversification opportunities do I have?

Listed below are a few examples of different forms of diversification which may help you decide what your farm or the buildings on it could be used for:

- **Bed and Breakfast/Self catering units** • **Equestrian Development**
- **Farm Shop** • **Industrial and Commercial uses**
- **Processing farm produce** • **Office space**

Unless there is very special justification planning permission for residential development in the countryside is likely to be refused.

New dwellings in the countryside are not considered to be an appropriate form of farm diversification.

When submitting a planning application for a diversification scheme, it is advisable to include a farm plan. In a plan a farmer can set out their plans for the future and show how the diversification proposals relate to the wider farm business. This will help to understand the overall content of the diversification proposals and hopefully the applicant would receive a speedier decision.

## What should be included in a farm plan?

- A farm 'profile' which includes details of the existing activities of the farm, its site area, what type of farm it is, what the existing buildings on the farm are and what wildlife is existent on the farm.
- Details of why there is a need for diversification, what problems are being encountered?
- What the proposal is for, with extra information included such as landscape plans, traffic data, structural survey etc.
- What the implications of the proposal are for the environment and the rural economy.

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.

## **What are the main issues to be considered?**

### **Access and traffic activity**

Planning policy encourages farm diversification but by definition this development is located in more isolated locations which can cause difficulties in terms of access and traffic activity.

Any proposed conversion scheme will need to be considered with regard to the standards set out by the Highway Authority (East Sussex County Council, County Hall Lewes). The District Council in consultation with the Highway Authority will examine the proposal in terms of the level of traffic generation with regard to the suitability of the access and the rural highway network, and highway safety.

Information on the existing traffic movements and proposed traffic movement will need to be submitted with an application. With large scale applications it may be necessary to submit a full Traffic Assessment (seek guidance from a planning officer whether this is necessary for your proposal). The Traffic Assessment should encourage non-car modes of transport.

The level of parking needs to be considered in conjunction with the use. Parking areas need to be well screened from the wider locality or make use of suitable existing buildings. Any hard standing or access should be surfaced in sympathetic rural materials such as rolled gravel.



The local authority can impose planning conditions to control such factors as the hours of delivery and the number of car parking spaces. Such conditions will normally be agreed with the applicant.

### **Reuse of existing buildings**

The vacant buildings on a farm can often be a great asset. However, not all buildings are suitable for conversion. They need to be of sound construction, their form, bulk and general design should be in keeping with their surroundings; and they need to be capable of conversion without major reconstruction.

### **Scale and intensity of use**

This can be where the benefits of producing a farm plan come in. The Council can then understand the overall approach to the whole farm, rather than an ad hoc approach with small applications trickling in over time. The farm plan will give a clear guide to how the proposal fits in with the overall plans for the farm.

The scale of any diversification should not undermine the rural character of the surrounding area.

In some instances, when a scheme is successful it can grow to such a level which would make it unacceptable. The Local Authority would not want to limit the growth of a successful business. However, it may sometimes need some form of control over it in order that the rural character of the area is not undermined.

### **Landscape**

Much of Lewes District is made up of regionally and nationally important landscapes and those areas which have no designation are still important to local residents. Therefore, diversification schemes require careful consideration in terms of their impact on the surrounding landscape. Mitigation measures such as screen planting around large unattractive areas of car parking will need to be considered.



If a proposal is likely to affect trees it may be necessary to contact the Council's Tree Officer.

### **Wildlife**

Rural buildings may be the habitat of bats and owls. Roosts for these creatures are protected by the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and it is important that the building is surveyed as early as possible. For further information please contact English Nature.

### **Neighbour amenity**

It is advisable early on in the process to discuss the project with neighbours in order to have regard to their concerns which may relate to the following:- dust, noise, odour, lighting, hours of work. It may be possible to reach a compromise at this stage of the process. These issues will be taken into account by the Council when determining an application.

### **Signs and adverts**

New development may require the need to promote and advertise and therefore signage can become an issue. The signage may need Advertisement Consent and would need to be well designed should respect the character of the area and be sited so as not to create a traffic hazard.

### **Business**

Even if your proposal gets planning permission the problems will not stop there, will it actually work? How much can you charge per night for a self catering unit, how much can you charge per square metre of office space?

Before submitting an application it is essential that you obtain business advice. The Farm Business Advisory Service (FBAS) at Sussex Enterprise offer such advice and can also be available to speak to at Planning Clinics.

### **Sustainable Development**

Are you interested in reducing your business overheads and improving your 'green' credentials?

The grant-funded East Sussex Betre (Business Excellence Through Resource Efficiency) offers FREE support and advice to help small businesses, including farmers & growers, to cut costs through waste minimisation, recycling and energy & water efficiency.

## What do I do next?

After reading this document, anyone who is intending to submit a planning application for a farm diversification scheme is strongly advised to contact the Planning and Environmental Services department at an early stage to discuss their proposal with officers. The service provided is free of charge.

Planning Clinics are available by appointment. The clinic can offer further advice on the information required with an application, whether a scheme is likely to be considered favourably and business advice.

Farmers should be aware that planning regulations are not the only legislation that they should have regard to. Their project may also require building regulations or listed building consent.

## How will my application be handled?

Planning Information Leaflet DC6 sets out how your application will be processed and covers issues such as application costs, delegated powers and committees.

### Farm Diversification - Checklist

**There are some key questions that farmers need to ask themselves when considering diversifying their farm business.**

- What sort of business are you planning to diversifying into, and how will it relate to the ongoing business?
- Do you need to prepare a Farm Plan to link together the farm business and the new diversification proposal?
- Do you have any vacant or underused farm buildings which could be converted for the new business?
- Are any of these building “listed” or inhabited by protected species (such as bats)?
- Will your proposal be noisy, create odours or pollution?
- Will your proposal harm the amenities of local residents?
- Will your proposal harm the character of the area?
- Will your proposal generate a high level of traffic or require large HGV vehicles to access the site?
- Is the access to the site safe in highway terms?
- Are there ways you can reduce the local environmental impact of your farm diversification proposal?
- Will you need external signs and advertisements for the new business?
- Have you sought advice from Sussex Enterprise’s Rural Development Officer on preparing a sound business case for your proposal?

## Additional Contacts

English Nature  
Sussex and Surrey Team  
Phoenix House  
32-33 North Street  
Lewes, BN7 2PH  
01273 476595

Tourism South East  
The Old Brew House  
Warwick Park  
Tunbridge Wells  
Kent. TN2 5TU  
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West Sussex  
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East Sussex Betre  
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East Sussex County Council Highways  
Switchboard 01273 481000

LDC Tree Officer  
01273 484438

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OTHER FORMATS. This document is also available in large print format or on tape or disc.  
Contact the Access Officer on 01273 484409.

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