

The Conservation of Traditional Farm Buildings

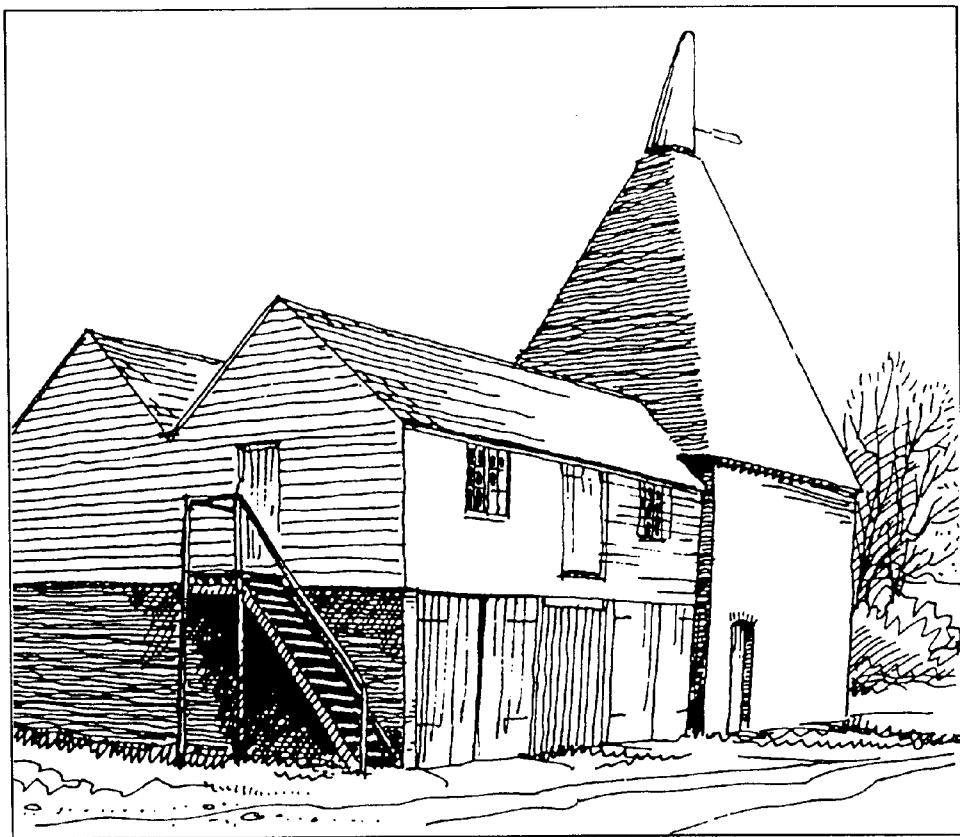
DEVELOPMENT
SERVICES
DEPARTMENT

Swale
BOROUGH COUNCIL
NORTH KENT COAST

PLANNING AND
DEVELOPMENT
GUIDELINES No.3

Introduction

Owing to its past and present agricultural economy, Swale Borough has a broad range of farm buildings across its landscape. In particular, it has also inherited a rich heritage of historic farm buildings ranging from large barns and oast houses to small granaries and stables. Changing patterns of farming and rural life have led to demands for new uses to be found for these buildings. Whilst development and progress are essential, the preservation of the best of our traditional farm buildings has to be encouraged and new uses when considered appropriate must respect the character of the building and its locality.



Planning Policies

1.0 Governmental Planning Policy Guidance Note No.7 (PPG7) entitled *"The Countryside and Rural Economy"* provides wider policy guidance on the re-use of all existing rural buildings to encourage and diversify the rural economy. The Borough Council's guidance is concerned with those buildings of a traditional nature; however those wishing to change the use of either traditional buildings or any other rural buildings are advised to view the guidance contained, in particular, in para 2.15 and Annex D of PPG7.

1.1 In addition the Kent Structure Plan and the Swale Borough Local Plans contain policies relating to the re-use and adaption of other rural buildings.

1.2 Whilst the conversion of agricultural buildings to other uses will be considered on their merits, special consideration needs to be given to those buildings of historic or architectural interest. As well as considering this guidance and that contained in this guidance, potential applications should have regard to Appendix IV of Circular 8/87 *"Historic Buildings and Conservation Areas-Policy and Procedures"* which provides more detailed guidance which the Borough Council considers when determining proposals affecting historic buildings or areas. In addition the Borough Council has prepared guidance relating to listed buildings entitled *"Listed Buildings-A Guide for Owners and Occupiers"*. All these documents can be inspected at Swale House.

