

# DESIGN GUIDE

for



## CONVERSION OF EXISTING BUILDINGS and FOR NEW BUILDINGS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE



## 1. INTRODUCTION

This leaflet is a general guide for people wishing to alter, extend or convert existing buildings or erect new buildings in the countryside. It is recommended that outline proposals be discussed with Council planning officers before applying for planning permission. Accurate survey plans and elevations of existing buildings and site features are essential for both the applicants to work out their proposals, and for the Council to consider them. Applications should include planting and landscaping as well as building proposals. In most cases the services of an architect could be helpful.

The guidance is based on Local Plan Policy EI (see Appendix 1), and is in accordance with the Scottish Office's Planning Advice Note 44 and National Planning Policy Guideline 15.

### THE LOWLAND LANDSCAPE

The coherence of the Scottish lowland landscape is due to it being largely the result of the agricultural revolution of the second half of the 18th century. This established large compact farms of enclosed fields, centred on steadings distributed over the landscape and carefully fitted into the given topography. Modern pylons, silos and roads have intruded into this now mature landscape, but they have not spoiled it.

### RESTRICTIONS ON NEW DEVELOPMENT

There is a consensus in favour of the preservation of the traditional rural scene. This is the basis of planning policies which severely restrict new development in the countryside. These have been adopted since the 1930's, when widening car ownership could have been the cause of the suburbanisation of much of the countryside within commuting distance of towns and cities.

Generally new buildings in the countryside are restricted to those for agriculture and agricultural workers, and must be located as part of farm steadings.

### REUSE OF REDUNDANT RURAL BUILDINGS

Few 18th and 19th century farm buildings are suited to modern farming methods, and the amalgamation of farms may make some complete farmsteads redundant. It is only in order that these older buildings should not be lost that exceptions to the usual restrictive policies may be made, and conversion for suitable non-agricultural uses may be allowed.

Local Plan Policy E1 states that the change of use and rehabilitation of redundant vernacular buildings in the countryside to residential use will be generally acceptable. However, the external appearance of the buildings should be left largely unaltered. The buildings need to be structurally sound, and capable of conversion without substantial rebuilding.

The aim is to preserve rural buildings for their architectural and historic interest, and for the contribution they make to the landscape. Applications for planning permission for change of use and conversion will be judged on the new use, and on how far this aim is achieved. It should not be taken as a pretext for substantial rebuilding, radical alteration, or excessive extension which would obliterate the character of the buildings. In the case of dilapidated structures, planning permission for reconstruction may depend on how much of the surviving fabric can be retained and reused. Extensions should leave the original buildings dominant.

## 2. THE DESIGN PRINCIPLES OF TRADITIONAL RURAL BUILDINGS

The characteristic buildings of the Scottish lowland landscape belong in the classical or Georgian tradition established in the 18th century, which continued until the agricultural depression of the 1870's. The design principles of this tradition should be followed in the conversion of old buildings, and also in the design of new ones, so that they fit harmoniously into the landscape.

### A: LOCATION AND SITING

- located in sheltered positions and avoiding ridges and therefore usually skylines;
- built along contours, with minimum underbuilding or changes to landform;
- on slopes, platforms for buildings formed by cutting as well as by filling, rather than by filling only.

### B: GROUPING AND ORIENTATION

- buildings grouped close together or attached to one another, to form sheltered L and U shaped courtyards; usually turning their backs to the prevailing west wind, ie with few doors or windows facing west.
- rectangular blocks with extension by addition of subsidiary blocks to main ones.

### C: LANDSCAPING

- buildings integrated into the landscape with shelter belts, trees, hedges and stone dykes which often extend out from buildings and between them.

### D: ROOFS

- symmetrical, pitches at 33° - 38°; houses with gables and chimneys at ridge level;
- dormers occupying small proportion of roof and with fronts fully glazed;
- other farm buildings sometimes have piended (hipped) roofs, and shallower pitches but no dormers.

### E: ELEVATION

- balanced and well proportioned (various elements related to one another geometrically or proportionally).

