



**Brighton & Hove
City Council**

PAN 01

Farm Diversification

Adopted - December 2005

Brighton & Hove City Council's Local Development Framework



Planning Advice Note



Introduction

The City Council recognises that the diversification of farm businesses may be necessary and beneficial to help maintain the efficient operation of farms and make a positive contribution to the rural economy more generally.

It is hoped that this note will be useful to farmers / landowners when they consider making proposals for farm diversification projects. It aims to provide a simple guide to the planning requirements that are most likely to arise when considering any proposal for farm diversification. It also identifies examples of potential and actual diversification opportunities.

Section One: Planning Policy Framework

Government Guidance

At a national level, current guidance regarding farm diversification is set out in Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS7): *Sustainable Development in Rural Areas* (August 2004).

The guidance recognises the increasing importance to farmers of diversification into both agricultural and non-agricultural activities in order to help sustain the viability of many farm businesses. Local planning authorities are encouraged to be supportive of well-conceived farm diversification schemes for business purposes that are **consistent in scale** with their rural or urban fringe location.

Although a supportive approach to farm diversification is encouraged, the guidance states that this should not result in excessive expansion and encroachment of building development into the countryside. In particular, the guidance advises local planning authorities to:

- Encourage the re-use or replacement of existing buildings where feasible; and
- Have regard to the amenity of any nearby residents or other rural businesses that may be adversely affected by new types of on-farm development.

The protection of the environment and the need for development to be sensitive to the character of the countryside and local distinctiveness is also stressed.

Regional Planning Guidance

The South-East region is subject to guidance in the form of Regional Planning Guidance for the South-East (RPG9) (March 2001), which is in the process of being replaced by the draft South East Plan (consultation draft, January 2005).

RPG9 states that development plans should encourage farm diversification to allow the development of alternative sources of income and employment for those in rural areas.



In particular, initiatives that would add value to the agricultural product of the farm, provide for tourism, leisure or cultural activities or other appropriate economic activities, should be promoted.

The draft South East Plan recognises the importance of strengthening land-based industries (agriculture, horticulture and forestry), and their ancillary industries, to enable them to **support and maintain incomes and commercial viability**. In particular, it advises that new Local Development Documents (which will be produced under the new planning system) should be supportive of these industries and of rural economic diversification, **where applications show positive benefits**.

Local Planning Guidance

A new planning system for regional and local planning was introduced from September 2004 under The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. However, for at least the next three years, the relevant development plan framework will remain the East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Structure Plan (December 1999) and the Brighton & Hove Local Plan (July 2005).

The East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Structure Plan sets out strategic planning policies to guide development. In terms of farm diversification, the relevant sections include the strategic policies for Rural Areas and the Environment policies.

The Brighton & Hove Local Plan sets out the local planning policy framework for the administrative area of Brighton & Hove, which includes areas of countryside on the city's periphery. The Local Plan contains the relevant local planning policies against which all applications for development (including changes of use) are assessed.

In terms of development in the countryside and farm diversification proposals, a number of the local plan policies are likely to be particularly relevant. Applicants are advised to note the particular requirements of policies outlined in:

- Chapter 1: Transport;
- Chapter 3: Quality of Development; and
- Chapter 7: Nature Conservation and Countryside

Generally, development outside the built-up area of the city is not permitted because the countryside needs safeguarding for its own sake. However, the local plan recognises that some development in countryside or urban fringe locations may be acceptable and in some instances necessary – for example, the diversification of activities on farms which do not prejudice the agricultural use. Where development is permissible, it will be required to be **unobtrusive** and must respect the **form, scale and character** of the countryside location.



Section Two: Planning Issues and Considerations

In terms of considering the suitability (in planning terms) of any business as a farm 'diversification' opportunity, there are a number of important land use planning issues that will need to be considered and addressed:

- A. The scale and intensity of the proposed use;
- B. Accessibility, access arrangement to the farm, traffic activity and highway safety;
- C. Neighbour amenity issues;
- D. Landscape impacts and opportunities for enhancement;
- E. Wildlife impacts and opportunities for enhancement;
- F. Re-use of rural buildings / New buildings; and
- G. Use of signage / advertisements

A. Scale and intensity of use – impact on rural character

Diversification schemes should help to support, rather than replace, farming activities on the rest of the farm. The scale of any diversification should not undermine the rural character of the farm or the surrounding area. The scale of activity will also determine likely impacts such as noise, traffic generation, hours of operation, landscape and visual impacts.

It may be beneficial to produce a farm plan which enables the overall approach to the farm business to be understood, rather than operating on an *ad hoc* approach with small applications coming forward over time. A farm plan might indicate how a proposal fits in with the overall plans for the farm.