What is Meant by "Traditional Farm Buildings"?

2.0 The Borough Council wishes to protect the very best of its rural buildings. For the purposes of these guidelines "traditional" buildings refer to the following:

- (a) Buildings included in the Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest, or worthy of inclusion on that list by meeting the principles of selection used by the Department of National Heritage as set out in Appendix 1 of DOE Circular 8/87 or;
- (b) An unlisted but traditionally constructed building which is grouped with one or more listed buildings in such a way as to contribute positively towards the setting of the listed building(s).
- (c) Exceptionally, specialist buildings of quality, which are not listed or grouped with listed buildings. The suitability will be determined on whether the building at present and as converted would contribute to the character of the Kentish countryside and will principally include good examples of Kentish oast houses and barns.

Future Uses for Traditional Agricultural Buildings

3.0 As farm units re-organise or diversify it is inevitable that some buildings will become surplus to requirements. **For traditional and historic buildings the first priority is the continuation of the building in agricultural use.** By the careful use of modern methods of storage and handling such as corrugated steel sheet storage bins, pallets and fork-lift trucks, many large barns can continue to serve a useful function on the farm.

3.1 If this proves to be completely out of the question then the local authority will give consideration to alternative uses. However, although the most attractive alternative, from a purely commercial point of view, might be to convert the building for residential purposes, this is seldom the best way to conserve the building in anything like its original form. Conversions to residential use often involve the greatest amount of adaption and can result in the loss of important features.

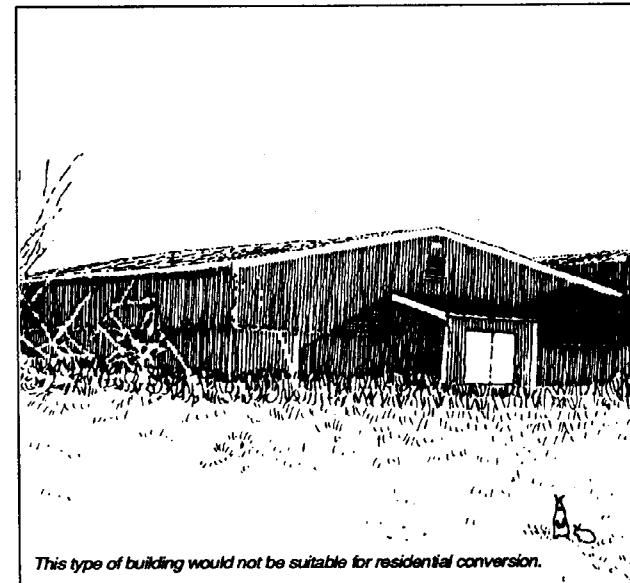
3.2 **Instances where the conversion of an agricultural building to residential use will be unacceptable include:**

- (a) *where the building has little or no intrinsic historic or architectural interest (see para 3.4);*
- (b) *where the building has been so altered over the years as to have lost its interest or attraction;*
- (c) *where a significant proportion has been lost due to demolition, dereliction, neglect or storm damage;*
- (d) *where the use would create problems to neighbours or produce additional hazards to users of country roads;*
- (e) *where a residential use would adversely affect agricultural operations, or where the level of amenity to new residents would be poor because of the proximity to farming operations;*
- (f) *where the building is one of a small number of historic barns which are of national importance where it would not be appropriate for any substantial changes to be made;*
- (g) *where the conversion cannot take place without a significant number of alterations which would be detrimental to the character of the building;*
- (h) *where part of the building contains species protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) which cannot be integrated into the development without detriment to them (see para. 8.0).*

3.3 The Borough Council will therefore generally look more favourably upon proposals to convert these agricultural buildings for other purposes which enable the existing structure and detailing to remain as little disturbed as possible. Where a residential use is however accepted as the best means of ensuring the retention of an important building, the Borough Council will expect the conversion to be of the highest standard and to accord with the guidance given in the later sections of this booklet.

3.4 Where the building has little or no intrinsic historic or architectural interest, or has been so altered over the years as to have lost its interest or attraction, conversion to residential use will not be considered. Other uses (see opposite) may be considered appropriate and these will be considered in accordance with the advice contained in Planning Policy Guidance Note 7, the Kent Structure Plan and the Borough's local plan.

