



**Monmouthshire County Council  
Local Development Plan**

**Draft Supplementary Planning  
Guidance**

**Rural Conversions to a Residential or  
Tourism Use**

**(Policies H4 and T2)**

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## 1 Introduction: Purpose of this Supplementary Planning Guidance

- 1.1 This note is one of a series of Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) Notes that have been prepared to provide supporting information and advice on the implementation of the Council's LDP policies. The Notes are intended to offer clear guidance on the main considerations that will be taken into account by the Council when reaching decisions on planning applications and in this case how planning policy on the conversion/rehabilitation of buildings in the open countryside to residential use will be implemented in practice.
- 1.2 The existing Conversion/Rehabilitation of Buildings in the Open Countryside to Residential Use Assessment of Re-use for Business Purposes SPG has been incorporated into this SPG. The April 2015 SPG has therefore been superseded. The Conversion of Agricultural Buildings Design Guide produced in April 2015 is however retained as a separate document and should be read alongside this SPG.
- 1.3 This SPG is prepared in the context of the Monmouthshire County Council Adopted Local Development Plan (LDP), February 2014. The SPG is a material consideration in relation to planning applications and appeals.
- 1.4 This SPG is intended to provide certainty and clarity for applicants, officers and Members in the interpretation and implementation of the LDP policy framework, specifically Policy H4, in relation to proposals for rural residential conversions. The SPG also provides clarity on the interpretation of the part of Policy T2 (Visitor Accommodation outside Settlements) that relates to rural conversion proposals for visitor accommodation.

The SPG contains the following information:

- **Section 2** gives an overview of the planning policy context in relation to rural conversions.
- **Section 3** provides detailed guidance on the interpretation and implementation of Policy H4 in the assessment of proposals for residential conversions/rehabilitations in the open countryside.
- **Section 4** provides information on assessing proposals for rural visitor accommodation conversions and the interpretation of the criteria listed in Policy T2.
- **Section 5** provides information on submitting a planning application for rural conversions, including details of the Council's pre-planning application advice service.
  
- **Appendices**

LDP Rural Conversion Policy Framework (Appendix A)

Contacts (Appendix B)

### National Planning Policy

- 2.1 National planning policy contained in Planning Policy Wales (PPW) is silent on the conversion of existing rural buildings for a residential use. The main emphasis in national planning policy is to adopt a positive approach to the conversion of rural buildings for business re-use (*PPW Edition 9, November 2016, para 7.6.5*).
- 2.2 Technical Advice Note 6 (TAN6) Planning for Sustainable Rural Communities (July 2010) provides guidance on the re-use or adaptation of rural buildings, noting that the primary consideration should be whether the nature and extent of the new use proposed for the building is acceptable in planning terms. TAN6 indicates that the conversion of rural buildings currently in industrial or commercial use to dwellings may have an adverse impact on the local economy (*TAN6 para 3.5.1*). TAN6 nevertheless states that while residential conversions have a minimal impact on the rural economy, conversions to a holiday use can contribute more and may reduce pressure to use other houses in the area for holiday use (*TAN6 para 3.6.1*).

### Monmouthshire Local Development Plan

- 2.3 The conversion/rehabilitation of buildings in the open countryside for residential use is an exception to national policies which generally seek to strictly control residential development in the open countryside. In accordance with PPW, the preferred use for such buildings is for employment uses, as well as for tourism, sport and recreation (subject to detailed planning considerations). There has, however, been considerable demand for the rehabilitation and conversion of barns and vacant rural buildings into residential units in Monmouthshire. Reflecting this trend, Policy H4 sets out strict controls to be applied in the consideration of such proposals in order to ensure that the conversion/rehabilitation of buildings does not detract from the special qualities of Monmouthshire's open countryside.
- 2.4 Strategic Policy S1 relates to the spatial distribution of new housing provision in Monmouthshire. The main focus is within or adjoining the Main Towns of Abergavenny, Chepstow and Monmouth. A smaller amount of new housing development is provided in the Severnside sub-region along with lesser amounts directed to the Rural Secondary Settlements of Usk, Raglan and Penperlleni. Some of the identified Main Villages also provide for small scale developments of a maximum of 15 dwellings as well as infill opportunities. A number of Minor Villages are also identified where small scale residential development will be allowed in the circumstances set out in LDP Policy H3. Outside the settlements listed, open countryside policies apply. In relation to rural buildings Strategic Policy S1 states planning permission will only be allowed for:

**“Acceptable conversions of rural buildings, in the circumstances set out in Policy H4”**

- 2.5 Strategic Policy S1 is supported by a number of detailed development management housing policies which provide a more detailed policy framework to support the provision of housing. Policy H4 is included within this framework.

- 2.6 Tourism is of importance to the economy of Monmouthshire. Strategic Policy S11 relates to the Visitor Economy and specifically seeks to enable the provision and enhancement of sustainable tourism development in Monmouthshire. Strategic Policy S11 is supported by a number of detailed development management tourism policies, including Policy T2.
- 2.7 Policy T2 relates specifically to visitor accommodation outside settlements. Policy T2 notes that proposals for visitor accommodation outside settlements should look to the re-use of existing buildings in order to protect the countryside from inappropriate development. This is in line with national guidance, which recognises that the re-use and adaptation of existing rural buildings has an important role in meeting the needs of rural areas for tourism development. This SPG only relates to the part of Policy T2 relating to rural conversion proposals for visitor accommodation.
- 2.8 Proposals for rural conversions should also have regard to the Council's Conversion of Agricultural Building's Design Guide SPG, Affordable Housing SPG (for residential conversions), Green Infrastructure SPG and the emerging Landscape SPG.

