

## Introduction

1. This leaflet seeks to provide advice to people who are considering converting rural buildings to alternative uses. Rural buildings are those outside of town or village planning boundaries, as identified in the Lewes District Local Plan (Local Plan). If after reading this advice, an owner is intending to submit a planning application they are recommended to discuss with officers their proposals at an early stage.
2. The Conversion of existing buildings in the countryside has an important role to play in meeting the needs of rural areas for commercial and industrial development as well as for tourism, sport, community and recreation uses. Such conversions are considered to be sustainable in terms of reducing the demand for new building in the countryside.
3. However, not all rural buildings are suitable for conversion. In the case of prominent or isolated buildings, particularly in the South Downs National Park (SDNP), their conversion may impact greatly upon the rural surroundings. In addition it may be that the building has reached the end of its productive life.
4. This is particularly the case with remote or large modern buildings rural buildings, which if converted to an alternative use, would be permanently retained as intrusive features in the landscape.

## Policy

5. In the countryside, there is a general presumption against development unless it requires a countryside location, such as agriculture or forestry. However, in the case of existing rural buildings, it is often preferable and more sustainable to consider alternative uses rather than allowing them to become or remain redundant.

## Commercial, Tourism, Community & Recreation Use

6. **Policy E9** is the policy in the Local Plan which relates to the re-use of rural buildings. For a rural building to be considered for re-use of any purpose, it must be in accordance with all parts of the policy, which reads as follows:

**Planning Permission will be granted for the re-use of rural buildings in the countryside for commercial uses (excluding retail), tourism, community uses and sport and recreation if the following criteria are met:**

- I they are of permanent and substantial construction,**
- II the conversion does not lead to dispersal of activity on such a scale as to prejudice town or village vitality and viability,**
- III their form, bulk and general design are in keeping with their surroundings or can be made such by securing an improvement in the external appearance of the building,**
- IV they are capable of conversion without major construction,**
- V any outside storage forms a minor and ancillary part of the use,**
- VI a satisfactory relationship is achieved between proposals for an individual building or buildings and any other building(s) on an important related part of any appropriate planning obligations or agreements,**
- VII the conversion would not give rise to an unavoidable need for unsightly overhead power and telephone connections, and**
- VIII it complies with other policies in the Local Plan.**

7. Some minor alterations may be made to the fabric of the building may be

acceptable in a re-use proposal where these are proven necessary to accommodate the use's operational needs.

## Residential Use

8. Residential conversions of rural buildings are considered to be the **least desirable** and sustainable method of re-use. Such conversions do little to maintain the rural economy and lead to no permanent job creation. In addition, a conversion may create additional traffic in the locality and introduce residential paraphernalia which can have an adverse impact on the character of the building and wider rural area.

9. Local Plan Policy **RES 7** relates to residential conversions in the countryside and should be considered in full prior to the submission of a residential conversion applications. Whilst residential conversions are not preferred, should a conversion meet criterion concerning its physical attributes and contribution to its surroundings, residential use may be acceptable where:

**IX residential conversion is a subordinate part of a scheme for business use and is of a scale commensurate with its functional requirement.**

10. In such circumstances, it is likely that the subordinate residential element would be tied to the commercial use by a legal agreement or condition.

11. If it is not an integral part of a commercial/ community/ recreation/ tourism scheme, then residential conversion of a rural building will be considered only once all other potential uses have been thoroughly explored (see criteria X).

12. This can be achieved by applying for, and

obtaining, planning permission for commercial (excluding retail), tourism, community, sports and recreation uses, and then if:

**X the District Council is satisfied that the application has first made documented and concerted attempts over a sustained period of at least 12 months to put the building into commercial uses (excluding retail), tourism and community uses.**

13. The building must be concertedly marketed at a realistic price to reflect these uses for at least 12 months (a period that covers all the seasonal variations of the property market).

14. This should not be a token exercise and it will only be considered that a genuine attempt to market the building for these purposes has been made where this is convincingly demonstrated and documented. If the Council is satisfied that the conversion of the building for these purposes has been thoroughly explored and exhausted, and it is clear that there is no demand for these uses in the locality, then residential conversion may be acceptable where the building is of sufficient quality to justify its retention (see paragraph 19).