### F: WINDOW AND DOOR OPENINGS

- taking up a small proportion of elevations and positioned away from corners;
- vertical proportions;
- windows with sliding sash and case frames;
- glazing in doors, if any, above centre (lock) rail only.

### G: MATERIALS

- limited in number, larger areas in subdued colours, roofs darker than walls;
- walls stone, poorer quality stone painted or rendered; underbuilding and walls of same material and finish;
- roofs, slate; window frames, timber, painted sometimes in bright colours (not stained); doors, timber, painted or stained.

### H: DETAILING

- generally restrained, with embellishment reserved for most important buildings.

### 3. GUIDANCE FOR CONVERSION OF EXISTING BUILDINGS

Conversions should leave the external appearance of the buildings **largely unaltered**. New dormers, porches, chimneys will rarely be acceptable, and few new door or window openings. This means that the buildings will provide less usable floor space, fewer rooms or dwelling units than a new building of the same volume. The character of a steading can be spoilt by subdivision into too many units. Rebuilding should be undertaken only where unavoidable, and replicate the existing as far as possible.

When converting a steading, the distinctions should be maintained between different farm buildings - the house, the cottages, barn, byre, implement shed, cartshed/granary, horse mill, stable with hayloft and adjoining bothy etc. The farm house is distinguished by its gabled higher roof, with full height first or attic floor, dormers, chimneys, more numerous windows, porches and finer detailing (margins, panelled doors etc). The other farm buildings are usually lower, with any lofts less than a full storey high, sometimes pitched (hipped) roofs, more doors and fewer windows, cart doorways, larger areas of blank wall, ventilation slits, pitching eyes to lofts, etc.

#### ROOFS

Existing gable, verge and eaves detailing should be maintained, restored and replicated in rebuilding, and extensions. Gables are usually with skewes or trimmed verges without barge board, and eaves are trimmed without facias. Some mid 19th century buildings have wide projecting verges sometimes with ornamental barge boards and matching overhanging eaves.

#### DOORS, WINDOWS AND ROOFLIGHTS

Existing door and window openings should be retained and old ones reopened in preference to forming new ones. This will influence internal planning, the number, size and use of rooms. In using door openings for windows, consider using half glazed doors or dummy doors. In blocking up openings, express their outline by recessing the new masonry.

New openings for doors, windows and rooflights, should be kept to a minimum in number and size and have vertical proportions. Any larger windows can be given vertical emphasis by subdivision with millions of masonry construction. Details of doors and windows should match existing ones in the same or an equivalent building. Window ingoes should be 150mm.

New dormers will rarely be allowed in steading roofs. Roof lights and windows in gables should be considered as an alternative. Any rooflights should be flush fitting with integral gutters. Modern elements such as patio doors may be acceptable but only where they would not affect the outward appearance of the building e.g. if facing into an internal courtyard.

#### WALLS

Existing stone walls and dykes should be retained wherever possible, and repaired and repainted as necessary. Where badly weathered stones are few, they should be replaced by indenting with matching stone. Only those elevations with extensive weathering should be painted or wet dash rendered. Patching with mortar and painting may be adequate and retains more of a building's character than rendering. Paint should be micro-porous and not oil based, and render either left plain, tinted or painted.

New walls not of stone should be rendered, including the underbuilding.

New openings in good stone walls should have stone lintels, cills and rybats to match the existing. Rendered margins in rendered walls may be acceptable but should not give the new opening undue emphasis. Using stone for the outer leaf in cavity wall construction is rarely successful, especially at comers.

Stone dykes should never be rendered. The top of a dyke should slope with the ground and not be stepped.

### GARAGING, PARKING ETC

Existing cartsheds should be reused as garaging with full height doors. Where existing buildings are unsuitable for garaging, new garages should be positioned to contribute to the steading group. Double-sized garage doors should be avoided. Parking and fuel tanks should be located to minimise visual impact.