### 3 Interpretation and Implementation of Policy H4 for Assessing Proposals for Residential Conversions/Rehabilitation in the Open Countryside

- 3.1 The primary focus of this SPG is to provide further clarification on the criteria set out in Policy H4 in the Local Development Plan. Policy H4 contains a total of seven criteria that must all be given further consideration in the determination of planning applications, for the conversion/rehabilitation of buildings for residential use in the open countryside. It is important that any such proposals conserve the character and quality of Monmouthshire's countryside and natural heritage value. Such proposals will only be permitted where they meet the criteria set out in Policy H4 and other relevant policies of the plan, particularly those which seek to minimise any detrimental effect on landscape value, environmental quality and amenity (including S13, LC5, EP1, MV1, DES1 and NE1). Proposals should be sympathetic to the rural setting in terms of the particular location, appropriate design and traffic considerations.

#### **Policy H4 – Conversion / Rehabilitation of Buildings in the Open Countryside for Residential Use**

**The conversion / rehabilitation of a building in the open countryside for residential use will be permitted where all the following criteria are met:**

- a) the form, bulk and general design of the proposal, including any extensions, respect the rural character and design of the building;**
- b) the proposal, including curtilage and access, is in scale and sympathy with the surrounding landscape and does not require the provision of unsightly infrastructure and ancillary buildings;**
- c) rebuilding works, necessitated by poor structural conditions and/ or the need for new openings in walls, should not involve substantial reconstruction, with structural surveys being required for marginal cases;**
- d) the more isolated and prominent the building, the more stringent will be the design requirements with regard to new door and window openings, extensions, means of access, service provision and garden curtilage, especially if located within the Wye Valley AONB;**
- e) buildings of modern and /or utilitarian construction and materials such as concrete block work, portal framed buildings clad in metal sheeting or buildings of substandard quality and / or incongruous appearance will not be considered favourably for residential conversion. Other buildings will be expected to have been used for their intended purpose for a significant period of time and particularly close scrutiny will be given to proposals relating to those less than 10 years old, especially where there has been no change in activity on the unit;**
- f) the building is capable of providing adequate living space (and ancillary space such as garaging) within the structure. Only very modest extensions will be allowed and normal permitted development rights to extend further or to construct ancillary buildings will be withdrawn; and**
- g) the conversion of buildings that are well suited for business use will not be permitted unless the applicant has made every reasonable**

**attempt to secure suitable business use and the application is supported by a statement of the efforts that have been made.**

**The above criteria will be applied strictly; proposals that are deemed not to comply with them will be judged against national policies relating to the erection of new dwellings in the countryside or against Policy T2 relating to the re-use and adaptation of existing buildings to provide permanent serviced or self-catering visitor accommodation. The above criteria will also be applied to proposals to extend buildings that have already been converted.**

- 3.2 The majority of rural buildings for which planning permission is sought for conversion and re-use in Monmouthshire are farm buildings. Notwithstanding this, the following guidance relates to the conversion of all types of rural buildings in the open countryside. The guidance is also applicable to the rehabilitation of abandoned dwellings i.e. former dwellings that have lost their residential use.
- 3.3 Many rural buildings are also important historical assets and may therefore have Listed Building status. Listed Buildings and rural buildings located in Conservation Areas are afforded a higher level of protection that seeks to preserve this special character. While all rural conversions should be carefully considered, the special character of Listed Buildings demands a higher level of control. As with all Listed Buildings, the Listed Building Consent process extends to protecting the internal character of the building as well as the external appearance and the wider setting. Further guidance in relation to Listed Building rural conversions is set out in the Conversion of Agricultural Buildings Design Guide. Pre-planning application advice is strongly advised in respect of rural conversions relating to Listed Buildings.

**Form, bulk and general design requirements (criteria a), c) and d) of relevance)**

- 3.4 As a predominately rural County, farm buildings can range from a pigsty to a large corn barn. Many of these buildings are in close proximity to the main farmhouse but can also be in isolated locations. All rural buildings suitable for conversion must be traditional in design and material, of good quality and have character in their appearance. The conversion of traditional buildings can successfully secure the retention of buildings in perpetuity in the countryside which may otherwise be lost.
- 3.5 Rural buildings suitable for conversion are generally made of stone, brick or are timber framed and normally have a slate, stone or pantile roof. In accordance with criterion a), the diversity of rural buildings should be respected by retaining individual features, materials, architectural style and setting of the building/group of buildings. Paragraph 3.2.3 of TAN6 strengthens this approach noting that conversion proposals should respect the landscape along with local building styles and materials.
- 3.6 Criterion (c) relates to the need for new openings in walls. Additional openings should be avoided as far as possible due to the potential damaging impact on the existing character of rural buildings. Existing openings should be retained and blocked up openings should be reused, wherever possible. Where there is an overriding need for new openings they must be kept to a minimum, be sympathetic in design and proportional to the existing building. As noted in criterion d), design requirements will be more stringent within the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and where

rural buildings are located in more isolated or prominent areas. Further detailed design guidance is set out in the Conversion of Agricultural Buildings Design Guide.

- 3.7 Permitted Development rights to modify any rural buildings that have been converted will be withdrawn, in order to retain and protect the character of such conversions.