In determining proposals for the change of use and conversion of traditional buildings in the countryside, the policy guidelines contained in the following pages will be adopted.



This type of building would not be suitable for residential conversion.

Possible uses for "Traditional" Farm Buildings.

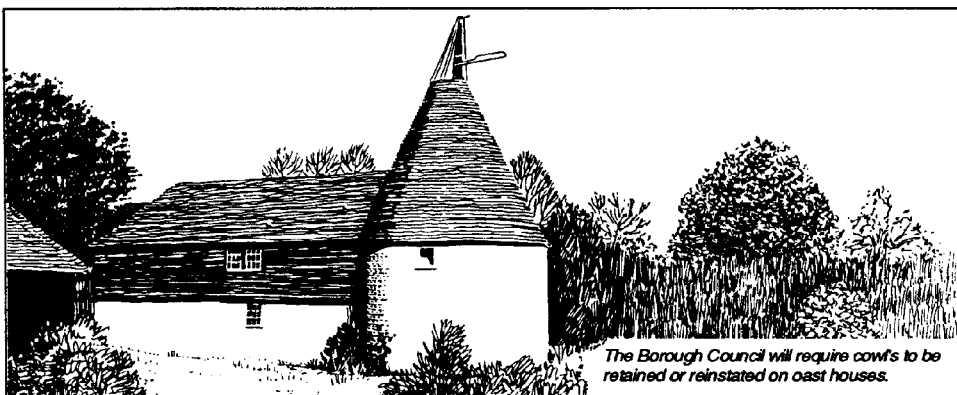
3.5 *The following are some of the alternative uses which might be considered appropriate for traditional and historic agricultural buildings. The advice of the Borough Council should be sought in all instances. Each application will however be considered on its own merits and due regard will be paid to the suitability of the use as far as the building is concerned and as it may affect adjoining property and the locality.*

- **A community building;**
- **Agricultural or other use;**
- **Craft work shop/studio;**
- **Farm shop;**
- **Light business use;**
- **Professional practice;**
- **Recreation building;**
- **Restaurant;**
- **Tourist accommodation.**

General

4.0 The Borough Council will need to be satisfied that the building had not been purposely made available for conversion by the recent erection of another agricultural building on land farmed by the same farmer, using permitted development rights, with the real intention of an early conversion to another use of the traditional or historic building. The Council would also be concerned if the building had been erected using permitted development rights and was then the subject of proposals for a change of use. In such circumstances it will be appropriate for the Borough Council to investigate the history of the building to establish whether it was ever used for the purpose for which it was claimed to have been built.

- 4.1 Only small scale uses will be considered.
- 4.2 For business uses, the application must incorporate clearly defined



limits of expansion together with an indication of the use of all adjacent open areas to ensure that no future expansion occurs over agricultural land or becomes unsightly. If further expansion is necessary then at that stage it is appropriate that the business should be relocated into an area set aside for such purposes.

4.3 For business uses, the proposal should relate to a specific occupier or use. In some cases where a specific end user cannot be identified, the Council will require the applicant to enter into an Agreement under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 whereby the Council will agree each occupier.

4.4 The change of use must be acceptable in terms of impact on the surroundings. There should be no objections such as intrusion into open countryside, noise, smell, safety, health or excessive traffic generation.

4.5 The proposal should not result in a loss of amenity or privacy to adjoining neighbours.

4.6 A safe and satisfactory access must be provided to the requirements of the Borough Council and car parking must be provided to Kent County Council standards.

4.7 All designs should be sensitive to the character of the building and its surroundings and use appropriate materials and landscaping.

4.8 Proposals should be sensitive to any nature conservation interest present in or around the building.

4.9 The proposal must be accompanied by an appropriate landscaping scheme suitable for a rural location (this would normally require the use of locally native species).

Principles of Conversion

5.0 If the proposal to convert is acceptable in principle then the following aspects should be considered:

1. Maintenance of Structural Integrity

5.1 Whatever the structural form of the building it is important that as little as possible of the existing structure is removed, unless the appearance of the building is enhanced as a result.

2. Retention of Agricultural Character

5.2 The sole purpose of allowing agricultural buildings of architectural or historic interest to be converted to a new use is to ensure the preservation of structures recognised as symbolic of rural life. If the conversion changes the character of the building for example to that of a suburban dwelling, this policy is undermined.

