



Snowdonia National Park Authority  
Supplementary Planning Guidance:  
**Farm Diversification**  
*October 2012*

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. This supplementary planning guidance has been prepared jointly by the three National Parks in Wales taking into account any additional local circumstances particular to one Park area. The guidance is a material planning consideration in determining planning applications for farm diversification and has been prepared to assist applicants in presenting such applications to Snowdonia National Park Authority (SNPA). Applicants may also wish to take advantage of the pre-application consultation service to discuss diversification projects before a planning application is submitted.

## **2. Purpose of the Guidance**

- 2.1. Although farm incomes have increased in recent years there will be a continuing need to diversify farm incomes in order to sustain the farm enterprise and the wider rural economy. In 2009/10 records indicate that approximately 24% of Welsh Farms undertook diversified activity in that year and that the percentage increased from previous years. The choice to diversify does not necessarily mean the farm business stops operating in the traditional way. Any new activity will provide additional income and potentially create more employment opportunities. This in turn will help sustain rural communities and the succession of younger people in rural enterprises. Appropriate investment in the rural economy will also assist in the sustainable management of the countryside which will bring about wider conservation and community benefits. Diversification schemes can also provide an assured future for traditional farm buildings.
- 2.2. Not all diversification projects will require planning permission but usually projects requiring change of use of land from agriculture to another use and the erection or conversion of buildings for non agricultural purposes will require planning consent.
- 2.3. Diversification proposals on farms will generally be supported by SNPA. They can vary greatly in range and scale and consequently their impact on the surrounding environment will differ from project to project. Such projects may range from converting a small building to an office to providing a new walking or mountain biking centre. This guidance gives some practical guidance on the planning issues that will arise when determining a planning application. Such issues will also provide a useful checklist at an early stage in developing a project. Appendix 1 gives some hypothetical practical examples of projects and the planning considerations that arise during or before a planning application is submitted. The projects discussed are examples only. It should not be concluded that similar proposals will automatically be granted planning permission.

## **3. National and Local Planning Policies**

- 3.1. Planning Policy Wales states that local planning authorities should adopt a positive approach to farm diversification in rural areas irrespective of whether they are served with public transport. Although consideration should firstly be given to converting existing buildings it does not discount the erection of appropriate new buildings. Further national technical guidance is given in Technical Advice Note 6 “Planning for Sustainable Rural Communities”.

- 3.2. This note generally supports sustainable projects in the countryside and states that many economic activities can be sustainably located on farms such as farm shops or workshops. It states that Farm Business Plans could usefully support applications for diversification. Such plans can demonstrate how the diversified activity fits into the wider farming picture, and set out its environmental consequences highlighting how any significant adverse effects will be mitigated.
- 3.3. **Policy 20 in the adopted Eryri Local Development Plan** deals with agricultural diversification and is produced in full in Appendix 2. The policy supports diversification schemes on a working farm which has been registered as an agricultural holding and the main business is agriculture. (As defined by the section 336 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.) It is unlikely that proposals for farm diversification could be supported for smaller tracts of land which are not part of a working farm.
- 3.4. The proposal should be a secondary activity to the main farm enterprise and ideally will complement the daily farm activity. In accordance with national policy there is a reference in **Policy 20 to Policy 9: Conversion and Change of Use of Rural Buildings** (see appendix 2). Preference will be given to the sympathetic conversion of existing buildings and an applicant will have to demonstrate why it will not be practical to use an existing building in preference to new build. Where it has been successfully demonstrated that a new building is required this should be for the sole use of a diversification project and not for any other purpose. It should also be in scale with its surroundings and appropriately designed for its intended use. Well proportioned buildings which take into account their setting and use of materials are more likely to be acceptable. Many farming enterprises have sufficient space next to existing buildings to enable any new building to be properly assimilated into the farm complex without causing undue harm. The design, scale and location of a development and its potential impact on the environment will also need to conform with **Policy 1: General Development Principles** (see appendix 2).
- 3.5. The change of use of an existing agricultural building to a non-agricultural use that subsequently gives rise to demand for a new building to meet the original use will not be supported unless there is clear evidence of changing farming practices that can justify further expansion or change.
- 3.6. In determining a planning application both local and national planning policies will be taken into consideration.