**Structural condition** (*criterion c*) of relevance)

- 3.8 Substantial rebuilding/reconstruction works to enable a rural conversion to a residential use will not be permitted. This would be tantamount to a new build dwelling in the open countryside, contrary to other policies set out within the LDP. This also applies to applications to convert rural buildings where substantial reconstruction has already taken place in association with the building's former use.
- 3.9 Generally, the building should be capable for conversion without the need for rebuilding/reconstruction works. In some instances, however, a small amount of rebuilding/reconstruction may be necessary to facilitate a rural conversion to take place. Approval for this will depend on the nature and extent of the works, due to the potential impact on the existing character and structural integrity of the building. Any such works will be considered on a case by case basis and should be detailed on the submitted plans. Pre-planning application advice is strongly advised in such instances.
- 3.10 Where the structural condition of a rural building is uncertain, a structural survey from a suitably qualified person must be submitted to demonstrate that the original building is structurally sound, largely intact and capable of conversion for a residential use. Due to the nature of the work involved in rural conversions, applications may be sent to officers in the Building Control department for comment.
- 3.11 Once conversion work has commenced, great care must be taken to ensure that the conversion works do not result in the collapse of the existing building's structure, which would result in the need for rebuilding works not permitted under the original planning permission. A further planning application would be required for any additional works. Substantial reconstruction, however, would be resisted as this would be tantamount to a new build dwelling in the open countryside.
- 3.12 While not required in all circumstances, evidence in the form of a structural survey from the outset of the proposal is recommended. This will provide confidence that the building is structurally sound and to ensure the integrity of the building is not compromised during the conversion works.

**Determining the suitability of a conversion** (*criterion e*) of relevance)

- 3.13 Modern and utilitarian buildings are designed to be functional and are not generally considered to be aesthetically pleasing. These buildings are often of an industrial character and due to their design and modern construction methods are unlikely to be suitable for residential conversion. Modern construction methods include, but are not limited to: steel frame construction, buildings clad in metal sheeting, corrugated sheets, concrete blockwork and plastic. These buildings do, nevertheless, have an important role in the economy of rural areas and may be suitable for conversion to alternative employment uses, subject to other detailed planning considerations.
- 3.14 Open structures such as Dutch Barns do not lend themselves to conversion. These are often large open structures of steel frame construction and would require a substantial amount of new build development to enable them to accommodate a



residential use. Buildings of substandard quality or incongruous appearance will not be considered favourably for conversion.

- 3.15 For other quality buildings of a traditional character and appearance that are not historic and have been built using modern construction methods, it is expected that these will have been used for their intended purpose for a significant period of time. As noted in criterion (e) proposals to convert buildings of less than 10 years old will be given particular close scrutiny. This will assist in ensuring that buildings have not been constructed for an agricultural or rural diversification purpose with the intention of early conversion to an alternative use. Comprehensive evidence of the building's use since completion will be required in support of any application. This will be of particular importance where there has been no change in activity on the unit. This approach is reflected in Welsh Government Guidance set out in paragraph 3.2.1 of TAN6.
- 3.16 The definition of modern is not limited solely to buildings less than 10 years old. The policy states particular scrutiny will be given for buildings of less than 10 years old. Even for buildings older than 10 years the Council would need to be satisfied that there has not been a deliberate attempt to abuse the planning system and that the building has legitimately been used for its original purpose.

**Provision of adequate living space** (*criterion f) of relevance*)

- 3.17 As outlined in criterion f) buildings proposed for rural conversion should be capable of providing adequate living space within the existing structure (including ancillary space such as garaging, which is discussed in paragraphs 3.18 to 3.20). Buildings that are deemed to be too small to accommodate a permanent residential use would not be considered appropriate for rural conversion. The conversion of an unsuitably sized building would potentially result in additional planning applications for extensions at a later date in order to provide more living space. This approach would be contrary to criterion (f) of Policy H4. It is appreciated, however, that small barn conversions could sometimes accommodate 1 or 2 people satisfactorily, and in assessing a building's suitability for conversion a minimum standard of 50 sq.m<sup>1</sup> will be adopted. Conversions of buildings below this size will not be approved. This 50 sq.m standard relates to the internal floorspace (including storage space) and conversion of a property of this size will only be allowed on the basis of a one bedroomed property for two people. If a case is made for the conversion of a building of this size at the time of a planning application, it is very unlikely extensions will be permissible in future to allow for additional people to reside at the property.

**Extensions and ancillary buildings** (*criterion f) of relevance*)

- 3.18 The starting point for rural conversions should be the conversion of the existing structure without the need for extensions. However, criterion (f) in Policy H4 does allow for very modest extensions. Any such extensions would need to be carefully assessed to ensure that any additions respect and harmonise with the existing building in relation to its size, scale and form. Extensions must be unobtrusive and subservient to the existing building in every respect. Extensions that would introduce incongruous elements will not be permitted.
- 3.19 The Council will need to be satisfied at the time of the application that adequate ancillary garaging and storage space can be achieved for the dwelling in order to avoid

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<sup>1</sup> The figure is adapted from Technical housing standards – nationally described space standard (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015).

pressure for further, possibly harmful, development at a future date. Vehicles should ideally be parked within an existing enclosed area or an existing outbuilding. New build outbuildings will not normally be acceptable except where modest in size and sensitively located. Where new buildings are permitted in exceptional circumstances, they should reflect their surroundings and be of traditional agricultural design, such as open fronted byres.

- 3.20 The re-use of existing buildings for ancillary garaging and storage space should be considered in the first instance, before contemplating the option of new build. Where appropriate, the utilisation of existing smaller buildings such as pigsties, cattle pens and small stables through conversion would be preferable to new build development. These are often easy to convert but are limited in size so would not be suitable for residential conversion. The criteria of H4 would nevertheless need to be met in all circumstances.
- 3.21 Conservatories and sunrooms are not considered suitable for rural conversions and will not normally be acceptable.
- 3.22 Permitted Development rights to extend further, modify or to construct ancillary buildings will be withdrawn from planning permissions for all rural conversions, in order to retain and protect the character and setting of such conversions.

