

2.46 THE REUSE AND ADAPTATION OF RURAL BUILDINGS (ENV. 19)

2.46.1 The focus of rural policy is on expanding the diversity of the rural economy while preserving and enhancing the environment of the countryside. The Structure Plan accepts in principle the reuse and adaptation of existing buildings provided the proposed uses are appropriate in scale, form, impact, character and siting to their location in the countryside and the existing buildings are capable of conversion without major or complete reconstruction.

2.46.2 The Council in making its judgement on specific proposals will take into account the likelihood of any positive benefits that may arise to protect and enhance the rural landscape and nature conservation interests. Buildings which are so derelict that they could be brought back into use only by complete or substantial reconstruction do not fall within the scope of this policy.

2.46.3 Having regard to the need to sustain and diversify the rural economy, it is appropriate that the Council should give particular priority to local employment conversions and uses. The Council will define the acceptable limits of non-agricultural activities permitted by this policy and resist further expansion (by way of additional buildings or site area) into the countryside.

2.46.4 The Rural White Paper reaffirms the importance of economic diversification and the need to accommodate change while continuing to conserve the countryside. A possibility under consideration by the Government is the introduction of a 'rural business class' which would be subject to limits on traffic generation. By helping to reduce the risk of uncontrolled expansion local authorities should have more confidence in allowing business diversification in the rural area. PPG7 proposes greater discrimination in favour of the reuse of rural buildings for business rather than residential purposes.

POLICY ENV.19 Proposals for the re use or adaptation of existing buildings in the countryside will be permitted provided:

- (a) the form, bulk and general design of the existing buildings are in keeping with their surroundings; and**
- (b) the existing buildings are suitable for the proposed new use(s) without needing extensive alterations, rebuilding and/or enlargement; and**
- (c) the conversion would not have a detrimental effect on the fabric, character and setting of historic buildings; and**
- (d) the conversion respects local building styles and materials; and**
- (e) the proposed curtilage of the new development is not visually intrusive or harmful to the amenities of the surrounding countryside; and**
- (f) the proposed new use(s) would not generate traffic of a type or amount harmful to local rural roads, or require improvements which would detrimentally affect the character of such roads or the area generally; and**
- (g) the proposed new use(s) would not result in material harm to the environmental qualities of the surrounding rural area; and**
- (h) the use of the building by protected species is surveyed and mitigation measures are approved by the Council using expert advice.**

In applying the criteria of this policy the Council will favour, where appropriate, the reuse and adaptation of rural buildings for business purposes.

2.46.7 Assessment of the highway implications will be made on the basis of the proposal and what would be considered necessary in terms of improvements by the Highway Authority. The reference to 'rural roads' is a generic term and the Council would be concerned as to the effects of the proposed development on rural tracks, footpaths and bridleways. Relevant considerations would include past and existing levels of traffic generated from the site; the level, type and frequency of traffic likely to be generated by the proposed development; and traffic levels accepted under any existing planning permission attached to the land.