#### **4. Range of Diversification Projects**

- 4.1. The potential range of diversification projects is vast and it is impossible for this guidance to deal with every likely possibility. Diversification can be described as any proposal which seeks to supplement farm income on working farms. These are usually categorised into tourism, services, sport and recreation and other uses. The conversion of disused farm buildings for tourism accommodation can usually be supported and sport and recreation projects which do not have an adverse impact on the landscape or biodiversity can be encouraged subject to adequate safeguards. However, in line with National Park purposes, the highest priority will be given to the protection and enhancement of the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area. Most projects will require planning permission. For certain types of

proposals such as for camping or caravan sites, there are other policies in the Local Development Plan and separate planning guidance which will apply and should be taken into account.

- 4.2. The scale of any proposal will be important. Too large a project may overwhelm an existing farm enterprise in terms of size or its financial contribution to the business. On the other hand there may be economic benefits in supporting an expansion of an existing business which has become very successful. Again good design can be very important in overcoming potential problems of scale. On balance the agricultural operation should remain the main business and the diversification proposal subservient to the main farm business. It is likely that any new buildings granted planning consent will be tied by planning condition to the original farm holding to avoid a possible future sale, unrelated to the farming enterprise. To assist with understanding more complex proposals, a Farm Business Plan should be submitted with a planning application.

## 5. Planning Considerations

- 5.1. **Other** planning considerations which the SNPA will take into account in addition to the policies contained in the Local Development Plan are outlined below. More detailed design and siting issues will be included in new supplementary planning guidance to be prepared on Eryri Landscapes and Local Sustainable Design. However the main considerations are discussed below;-
- 5.2. **Scale** – Most farming enterprises are located in attractive open countryside. Many farms already have very large buildings which, in some instances, are not unlike industrial buildings found in urban areas. Any new build should therefore limit its visual impact on the landscape and be appropriately designed and sited. Some activities due to their scale may generate large volumes of traffic or create noise and general disturbance for other properties nearby. The level of activity that is likely to be created should be appropriate to the site and this will be assessed as part of a planning application. The conversion of existing buildings will be given priority over new build.
- 5.3. **Access** - Many existing farms are located in isolated locations with access along narrow country roads. However many are already serviced by larger delivery vehicles and the volume of car traffic along approach roads may be light. In such circumstances and where site access visibility is good an additional amount of traffic generation may not cause a problem. It would not however be appropriate to encourage additional traffic generation on a dangerous access or along approach roads that are totally unsuitable for the expected traffic generation. Accessibility by public transport would be an advantage but it is recognised this is not always possible in more isolated locations.
- 5.4. **Siting and Design** – Features of traditional farm buildings should be retained as part of a new design and in some cases an archaeological investigation may be required before conversion work commences and any findings recorded or retained. If it is not possible or practical to convert an existing building, siting a new building close to an existing group will minimise the impact on the open countryside and ensure the efficient use of existing services. If the ground chosen for the site of a new structure is sloping, it helps to reduce its impact if the eaves and ridge are parallel to the

ground contours. The design and type of materials will depend on the use of the building. Generally however new buildings should be of traditional design and use local building materials to match those existing on the site.

- 5.5. It may be possible to re-cycle local stone and slate from the site. The bulk and form of a new building can be lessened by breaking up the roof pitch, while dark grey, dark green, dark blue, black or dark brown roofs harmonise more readily with the landscape. At ground level large areas of unrelieved tarmac are best avoided and should be broken down into smaller spaces. Tree planting can also assist in screening some elevations from more public viewpoints such as roads or public footpaths.
- 5.6. The SNPA will also consider carefully the overall impact on the landscape from near and far viewpoints and especially the visibility from higher surrounding land. Usually the better the design and use of local materials the less intrusive a building will appear in the landscape. The proposal may also involve the use of land for recreational or other purpose. If so, the impact on the landscape should be kept to a minimum.