#### **Conversion of buildings well suited for business use (*criterion g*) of relevance)**

- 3.23 As noted in paragraph 2.1 the Welsh Government advocate a positive approach to the conversion of rural buildings for a business use. Criterion (g) of Policy H4 relates specifically to the conversion of rural buildings well suited for a business use and notes that these will not be permitted to be converted to a residential use unless the applicant has made every reasonable attempt to secure a suitable business use. In order to comply with criterion g) all applications for the conversion of buildings in the countryside to a residential use must be accompanied by a **statement** giving reasons why a conversion to a business use is not practicable or desirable. Paragraph 3.26 provides details on the type of information such a statement should contain.
- 3.24 Applications for the rehabilitation of former dwellings (i.e. abandoned dwellings that have lost their residential use) do not require such a statement. It is accepted that such buildings would not generally have a design and layout that is appropriate for business use. It is also considered unreasonable to require a statement in such circumstances, given that the buildings have previously been used as dwellings.
- 3.25 Additionally, while it is recognised that visitor accommodation provides some employment opportunities and contributes to the rural economy, it is not considered a business use in terms of criterion (g) of Policy H4. As both residential and visitor accommodation uses relate to a C3 use<sup>2</sup>, most residential conversions have the potential to be used as holiday accommodation. Further information in relation to Policy H4 and the links to Policy T2 relating to visitor accommodation use are set out in Section 4 of the SPG.

#### **Business Use Statement Content**

- 3.26 Some of the factors that might result in a building **not** being suitable for a business use are:

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<sup>2</sup> as identified in the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987

**General Location** - In many instances, buildings located in very remote areas will be unsuitable for business uses. Delivery of goods may be difficult, distribution costs are likely to be high and sufficient staff may be unobtainable.

**Local road network** - For road safety reasons, the intensive use of narrow, single carriageway country lanes with few passing places is normally undesirable.

**Site access** - Where site access is difficult, as, for example, where visibility is obstructed by buildings and boundary walls or hedges, its use by significant levels of additional traffic may be hazardous.

**Parking** - A building suitable for a business use must have sufficient parking space available within the existing curtilage. At the same time, the provision of such parking should not be visually intrusive or cause harm to the rural character of the area.

**External appearance** - Conversions of agricultural buildings should seek to maintain the agricultural character and appearance of the existing structure. Generally, business conversions can often be carried out with less harm to the appearance of the building than residential conversions. Business uses that require major alterations, however, such as the insertion of larger windows, delivery doors, air vents and the attachment of other external equipment are unlikely to be appropriate.

**Planning history** - If there is an existing planning permission that could be implemented for the residential conversion of the same building it would be unreasonable to require proof that the building is not suitable for a business use in any subsequent applications for amended schemes.

3.27 If planning permission has already been granted for residential conversion within the same group of buildings this may be sufficient reason for determining that the remaining buildings are not suitable for business uses where this would lead to harm to residential amenity and/or an unsatisfactory relationship between incompatible land uses.

**3.28 When a planning application for the conversion of a building in the open countryside to residential use is submitted, a failure to provide a supporting statement to demonstrate that the building is unsuitable for business use may result in the application being refused.**

#### **The Marketing Exercise**

3.29 Where the Local Planning Authority considers that a building is suitable for business use, applicants will be expected to market it for sale or lease for business purposes prior to submitting a planning application. The results of the marketing exercise should be included in the supporting Statement. If a marketing exercise has not been carried out the Council will request that this be done after the submission of the application, failure to do so may result in the application being refused. If there is any doubt regarding the suitability of the building for business use, marketing will be essential.

**3.30 Where a building is considered well suited for a business use the absence of appropriate details of the marketing undertaken may result in the application being refused.**

- 3.31 The marketing period should last for a continuous period of at least 6 months from the date of the first advert.
- 3.32 It is difficult to be prescriptive about the definition of the marketing exercise as each case will be different. However, the Council will expect a marketing exercise to comprise the equivalent of:
- A minimum of 3 adverts at 2-monthly intervals in a regional newspaper, such as *The Western Mail* or *The South Wales Argus*;
  - Active marketing through a recognised and independent commercial property agent covering South and Mid Wales and bordering English regions;
  - Notifying other organisations who may have an interest in promoting the site (e.g. Monmouthshire County Council Business and Enterprise Section)
- 3.33 The Council will need to be satisfied that genuine attempts have been made to market the property. The supporting statement should include evidence of:
- the extent of the marketing, including copies of all adverts (with dates), when and for how long the advert was in the agent's window, websites etc.;
  - the price at which the property has been marketed (which should reasonably reflect its value as a business premises and is appropriate to the potential business use of the building and its location);
  - written details of any enquiries received, including any firm offers (conditional or unconditional); and
  - a written statement of the commercial property agent's view as to the commercial viability of the site.

#### **Other considerations in relation to Rural Conversions**

##### *Access (criteria b) and d) of relevance)*

- 3.34 Existing accesses to rural buildings should be retained and used wherever possible. If for any reason the existing access cannot be retained, any new access should follow natural boundaries and be in scale and sympathy with the surrounding landscape in accordance with criterion b) of Policy H4. Accesses must be as unobtrusive as possible; formal drives and tarmac surfacing must be avoided. New accesses across open fields will be strongly resisted. This is of particular relevance in relation to the conversion of former agricultural buildings. New single access points for individual rural conversions would also be resisted, where there is an opportunity to utilise a shared arrangement. As noted in criterion d), design requirements for means of access will be more stringent within the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and where rural buildings are located in more isolated or prominent areas. Further information on this matter is contained in the Conversion of Agricultural Buildings Design Guide.