15. There may be other physical constraints which make a commercial, tourism or community uses unacceptable in land use terms, for example the impact of traffic on the highway network. However, this in itself does not mean that a residential conversion would be acceptable, as only the best examples of traditional rural buildings will be considered worthy of retention via residential conversion.

16. In addition to meeting the criteria stipulated

in Tests I – X, for a building to considered fit for conversion it must also be:

**XI capable of conversion without extension or substantial alterations, and**

**XII makes a valuable contribution to the rural surroundings**

## Extensions and Alterations

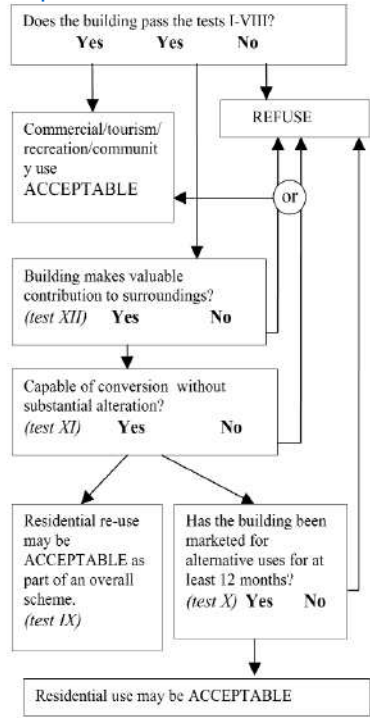
17. Residential conversions should only be restricted to a re-use of the fabric of the existing building.

18. Any extension or addition to the building to facilitate a residential use will not be permitted as this would be contrary to the principle of conversion – i.e. it would involve new built residential development in the countryside. If planning permission is granted for a conversion it is likely that normal permitted development rights would be removed. This would also apply to the cartilage, as a proliferation of sheds and domestic outbuildings can drastically change the character of its surroundings.

## Valuable Contribution to the Rural Surroundings

19. The valuable contribution a building makes its local environment implies that the building is of a traditional design, constructed in local materials which 'sits' well in the locality and has a positive and enhancing affect on its surroundings. Test **XII** will be more stringently applied in places, such as locations which are in the SDNP or Conservation Areas, which are more sensitive to change.

The process whereby a conversion may be acceptable is illustrated as follows:



(The above wording and diagram are a simplification of the content found in Local Plan policy RES7 – Residential Conversions in the Countryside. The Policy should be considered in full prior to the submission of an application).

### Detailed Planning Considerations

#### Design

20. Traditional rural buildings without modern extensions, are simple structures with plain uninterrupted roof slopes and a limited number of openings in the walls. Other features may include wagon entrances, hoist doors and access ladders. Rural buildings may also include more unusual non-agricultural examples.

21. In converting a rural building, the basic principle should be to retain the original rural form and appearance of the building as far as possible, i.e. through the introduction of minimal new glazing (including roof lights) or openings in the fabric and no chimneys or additions etc. to the roof slopes.

#### Removal of Unsuitable Buildings

22. An application for conversion of buildings may include within the cartilage other buildings or structures that are unsuitable for conversion. In such a situation, the Council may seek the removal of such buildings and structures to improve the setting of the conversion as part of any planning permission. This may be dealt with by a legal agreement.

#### Vehicular Access and Parking

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

24. The level of parking will also be considered in conjunction with the use whilst 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.

25. It is possible that a proposal for conversion may generate highway objections that cannot be overcome. A rural building may therefore not be appropriate for conversion as a result of its location on an unsuitable of the rural highways network.

#### Contacts

##### Listed Buildings

26. Where a building is listed, a separate application for Listed Building Consent will be required. For detailed advice, please contact the planning department or English Heritage (South East) on (01483) 252000.

##### Wildlife

27. Rural buildings are often the habitat of bats and owls. Roosts for these creatures are protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and it is important that the building is surveyed as early as possible. For further information, please contact Natural England on 0300 060 0300.

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 Southover Road  
 Lewes  
 BN7 1AB

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This leaflet is available in large print, audiotape, disc or in another language upon request. Please telephone (01273) 484141 or email [lewesdc@lewes.gov.uk](mailto:lewesdc@lewes.gov.uk).

Planning Information Leaflet DC 4



# RE-USE OF RURAL BUILDINGS

## Planning Advice Note