## **6. Biodiversity Issues**

- 6.1. The conversion of an existing building or the use of land may impact on important environmental sites or protected species. In the case of conversions many older farm buildings are potential habitats for bats and barn owls which are protected by law. If either is found to be present their habitat will need to be safeguarded and a licence obtained from the Welsh Government to disturb or move the animals. It does not mean that a proposal cannot go ahead. There are ways of mitigating impacts on protected species and habitats that can be discussed and agreed with the SNPA. Further information can also be obtained in the Supplementary Planning Guidance on Nature Conservation and Biodiversity.

## **7. Amenity**

- 7.1. Although most proposals are unlikely to give rise to amenity issues, it is possible for example, that noise, smell or traffic generation may cause a nuisance to other local people living in the vicinity. Careful siting of an activity or building could overcome such issues. As discussed above, the use of appropriate landscaping can often prove effective. It is also advisable to discuss a proposal with a near neighbour that could be affected and explain in details what the plans entail. This will avoid potential future misconceptions and help smooth the passage of a planning application.

## **8. Conclusion**

- 8.1. If having read this guidance you wish to discuss a project in more detail the SNPA would be glad to assist through its pre-application discussion service. Guidance can be given on what further information may be required and the likelihood of obtaining planning permission before any unnecessary expenditure is made. Where possible, the SNPA will work with applicants in bringing forward satisfactory proposals which can benefit their business and the wider rural economy.



## **Appendix 1**

Below are examples of three hypothetical diversification projects that, subject to further details being obtained and satisfied, are likely to be supported by the Planning Authority. The main planning issues that will arise are discussed below which a potential applicant can begin to consider before submitting a planning application. The SNPA offers a comprehensive pre-application discussion service and it is advised that potential applicants take advantage of the opportunity for early dialogue with planning officers.

### **Proposal 1: The conversion of traditional farm buildings into five holiday accommodation units and the construction of a mountain cycle path on adjoining land within the farm holding.**

#### **Are the farm buildings suitable for conversion?**

Yes they are built in traditional stone and can be converted without any further extensions. They are currently no longer required to carry out the farming enterprise and are structurally sound. The scheme of conversion retains the character of the original buildings and the site is reasonably close to other tourist attractions. The buildings due to their architectural merit are worthy of retention and need a new economic viable use. The scheme complies with the appropriate conversion policies of the Authority.

#### **What further information is required by the Planning Authority?**

The applicant has taken advantage of the pre-application service provided and at this stage was informed that the old farm buildings are likely to be habitats for bats. A preliminary survey has also indicated the presence of bats. The applicant was therefore asked to employ a qualified person to undertake a bat survey which has indeed confirmed the presence of bats overwintering in the barns. The survey has also identified mitigation measures which involves the conversion of another small building as a new dedicated roost. The Planning Authority (PA) is content with the details provided.

There are no other protected species identified or statutory sites of designated environmental importance affected.

#### **Is the access capable of accommodating the extra traffic?**

The existing access has poor visibility onto a busy B road. It can however be improved at minimal cost by moving back hedgerows and creating better visibility lines along the B road. The land is within the ownership of the applicant and therefore the improvement can be made. The PA has already asked the applicant to improve the access and this is shown on the plans submitted with the application.

What impact will the cycle track have?

The original intention was to have the cycle track available for the occupiers of the holiday units only. However the applicant has decided it would be unviable to provide the track unless other users can also be attracted and a small charge levied. There is adequate existing hard standing within the farm complex for the parking of approximately 20 cars. The applicant is seeking to attract families and essentially the cycle track is for learners and smaller children.

As the cycle track is located within a small woodland and does not involve the removal of trees, is not intrusive in the landscape and uses minimal new hard surfaces the PA

considers this aspect of the proposal acceptable. It also considers that the proposal will compliment other cycle tracks in the area that cater for more extreme cycling enthusiasts.