##### *Curtilage and infrastructure (criteria b) and d) of relevance)*

- 3.35 As noted in criterion b) of Policy H4, the curtilage of rural conversions should be in scale and sympathy with the surrounding landscape and should not include unsightly infrastructure. Criterion d) adds that design requirements for garden curtilage and service provision will be more stringent in more isolated and prominent buildings, especially if the rural building is located within the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

- 3.36 Rural conversions should avoid overly domesticated settings, the curtilage should generally remain open and uncluttered. Curtilages should be kept to the minimum area required for occupation of the premises and follow established boundary walls and hedgerows, where appropriate. Suburban walls and fences will be resisted. In order to retain and protect the character and setting of rural buildings, permitted development rights will be withdrawn. Additional planning conditions relating to landscaping may also be sought. The Conversion of Agricultural Buildings Design Guide provides detailed information in relation to this matter.

#### Lighting

- 3.37 The use of excessive external lighting should be minimised to reduce light pollution and over domestication. Policy EP3 should be considered in relation to the incorporation of lighting into any rural conversion scheme. Further information on the design of external lighting is provided in the Conversion of Agricultural Buildings Design Guide.

#### **Successive Applications for Rural Conversions**

- 3.38 The criteria of Policy H4 are applicable to proposals to extend rural buildings that have previously been converted. While Policy H4 does not exclude extensions to rural conversions, any successive applications must be carefully considered against the criteria. The final paragraph of Policy H4 emphasises this approach and will help ensure there is no detrimental cumulative effect arising from subsequent applications.

#### **3.39 Other Policies and SPG**

##### **LDP Policy S4 - Affordable Housing**

- 3.40 Rural conversions have the opportunity to assist in meeting the affordable housing requirements in Monmouthshire. Strategic Policy S4 requires that in the open countryside developments involving the conversion of existing buildings or sub-division of existing dwellings to provide 3 or more dwellings will make provision for 35% of the total number of dwellings to be affordable. Affordable Housing contributions will be sought for schemes below the threshold.
- 3.41 The Affordable Housing SPG (March 2016) must also be referred to, the SPG recognises the provision of affordable housing on site is not always practicable in rural conversion schemes. A more flexible approach has therefore been adopted by the Council in such situations. A financial contribution towards affordable housing in the local authority area is still likely to be required, the level of which will nevertheless be carefully considered to take account of the viability and practical implications of conversions.

##### **LDP Policy SD3 – Flood Risk**

- 3.42 Both residential and visitor accommodation schemes are considered to be highly vulnerable development. Policy SD3 specifies that proposals for highly vulnerable development will not be permitted in areas which may be liable to flooding. Specifically, rural conversions to highly vulnerable uses in areas of Zone C2 (undefended) floodplain will not be supported.

## **Nature Conservation and Development**

- 3.43 The impact of rural conversions on biodiversity must be considered under the requirements of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended), the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and Environment (Wales) Act 2016. A number of bats and nesting birds commonly make use of rural buildings and other habitats and species can be affected in their development however, this does not typically preclude development. Technical Advice Note 5 Nature Conservation and Planning (2009) provides advice in relation to development affecting both protected sites and species.
- 3.44 Enhancements for bats and or nesting birds are promoted by Welsh Government Policy and we encourage the inclusion of appropriate opportunities for example integrated bat roost provision (bat boxes) or bird boxes at the application stage.

### **Additional LDP Policies**

- 3.45 Consideration will need to be given to a proposal's compliance with other relevant LDP policies. The list below provides details of the relevant policies rural conversions are likely to need to address. The policies listed are not exhaustive and others may need to be considered, dependent on the sites location.
- DES1 – General Design Considerations
  - EP1 – Amenity and Environmental Protection
  - EP2 – Protection of Water Sources and the Water Environment
  - EP3 – Lighting
  - EP5 – Foul Sewage Disposal
  - G11 – Green Infrastructure
  - LC5 – Protection an Enhancement of Landscape Character
  - MV1 – Proposed Developments and Highway Considerations
  - NE1 – Nature Conservation and Development.

### **Supplementary Planning Guidance**

- 3.46 Rural conversion schemes should also have regard to the Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance, including:
- Conversion of Agricultural Buildings Design Guide SPG (April 2015)
  - Green Infrastructure SPG (April 2015)
  - Affordable Housing SPG (March 2016)
  - Emerging Landscape SPG

#### 4 Assessing Proposals for Rural Visitor Accommodation Conversions: Interpretation of Criteria listed in Policy T2

- 4.1 The LDP recognises that the provision of visitor accommodation has an important role to play in meeting the Council's aspirations for Monmouthshire to realise its potential as a high quality and competitive tourist destination. Proposals for such development should not be at the expense of environmental considerations and Policy T2 therefore seeks to carefully manage the development of visitor accommodation in the open countryside. Accordingly, Policy T2 discourages new build development in the open countryside other than where it is in the form of ancillary development to established medium or large hotels.
- 4.2 Policy T2 relates to visitor accommodation outside settlements and makes reference to Policy H4. Policy T2 states that self-catering visitor accommodation will only be permitted outside town and village development boundaries if it consists of the re-use and adaptation of existing buildings and the conversion of buildings for such uses complies with the criteria set out in Policy H4 (as detailed in Section 3). All proposals for the conversion/rehabilitation of buildings in the open countryside to visitor accommodation must therefore be assessed against the criteria listed in Policy H4. In addition, Policy T2 sets out the exceptional circumstances where further consideration can be given to proposals that do not comply with the criteria of Policy H4.
- 4.3 LDP Strategic Policy S11 provides further emphasis on the importance of the tourism economy to Monmouthshire and provides support for sustainable forms of tourism, subject to detailed planning considerations. As the primary focus of this SPG relates to rural conversions, it only relates to part of Policy T2 and does not incorporate guidance on other forms of tourism accommodation. Draft Supplementary Planning Guidance on Sustainable Tourism Accommodation has been prepared to provide further information on this subject, offering detailed guidance on sustainable tourism accommodation proposals.
- 4.4 The relevant part of Policy T2 in relation to visitor accommodation outside town and village development boundaries is listed below:

**“...outside town and village development boundaries, the provision of permanent serviced or self-catering visitor accommodation will only be permitted if it consists of the re-use and adaptation of existing buildings and the conversion of buildings for such uses complies with the criteria set out in Policy H4.**

**As an exception to the above proposals to provide visitor accommodation may be permitted where they involve:**

**a) the substantial rebuild of a building within the curtilage of an existing and occupied farm property where it assists in an agricultural diversification scheme in accordance with Policy RE3.**

**b) the conversion of buildings of modern construction and materials provided the buildings are appropriate for residential use (e.g. not modern agricultural or factory buildings); not of substandard quality and/or incongruous appearance; and have been used for their intended purpose for a significant period of time. Particularly close scrutiny will be given to proposals relating to those buildings less than 10 years old, especially where there has been no change in activity on the unit.**

**c) the conversion of buildings that are too small or are inappropriately located to provide appropriate standards of space and amenity for conversions to**

**permanent residential accommodation but are suitable for tourist accommodation**

**Where conversions to tourist accommodation are allowed in the exceptional circumstances set out in criteria a) to c) above then the occupancy of the building will be restricted in perpetuity to short stay tourist accommodation...”**

- 4.5 As noted in paragraph 3.25, in most instances a self-catering visitor accommodation use would be acceptable in rural conversions that are suitable for a residential use. However, rural conversions that have been allowed for visitor accommodation as exceptions to Policy H4 in accordance with the criteria below and conditioned accordingly would generally be expected to remain as such in perpetuity.

**Policy T2 – criterion a)**

- 4.6 The first exception relates to substantial rebuild for visitor accommodation where it assists in an agricultural diversification scheme in accordance with Policy RE3. Substantial reconstruction of an existing building would not normally be acceptable under criterion c) of Policy H4. Criterion d) of Policy RE3 however allows for proposals for visitor accommodation to involve reconstruction, noting that new build will only be permitted where it consists of the substantial rebuild of a building within the curtilage<sup>3</sup> of an existing and occupied farm property. Any rebuilding work must respect or be in sympathy with the local and traditional characteristics of the building. The other criteria in Policy RE3 must be addressed where appropriate in order for visitor accommodation proposals to be considered as an exceptional circumstance.

**Policy T2 – criterion b)**

- 4.7 Criterion b) of Policy T2 sets out circumstances where further consideration can be given to proposals for the use of modern buildings as visitor accommodation. Some modern construction methods such as concrete block and/or rendered buildings may provide opportunities for visitor accommodation as an exception given by Policy T2, even though they would be considered contrary to Policy H4. Criterion b) however stipulates that buildings that are not appropriate for a residential use, i.e. modern agricultural and factory buildings, would be considered inappropriate for visitor accommodation. Rural buildings of steel frame construction and those clad in metal sheeting or corrugated sheets would also not be appropriate for a tourism use.
- 4.8 As noted in paragraph 3.15 in relation to criterion (e) of Policy H4 it is expected that these buildings will have been used for their intended purpose for a significant period of time. Proposals to convert buildings of less than 10 years old to visitor accommodation will be given particular close scrutiny and consistent with Policy H4, the definition of modern is not limited solely to buildings less than 10 years old. The Council need to be satisfied at the time of the application for conversion to visitor accommodation that adequate ancillary garaging and storage space can be achieved for the existing dwelling, to avoid pressure for further, possibly harmful, development at a future date. Any future applications for garaging will be resisted.

**Policy T2 – criterion c)**

- 4.9 It is acceptable for visitor accommodation to have a smaller floor area than is usually considered appropriate for a permanent residential use, as reflected in criterion c).

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<sup>3</sup> The curtilage would typically relate to the farmhouse, farmyard and any immediately surrounding buildings.



Rural conversions can offer scope for a tourism use where they would normally be resisted for a residential use due to limited space and amenity, as they are intended to be used on a short term basis only. The conversion of an unsuitably small sized building to a permanent residential use would potentially result in additional planning applications for extensions at a later date in order to provide more living space. This approach would be contrary to criterion (f) of Policy H4. Paragraphs 3.18 – 3.21 provide further information in relation to extensions and ancillary buildings. Criterion c) also relates to buildings that are inappropriately located, for instance that are deemed unsuitable for a permanent residential use in terms of privacy and amenity in relation to an existing dwelling. These may also be considered to be suitable for visitor accommodation as an exception given by Policy T2.

- 4.10 In instances where rural conversions to visitor accommodation are allowed in the exceptional circumstances noted above, appropriate planning conditions will be applied to restrict the use of buildings to short stay visitor accommodation in perpetuity. These conditions are required to ensure that rural conversions are occupied solely for holiday accommodation purposes. As exceptions they would have not been considered suitable for general residential accommodation. The Council will maintain a database of all visitor accommodation permissions and will regularly monitor such permissions to ensure that these conditions are complied with.