In some instances, it may be necessary for the local planning authority to impose some control over the scale of an activity in order that the rural character of the area is not undermined.

**SEE: Structure Plan policies: S1, S10-S12, EN1-5
Local Plan policies: QD1-2, QD27, NC5-8**

B. Access, traffic activity, highway safety

Given that farms are generally located in more peripheral/rural locations, an obvious issue is accessibility of the farm for workers, suitability of access arrangements to the farm, traffic activity generated and highway safety. Particular problems can arise when a public right of way runs along the access.

Information regarding existing and proposed traffic movements is likely to be required with most planning applications. It may be inappropriate to locate developments that rely on car access in such areas because of potential problems such as increased traffic activity, noise, safety or parking congestion.



A 'travel plan' may also be required in areas of low public transport accessibility – which could set out remedial measures to make a proposal more acceptable.

With larger scale applications, it may be necessary to submit a full Traffic Assessment. The Traffic Assessment should encourage non-car modes of transport.

The level of parking will need to be considered in conjunction with the proposed use. Parking areas may need to be well screened from the wider locality or to make use of existing buildings.

SEE: Structure Plan policies: TRI-3, TR5, TRI6, TRI8
Local Plan policies: TRI-4, TRI4, TRI9

C. Neighbour amenity

Neighbour concerns will include dust, noise, odour, lighting, hours of operation and traffic movements through residential areas.

SEE: Structure Plan policies: TRI-3
Local Plan policies: QD27, TRI-3

D. Landscape impacts and opportunities for enhancements

Given that many of the farms within the Brighton & Hove area fall within countryside / AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) landscape designations and within the Designation Order area of the proposed South Downs National Park, any diversification scheme will require careful consideration in terms of its impact on the surrounding landscape – which in addition to visual impact can include all the issues identified in part C) above. Open storage, for example, is unlikely to be acceptable in areas of nationally protected landscape. Mitigation measures may be required, such as screen planting around areas of car parking, improvements to farm buildings and positive measures to promote and enhance wildlife conservation.

SEE: Structure Plan policies: S1, ENI-5
Local Plan policies: NC5-8, QDI5-16

E. Wildlife impacts and opportunities for enhancement

Farm buildings may be the habitat of bats, owls and other birds. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 protects the roosts for these creatures and farm buildings may need surveying. The Council's Ecologist or English Nature can provide further information [see [Contacts](#) in Section Four].

Diversification schemes will also offer opportunities to **integrate and enhance nature conservation features**. Even small proposals can incorporate ponds, native plants and



bird and bat boxes sited appropriately. Such features will normally be required as part of farm building diversification proposals.

SEE: Structure Plan policies: S1, EN17-19
Local Plan policies: NCI-4, QDI7-18

F. Re-use of existing buildings / new buildings

The adaptation or conversion of existing rural buildings for appropriate diversification proposals will be encouraged. Such buildings will need to be of sound construction and their **form, bulk and general design in keeping with their surroundings**. New buildings will be resisted whenever possible – where exceptional circumstances permit, they should be sited close to existing buildings or building groups, rather than isolated in the landscape and again must respect the form, scale and character of the local area and landscape. A design statement may be required which sets out how the proposal integrates with the surrounding area and nature conservation. It would be particularly desirable to produce a comprehensive farm plan that identifies which buildings may need replacing and where (see part A).

SEE: Structure Plan policies: S10-12, EN1, EN26
Local Plan policies: NC5 - 8

G. Advertising and signage

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** to respect the character of the area and be **well sited** so as not to cause a traffic hazard.

SEE: Local Plan policy: QDI2

Section Three: Diversification Opportunities

Listed below are some examples of different forms of farm diversification which may prove acceptable in planning terms, **subject to the details of any particular proposal in relation to the planning considerations set out above.**

The list is not meant to be exhaustive and there may well be other examples of non-agricultural uses that could also prove acceptable:

- **Farm shops**
- **Farm based food processing**
- **Equestrian development**



- **Woodland produce and woodland based enterprise (e.g. forestry, woodchips)**
- **Tourist accommodation and visitor facilities (e.g. bed and breakfast, caravan sites, farm trails, 'pick-your-own' food)**
- **Renewable energy crops / biomass (e.g. rape, sunflower)**
- **Farm workshop facilities and services**
- **Composting**
- **Other small business uses linked to farming (e.g. brewing, milling, processing produce, localised meat preparation)**

The conversion of existing farm buildings to residential use will be resisted; exceptions may occasionally be made where every attempt has been made to secure a suitable business re-use with no success or where it is to provide social rented accommodation to meet an essential housing need within the locality - for example, the need to enable farm, forestry or certain other workers who are essential for the effective and safe operation of rural-based enterprises to be housed.