### **Conclusions**

The PA concludes that the proposal conforms to planning policy, creates minimum disruption and will supplement the farm income of a small mixed farm. It therefore grants a conditional planning permission.

**Proposal 2: Erection of Farm Shop and associated storage produce building (2000 sq.ft in area) on an organic vegetable and beef farm.**

**Is the design of the new building acceptable?**

The applicant intends to sell produce grown on the farm but also other related produce brought in from outside. The farm is a thriving organic operation and the farmer wishes to boost income by selling directly to the public. There are no traditional farm buildings remaining and all other buildings on the farm are used for agricultural operations. The design of the new building is of simple rendered construction with a slate roof. The existing farm house is rendered and the siting is thought appropriate, adjacent but separated from the main agricultural enterprise.

**Will the proposal affect any nearby shops in villages or towns?**

The area has a reputation for producing good quality organic produce. Although there is a town five miles away the PA considers that the speciality produce sold and the size of the retail area (500 sq.ft.) will not have an adverse effect on nearby retailers. The PA is slightly concerned about the number of people that could be attracted but there is a very good access and sufficient parking on site.

**Is there impact on Amenity?**

Yes potentially. There are two properties on the opposite side of the road and the car parking area is visible from these properties and from the main road. As a consequence the PA has asked the applicant to provide tree planting and earth bunding along two sides of the car park. The applicant is happy to do this as he thinks it will improve the attractiveness of the site and the earth bunding will reduce noise nuisance. The applicant, being a good neighbour has previously discussed his proposal with the occupiers of the nearby properties and they raise no objections during the consultation on the planning application.

**Conclusion**

As most of the produce sold in the shop will be grown on the farm and its scale is relatively small the PA recommended granting planning permission. However they condition that 60% of the produce to be sold at anytime should be produced on the farm.

**Proposal 3: Erection of a small workshop (500sq.ft) for the manufacture of specialised steel goods.**

Is the building and site suitable for the use?

The farm is located close to main urban areas and all the existing buildings are in agricultural use. The farmer has skills in metal manufacture and is currently making steel gates and other small goods for the agricultural industry. He now wants to erect a bespoke workshop, employ one apprentice and manufacture goods for the domestic and general industrial market. The building will be located close to other buildings within the farm complex and there is sufficient space for the movement of delivery vehicles. The building is suitably designed and built in rendered block work with a steel clad roof which blends in with other site buildings.

**Will there be issues of amenity?**

There are no properties, apart from the farm dwelling, within 400m of the workshop therefore noise from steel cutting and fabrication is unlikely to cause a problem. Existing buildings around the workshop will also baffle noise from the site. Most of the noisier finishing work will be carried out inside the building.

**Conclusion**

The PA came to the conclusion that the use will have minimal visual impact and the increase in traffic to the site is negligible and acceptable. They recognise that such an activity could be located within an industrial park. However there are obvious diversification opportunities which could complement the overall farming activity. The creation of new employment with the possibility of more jobs to follow is also a material planning consideration. The planning authority used conditions attached to the planning consent to ensure the new building is tied in perpetuity to the agricultural holding. It is likely that a further modest expansion of the business in the future could also be permitted in this case.

## Appendix 2

### Development Policy 1: General Development Principles (1)

To conserve and enhance the 'Special Qualities' and purposes of the National Park development will only be permitted where all the following apply:

- i. The nature, location and siting, height, form and scale of the development is compatible with the capacity and character of the site and locality within which it is located.
- ii. A development within the domestic curtilage of a dwelling will not detract from the character and form of the existing dwelling or its setting in the landscape.
- iii. The development is not unduly prominent in the landscape and will not significantly harm the amenity of neighbouring property.
- iv. The development reflects a good sustainable design standard, uses materials that are sympathetic to or enhance their surroundings and conforms with Development Policy 6: Sustainable Design and Materials.
- v. The development will not have an unacceptable adverse impact on the characteristic biodiversity of Snowdonia, particularly habitats and species protected under national and European legislation.
- vi. The development does not result in the loss of landscape features, including woodland, healthy trees, hedgerows, dry stone walls or damage any important open space or public view.
- vii. An appropriate access meeting highway standards exists or can be provided without harm to the character of the locality or neighbouring amenity.
- viii. Adequate provision of car parking and on-site turning areas are provided where necessary which are appropriate to the scale of the proposed development. Car parking surfaces should be permeable where appropriate to the development.
- ix. The traffic implications of the development do not result in volumes or types of traffic which will create highway or safety problems on the local road network, or significantly harm the landscape or amenity of local people.
- x. Appropriate services and infrastructure can be provided without compromising the quality and character of the landscape and cultural heritage.
- xi. The development will not have an unacceptable adverse impact, through

increased resource use, discharges or emissions, on public health, surface and ground water (quality, quantity or ecology), air quality, soil and the best and most versatile agricultural land.

- xii. The development is compatible with, and does not cause significant harm, to the environment, neighbouring residential amenity or the amenity of the Park by way of noise, dust, vibration, odour, light pollution, hazardous materials or waste production.
- xiii. The development will not have an unacceptable adverse impact on the quiet enjoyment of the area by the public.
- xiv. The development will not have an unacceptable adverse impact on public rights of way, other recreational routes or open country.
- xv. Land stability can be achieved without causing unacceptable environmental or landscape impact.
- xvi. The risks of, and consequences of flooding can be managed on and off site to an acceptable level in line with national planning policy.

#### **Development Policy 9: Conversion and change of use of rural buildings (9)**

The conversion or change of use of redundant rural buildings outside any housing development boundary will be permitted for an employment use, short term self catering holiday accommodation or for affordable housing to meet local needs provided that the following criteria are met:

- i. The building is of permanent and substantial construction, of traditional form and character and has an architectural value worthy of preservation.
- ii. The building is capable of conversion without the need for significant rebuilding or extension which would harm its existing character.
- iii. All external works including finishes and property boundaries are sympathetic to the character of the building, local building style and materials and do not harm the character of any surrounding building group.
- iv. The proposal or any new ancillary structures do not harm the character of the landscape in which they are located.
- v. The proposal does not lead to the creation of new vehicular access or parking areas that would adversely affect the character or appearance of the building or that of the wider landscape.

Where the proposal involves a listed building or a building of traditional form or design, the proposal conforms with Development Policy 7: Listed and Traditional Buildings.

Proposals for new affordable dwellings will only be granted where the requirements of Strategic Policy G: Housing are met including the possibility of commuted sums.

An independent structural survey will be required where there is any doubt over the structural stability of the building or it is considered that the proposed works would result in major or substantial reconstruction.

Applicants must demonstrate that the proposed residential use would not displace an existing use which requires the construction of an alternative building to enable it to continue.

### **Development Policy 20: Agricultural diversification (20)**

Within the National Park support will be given to agricultural diversification proposals, which assist in maintaining the viability of a farm holding and further National Park purposes, where:

- i. The development forms part of an agricultural diversification scheme.
- ii. The proposal is secondary to the use of the remaining land on the holding for livestock or crop production.
- iii. The scheme takes place on a holding which is registered as an existing agricultural business.
- iv. The development complies with Development Policy 9.

Where a new building is required to enable the diversification proposal to be undertaken, the National Park Authority will require the applicant to demonstrate that the re-use of an existing building is not practical. Where the re-use of an existing building is not practical, any new building proposed must:

- v. Be essential for the sole purpose of the operation of the proposed diversification scheme.
- vi. Be of a type and scale which reflects the nature of the diversification proposal.

Where such requirements are satisfied the National Park Authority will use conditions attached to the planning consent or require the applicant to enter into a legal agreement to ensure that the new building is tied in perpetuity to the agricultural holding.