#### **Other LDP Policies**

- 4.11 Consideration will need to be given to a proposal's compliance with other relevant LDP policies and SPG, as set out in paragraph 3.45 and 3.46.

## 5 Submitting a Planning Application

- 5.1 Applicants and/or agents are advised to discuss with Development Management Officers whether their proposals for the conversion of rural buildings/applications relating to existing rural conversions are likely to be acceptable. These discussions can also include the likelihood of the building being suitable for business purposes, the content of any necessary statement and the resulting requirement for marketing prior to the submission of a planning application. Please note this is by means of a formal pre-planning application service which is available at a modest cost (dependent on the level of service required). Certain exemptions apply. Full details can be found on the Council's website at the following link: <http://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/planning/pre-application-advice-service>. However, the views given at the pre-planning stage are given at an officer level only and do not prejudice the decision of the Council if a formal planning application is received.
- 5.2 Guidance is available on the Council's website relating to the information required to accompany a planning application. Applications for Rural Conversions must be submitted in Full rather than in Outline, as they relate to a change of use and full details are required to provide sufficient information to enable the Council to assess the proposal.
- 5.3 Ecological surveys are likely to be required to support applications and may be seasonally restricted, depending on the ecology at the site. A Bats in Buildings Building Information Record is essential for all rural conversion applications. Information in relation to this and other ecology and landscape matters is available on the Council's website in the following location: <http://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/home/for-businesses/ecology-and-landscape>. Pre-planning advice is however recommended in order to provide guidance in relation to such matters.
- 5.4 Building regulations approval will be required for rural conversions. Further information can be found on the Council's website: <http://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/building-control>. Building Control Officers can also be included in pre-planning advice when requested.

## **Appendix A**

### **Local Development Plan Rural Conversion Policy Framework**

## Policy S1 – The Spatial Distribution of New Housing Provision

The main focus for new housing development is within or adjoining the Main Towns of:

- Abergavenny, Chepstow and Monmouth.

The Severnside sub-region consists of the settlements of Caerwent, Caldicot, Magor, Portskewett, Rogiet, Sudbrook and Undy. A smaller amount of new housing development is provided in the Severnside sub-region, particularly at Magor/Undy, Caldicot/Portskewett and Sudbrook.

The Rural Secondary Settlements are Usk, Raglan, Penperlleni and Llanfoist. A small amount of new housing development is directed to the Rural Secondary Settlements of Usk, Raglan and Penperlleni.

Some sites are allocated for small scale residential development (up to a maximum of 15 dwellings) in identified Main Villages with the primary aim of providing affordable housing to meet local needs. The identified Main Villages are:

Cross Ash	Llanishen
Devauden	Llanvair Kilgeddin
Dingestow	Mathern
Grosmont	Penallt
Little Mill	Pwllmeyric
Llanddewi Rhydderch	Shirenewton /Mynyddbach
Llandogo	St Arvans
Llanellen	Trellech
Llangybi	Werngifford /Pandy

Development Boundaries are drawn around the Main Towns, Severnside settlements, Rural Secondary Settlements and Main Villages listed above. Outside these development boundaries planning permission for new residential development will not be allowed in any other settlements except in or adjoining identified Minor Villages where small scale residential development will be allowed in the circumstances set out in Policy H3. The identified Minor Villages are:

Bettws Newydd	Llanover
Broadstone/Catbrook	Llansoy
Brynygwenin	Llantilio Crossenny
Coed-y-Paen	Llantrisant
Crick	Llanvair Discoed
Cuckoo's Row	Llanvapley
Great Oak	Mitchel Troy
Gwehelog	Penpergwm
Llanarth	The Narth
Llandegveth	The Bryn
Llandenny	Tintern
Llangwm	Tredunnoch

Outside the settlements listed above open countryside policies will apply where planning permission will only be allowed for the following types of new residential development:

- Acceptable conversions of rural buildings, in the circumstances set out in Policy H4.
- Sub-divisions of existing dwellings, subject to detailed planning criteria.
- Dwellings necessary for agricultural, forestry or other appropriate rural enterprises, in accordance with TAN6.

## Policy S4 – Affordable Housing Provision

Provision will be made for around 960 affordable homes in the Local Development Plan Period 2011-2021. To meet this target it will be expected that:

- In Main Towns and Rural Secondary Settlements as identified in Policy S1 development sites with a capacity for 5 or more dwellings will make provision (subject to appropriate viability assessment) for 35% of the total number of dwellings on the site to be affordable.
- In the Severnside settlements identified in Policy S1 development sites with a capacity for 5 or more dwellings will make provision (subject to appropriate viability assessment) for 25% of the total number of dwellings on the site to be affordable.
- In the Main Villages identified in Policy S1:
  - Development sites with a capacity for 3 or more dwellings will make provision for at least 60% of the total number of dwellings on the site to be affordable.
- In the Minor Villages identified in Policy S1 where there is compliance with Policy H3:
  - Development sites with a capacity for 4 dwellings will make provision for 3 dwellings to be affordable.
  - Development sites with a capacity for 3 dwellings will make provision for 2 dwellings to be affordable.
- In the open countryside developments involving the conversion of existing buildings or sub-division of existing dwellings to provide 3 or more additional dwellings will make provision (subject to appropriate viability assessment) for 35% of the total number of dwellings to be affordable.
- Development sites with a capacity below the thresholds set out above will make a financial contribution towards the provision of affordable housing in the local planning authority area.

Other than in Main Villages, in determining how many affordable houses should be provided on a development site, the figure resulting from applying the proportion required to the total number of dwellings will be rounded to the nearest whole number (where half rounds up).