3. Incorporation of Existing Features

5.3 Cowls, waggon entrances, existing openings, hoist doors, access ladders etc. should as far as possible be retained and adapted if appropriate. If evidence exists to show that small scale features have been removed then these may usually be restored. In some instances (for example where oast cowls are missing) the Borough Council may insist that they be replaced as a condition of granting consent. However, where larger features such as complete kilns of oast houses have been demolished, then it will not be acceptable for these to be rebuilt in replica. Inappropriate modern additions and adjacent farm buildings constructed of modern materials, and not being part of the historical use of the building or group of buildings should be removed at the time of conversion.

4. Interiors

5.4 As much as possible of the interior of a framed building, such as a barn, should remain open to reveal the construction. At least one bay within a barn, accommodating the entrance hall and staircase, to expose the full height of the structure, will normally be required.

"Rooflights"

The following statement made by the British Tourist Authority summarises the importance of careful detailing and the problems caused by inappropriate windows and introduction of rooflights:

".....any conversion must respect the character and integrity of the buildings. Barns, in particular, are usually very simple and monolithic buildings - their dignity deriving from the unbroken mass of their walls and the sweep of their roofs. Any adaptation which involves breaching new apertures in the walls, or inserting dormers or even rooflights in the roof, is likely to be jarring - the worse because the damage is usually irreversible, as brick or stone walls of this type can rarely be satisfactorily patched. Internally, their timber roofs also deserve careful treatment in any adaptation. The conversion of barns to houses, therefore, is only very rarely likely to be an acceptable form of conservation; requirements for lighting, ventilation and access may well result in what can only be described as a fate worse than death".

5. Materials

5.5 Where existing materials have been replaced or new materials introduced only traditional materials of appropriate quality will be permitted, fixed in the traditional manner and finished in traditional colours and textures.

6. Layout

5.6 Partitions should be located in relation to the structure and should be related to the structural members of a framed building.

7. Fenestration

5.7 The type and locations of windows is often the key to a successful conversion. At the same time this is sometimes a major problem. By exploiting existing windows or openings and perhaps seeking an informal pattern of openings with the minimum number of windows, a domestic appearance may be avoided. Windows of a vertical proportion are better. The use of UPVC or double glazed window units and roof lights will not be acceptable. No window openings should be made in roofs.

5.8 Given these difficulties, applicants must be prepared to accept that they may not be able to put the full volume of the building to use due to these restrictions particularly in the case of barn and oast roofs.

8. Flues

5.9 Brick chimney stacks are normally inappropriate and industrial metal flues in appropriate colours, discretely located, are usually preferable. Gas heating with a balanced flue could also be incorporated.

9. Extensions

5.10 The purpose of converting a traditional building will be to adapt it with the minimum of alteration for the purpose required. As such it will not normally be considered appropriate to extend the existing building to accommodate the use.

General Design

6.0 A very high standard of design will be expected and applicants are advised to seek expert advice from an architect or other sensitive designer who is conversant with this type of work and has a detailed knowledge of historic buildings and traditional construction. The Borough Council welcomes consultation at all stages of design and the Conservation Officer is able to offer free advice..

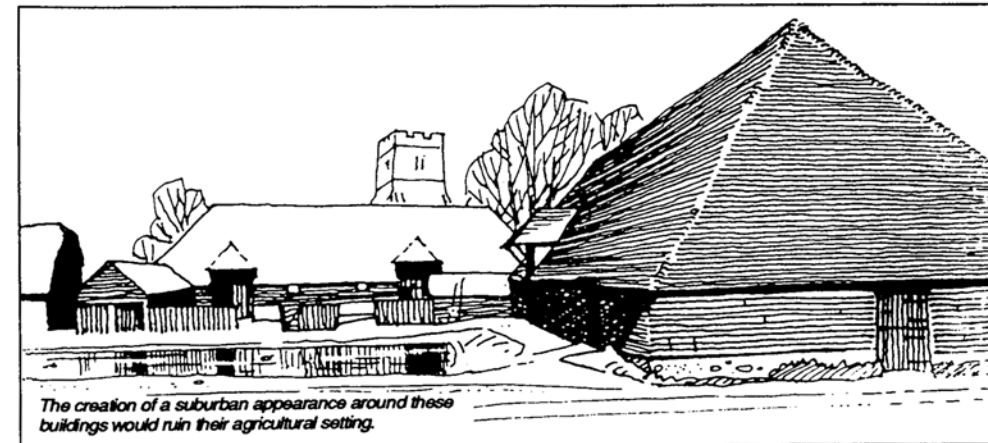
Landscape Design

7.0 Where residential conversion is concerned, just as the character of the building can be destroyed by an over-domestic appearance so can its setting be ruined by creating a suburban garden. The aim should be to seek to integrate the garden with the surrounding countryside.