Section Four: Diversification Examples

It is worth bearing in mind that the majority (over 80%) of diversification schemes across the UK are **approved**, including those in the urban fringe area. Success is often dependent on following the tips below:

- Ensuring the proposal is **in line with development plan policies**.
- Considering the effect it might have on **neighbours, the local community and the environment**.
- Making sure that **accurate and thorough information** is supplied, ideally as part of a **farm business plan**.
- **Discussing your proposals in advance with planning officers** (accompanied by a planning consultant, land agent or surveyor, if necessary).

Some examples of successful farm diversification schemes across the region are outlined below:

- Park Farm, Arundel, West Sussex (Arun District Council) – a high quality conversion of former estate home farm buildings to offices.
- West Stoke Farm, Downs Road, West Stoke, West Sussex (Chichester District Council) – a high quality conversion of fine buildings to offices.
- Langley Farm, Langley, West Sussex (Chichester District Council) – conversion of buildings to workshops for a green oak carpentry firm.
- Streat Hall Farm, Streat Hill, East Sussex (Lewes District Council) – conversion of buildings to storage and a micro-brewery.



- Ranscombe Farm, Ranscombe Lane, near Lewes, East Sussex (Lewes District Council) – part conversion / part new-build (replacing existing agricultural building) to holiday lets.
- Red House Farm, Pyecombe, West Sussex (Mid Sussex District Council) – small-scale conversion of buildings to offices.

Section Five: Next Steps

Anyone intending to submit a planning application for a farm diversification scheme is strongly advised to **contact the local planning authority** at an early stage to discuss their proposal with planning officers. Advice can be offered regarding:

- whether a planning application is required;
- information likely to be required to be submitted with an application; and
- whether a scheme is likely to be considered favourably.

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

Council Contacts

Planning Policy

Please contact the Administrator for the Local Development Team initially:
01273 292505

Development Control

Please contact one of the area team Planning Support Officers initially: -

East Area Planning Team (Brighton excluding Regency and Withdean wards):
01273 292509

West Area Planning Team (Hove and Brighton Regency and Withdean wards):
01273 292121

Building Control

Please contact one of the Administrators initially: 01273 292030 / 01273 292050

Ecologist

Matthew Thomas: 01273 292371

**External Contacts**

Countryside Agency, South East Regional Office, Dacre House, Dacre Street, London, SW1H 0DH (020 7340 2900); website: <http://www.countryside.gov.uk/>

English Nature, Sussex & Surrey Team, 32-33 North Street, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 2PH (01273 476595); website: <http://www.english-nature.org.uk/>

Environment Agency (Sussex Area Office), Saxon House, Little High Street, Worthing, West Sussex, BN11 1PH (01903 703824); website: <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/>

Forestry Commission, Forest Research Station, Alice Holt Lodge, Wrecclesham, Farnham, Surrey, GU10 4LH; website: www.forestry.gov.uk/

South Downs Conservation Board, Victorian Barn, Victorian Business Centre, Ford Lane, Ford, Arundel, West Sussex, BN18 0EF (01243 558700);
e-mail: comms@southdowns-aonb.gov.uk

South East England Development Agency, Cross Lanes, Guildford, Surrey, GU1 1YA (01483 500791); website: <http://www.seeda.co.uk/>

South East England Tourist Board, The Old Brew House, Warwick Park, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN2 3TU (01892 540766); website: <http://www.southeastengland.uk.com/>

Sussex Enterprise, Greenacre Court, Station Road, Burgess Hill, West Sussex, RH15 9DS (01444 259200 / 0845 678 8867); website: <http://www.sussexenterprise.co.uk/index.jsp>

Documentation List

A Farmer's Guide to the Planning System (July 2001)
website: <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1163344>

Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS7): Sustainable development in rural areas (August 2004)
website: <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1143824>

Regional Planning Guidance for the South-East (RPG9) (March 2001)
website: <http://www.gose.gov.uk/gose/docs/171301/311174/RPG9March2001.pdf>

Draft South East Plan (January 2005)
website: http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/southeastplan/plan/view_plan.html

East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Structure Plan (December 1999)
website:
<http://www.eastsussexcc.gov.uk/environment/planning/development/localplanning/download23.htm>

Brighton & Hove Local Plan (July 2005)
website:
http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/downloads/bhcc/local_plan_2005/B_H_Local_Plan_2005.pdf

For further information contact:

The Local Development Team, Planning Strategy & Projects,
Brighton & Hove City Council, Hove Town Hall, Norton Road,
Hove BN3 3BQ.

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LDF website at: www.brighton-hove.gov.uk