The capacity of a development site will be based on an assumed achievable density of 30 dwellings per hectare.

## Strategic Tourism Policy

### Policy S11 – Visitor Economy

Development proposals that provide and /or enhance sustainable forms of tourism will be permitted subject to detailed planning considerations.

Development proposals that would have an unacceptable adverse impact on features and areas of tourism interest and their settings, or that would result in the unjustified loss of tourism facilities will not be permitted.

**Policy H4 – Conversion / Rehabilitation of Buildings in the Open Countryside for Residential Use**

The conversion / rehabilitation of a building in the open countryside for residential use will be permitted where all the following criteria are met:

- a) the form, bulk and general design of the proposal, including any extensions, respect the rural character and design of the building;
- b) the proposal, including curtilage and access, is in scale and sympathy with the surrounding landscape and does not require the provision of unsightly infrastructure and ancillary buildings;
- c) rebuilding works, necessitated by poor structural conditions and/ or the need for new openings in walls, should not involve substantial reconstruction, with structural surveys being required for marginal cases;
- d) the more isolated and prominent the building, the more stringent will be the design requirements with regard to new door and window openings, extensions, means of access, service provision and garden curtilage, especially if located within the Wye Valley AONB;
- e) buildings of modern and /or utilitarian construction and materials such as concrete block work, portal framed buildings clad in metal sheeting or buildings of substandard quality and / or incongruous appearance will not be considered favourably for residential conversion. Other buildings will be expected to have been used for their intended purpose for a significant period of time and particularly close scrutiny will be given to proposals relating to those less than 10 years old, especially where there has been no change in activity on the unit;
- f) the building is capable of providing adequate living space (and ancillary space such as garaging) within the structure. Only very modest extensions will be allowed and normal permitted development rights to extend further or to construct ancillary buildings will be withdrawn; and
- g) the conversion of buildings that are well suited for business use will not be permitted unless the applicant has made every reasonable attempt to secure suitable business use and the application is supported by a statement of the efforts that have been made.

The above criteria will be applied strictly; proposals that are deemed not to comply with them will be judged against national policies relating to the erection of new dwellings in the countryside or against Policy T2 relating to the re-use and adaptation of existing buildings to provide permanent serviced or self-catering visitor accommodation. The above criteria will also be applied to proposals to extend buildings that have already been converted.

### **Policy RE3 – Agricultural Diversification**

Development proposals which make a positive contribution to agriculture or its diversification will be permitted where the new use or building meets the following criteria:

- a) the proposed non-agricultural development is run in conjunction with, and is complementary to, the agricultural activities of the enterprise;
- b) the proposal is supported by an appropriate business case which demonstrates the link to existing business activity and the benefits of the scheme in terms of sustaining employment / the rural economy;
- c) in relation to new build, the applicant must demonstrate that there are no existing buildings suitable for conversion / re-use in preference to new build;
- d) with regard to diversification proposals for visitor accommodation, new build will only be permitted where it consists of the substantial rebuild of a building within the curtilage of an existing and occupied farm property, as specified in Policy T2;
- e) where rebuild is permitted under criteria c) and d) any rebuilding work should respect or be in sympathy with the local and traditional characteristics of the building;
- f) proposals for new built development meet the detailed criteria set out in Policy LC1;
- g) proposals for renewable energy schemes meet the criteria set out in Policy SD1.

### **Policy T2 – Visitor Accommodation outside Settlements**

New build serviced or self-catering visitor accommodation will be allowed outside town and village development boundaries as ancillary development to established medium or large hotels.

Otherwise, outside town and village development boundaries, the provision of permanent serviced or self-catering visitor accommodation will only be permitted if it consists of the re-use and adaptation of existing buildings and the conversion of buildings for such uses complies with the criteria set out in Policy H4.

As an exception to the above proposals to provide visitor accommodation may be permitted where they involve:

- a) the substantial rebuild of a building within the curtilage of an existing and occupied farm property where it assists in an agricultural diversification scheme in accordance with Policy RE3.
- b) the conversion of buildings of modern construction and materials provided the buildings are appropriate for residential use (e.g. not modern agricultural or factory buildings); not of substandard quality and /or incongruous appearance; and have been used for their intended purpose for a significant period of time. Particularly close scrutiny will be given to proposals relating to those buildings less than 10 years old, especially where there has been no change in activity on the unit.
- c) the conversion of buildings that are too small or are inappropriately located to provide appropriate standards of space and amenity for conversions to permanent residential accommodation but are suitable for tourist accommodation.

Where conversions to tourism accommodation are allowed in the exceptional circumstances set out in criteria a) to c) above then the occupancy of the building will be restricted in perpetuity to short stay tourist accommodation.

All proposals will be considered against other plan policies and should integrate with their surroundings, in terms of design and layout and how the proposal will function.

## **Appendix B**

### **Contacts**



If you would like further advice on the pre-planning application service or planning application forms/guidance, please contact the Development Management Section using one of the methods below:

**Development Management**

Monmouthshire County Council  
County Hall  
The Rhadyr  
Usk  
NP15 1GA

Tel: 01633 644880

Email: [planning@monmouthshire.gov.uk](mailto:planning@monmouthshire.gov.uk)

If you would like further guidance on the policies contained in the Local Development Plan please contact the Council's Planning Policy Section:

**Planning Policy**

Monmouthshire County Council  
County Hall  
The Rhadyr  
Usk  
NP15 1GA

Tel: 01633 644429

Email: [planningpolicy@monmouthshire.gov.uk](mailto:planningpolicy@monmouthshire.gov.uk)