7.1 The curtilage for the new dwelling should make use of existing field boundaries where these are situated within a reasonable distance. There should be little or no encroachment onto adjacent agricultural land.

7.2 Boundary treatment should generally be mixed hedgerow planting. Alien trees and shrubs should be avoided. Use of locally native species will be required. Applicants should have regard to the landscape principles contained in the Borough Council's booklet entitled "Planting on New Developments - A Guide for Developers".

7.3 Clothes drying areas should be carefully sited and screened as should garden sheds, greenhouses, garages and car parking areas. Careful thought should be given to the construction of driveways and such details as raised concrete kerbs should be avoided. Wherever possible garages should be incorporated within the main building to be converted or use should be made of an otherwise redundant ancillary building provided this is attractive and would not be detrimental to the overall setting of the scheme.



The creation of a suburban appearance around these buildings would ruin their agricultural setting.

Nature Conservation

8.0 English Nature has expressed concern that the conversion of farm buildings contributes to the decline of Barn Owls, a species listed on Schedule I of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act by which it is specially protected. Bats are also at risk and they too are scheduled by the same Act and are similarly protected. **It is a criminal offence to deliberately disturb or destroy these species.**

8.1 It is sometimes possible to integrate the nature conservation interest into a conversion, through leaving areas of the roofspace void or by use of appropriate roosting boxes. Where bats or owls have been successfully integrated, advice from English Nature on the choice of roof timber or damp treatments should be taken to ensure that these species are not poisoned. The advice of English Nature should be taken in all instances.

8.2 Where a nature conservation interest of this type cannot be retained the Borough Council will not normally grant planning permission or listed building consent.

Finally

9.0 It is essential to remember that a barn or farm building will never be, unless it is rebuilt and, thus, destroyed, quite like a purpose built house. If your purpose in conversion is to build yourself a conventional house, then a barn is not what you need. A good conversion takes the qualities of the building into account and then rethinks it in architectural terms, not as pastiche, but as a design respecting the original and finding its references and inspiration from the form and character of the existing building.



Appropriate conversions can give new life to neglected buildings.

see list of contacts below

For further planning advice please contact:

Planning Services, Swale house, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT; (advice is also available on the planning pages of website at www.swale.gov.uk)

Email us on planning@swale.gov.uk or Fax us on 01795 417417

The Duty officer is: available:

8.45 to 5.00pm Monday to Thursday and 8.45 am to 4.30 pm on Friday.

Contactable either in person at Swale House or by telephoning **01795 417442** and can

- Give advice on procedures and processes
- Answer general questions and Comment on development potential
- Give general advice on who to contact and how best to seek pre-application advice.

Swale's Conservation Officer - telephone 01795 417375

For Building Regulation advice please contact:

South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership,
Compass Centre, Chatham Maritime, Chatham, Kent, ME4 4YH

Telephone 01634 331133

Fax 01634 331299

Email building@stqbc.org.uk

If you would like further information, more copies or alternative versions (i.e large print, audio, different language) we will do our best to accommodate your request please contact:

Customer Services

Phone: **01795 417850**

Email: csc@swale.gov.uk

This booklet is one of a number of planning and development guidelines published by the Development Services Department of Swale Borough Council. Others include:

1. ● *The Conversion of Buildings into Flats and Houses in Multiple Occupation.*
2. ● *Listed Buildings - A Guide for Owners and Occupiers.*
3. ● *The Conservation of Traditional Farm Buildings.*
4. ● *The Design of Shopfronts, Signs and Advertisements.*
5. ● *Designing an Extension - A Guide for Householders.*
6. ● *Planting on New Developments - A Guide for Developers.*
7. ● *The Erection of Stables and Keeping of Horses.*
8. ● *Conservation Areas.*

Others may be published from time to time. Should you wish to obtain any of the above then please contact:

Swale Borough Council. Development Services Department,
Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne,
Kent. ME10 3HT. ☎ (0795) 417344.