### LANDSCAPING

In defining garden grounds, parking areas etc, existing paving, dykes, gates, hedges and trees should be taken into account and retained and any alterations made in matching materials. Hedge plants and trees should be of native species and should tie in with the existing local planting. Ranch style fencing, brick or concrete block walls and fast growing conifers should all be avoided.



## 4. GUIDANCE FOR NEW BUILDINGS

Local Plan Policy E1 allows new development in the Greenbelt only in a few exceptional cases (see Appendix).

### RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS

New residential buildings should be sited to form part of existing farm steadings, they should follow the design principles of traditional rural buildings as described in 2 above, particularly in their location, siting, grouping with other buildings and landscaping (2A, B and C). They should be congruous with their setting and neighbours, and follow the principles and guidance given in 'Timber Frame Houses in the Scottish Countryside' (Scottish Office, 1994).

### NON RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS

In addition to following the design principles set out in 2 above, for larger non residential buildings special consideration is needed of scale and colour.

#### Scale

Modern agricultural and other large non residential buildings can look too big in some settings and out of scale with nearby older buildings. They should be grouped with existing buildings, but not built so close as to dwarf them. The new buildings should be no larger than operation requires and not combine several distinct functions under one roof which could be accommodated in two or more smaller units. Multi-span roofs can be useful in reducing overall heights, and large expanses of walls and roofs can be broken up, with down pipes, doors and ventilators.

Tall mature trees are most valuable in integrating large buildings into the landscape, softening their outlines and counteracting their horizontal emphasis. Large growing native species trees should be planted, where appropriate, along with native shrubs, but dense conifer screens are not desirable as they can themselves be as intrusive as the buildings they are intended to hide.

#### Colours

The colours of cladding materials should be chosen to relate to nearby buildings and to the surrounding landscape. Attempts to camouflage rarely succeed as the background colours are various and change with the seasons.

Dull and dark natural colours help to reduce the apparent size and nearness of large buildings. As roofs are at a more reflective angle to the sky they need to be a darker colour than walls. This makes buildings look less conspicuous and more stable. A colour similar to that of the roofs of existing buildings does most to relate new to old, while matching paintwork colours for doors, downpipes etc can also help.

Preferred external colours for agricultural buildings and structures are given in British Standard 5502 Part 20:

#### Walls

B.S.	RAL
04C39	5156 -Y87R
04D44	2858 - 488R
08B25	6308 - Y40R
08D45	na
10B21	4011 - G99R
10B23	na
12B21	3915 - G65R
18B21	4004 - B57G
18B25	6405 - B14G
18C39	6126 - B08G

#### Roofs

B.S.	RAL
00A13	7501 - R97B
04B29	na
10B27	na
10B29	8305 - G89Y
18B27	na
18B29	8205 - B06G
18C39	6126 - B08G

# A P P E N D I X I

## LOCAL PLAN POLICY E1

No new development will normally be permitted in the Greenbelt other than the exceptions specified below:-

### 1. Housing

a) New Dwellings: Will only be permitted to meet the requirement of agriculture or forestry where the proposal is supported by the Scottish Office, Agriculture and Fisheries Department and where it is necessary for the dwelling to be located outwith a settlement. New dwellings should be sited to form part of existing farm complexes and proposals will be considered against the criteria in PANEL E1.

b) Change of Use: The change of use and rehabilitation of redundant buildings in the countryside to residential use will generally be acceptable subject to the criteria in PANEL E1.

c) Extensions: Proposals for extensions to existing dwellings in the Greenbelt will be considered against the criteria in PANEL E1. The original building should form a dominant part of the final overall development.

2. Industry: Proposals for the extension of existing industrial and business premises and for the change of use of redundant buildings to small scale industrial and business use will be considered against the criteria in PANEL E1.

3. Hotel Leisure Complex: Proposals for the change of use of existing buildings to hotel use, and associated outdoor and indoor recreation facilities will be considered against the criteria in Panel E1.

4. Holiday Caravan/ Chalet/ Lodge parks: subject to the criteria in PANEL E1.

5. Outdoor Recreational Facilities: subject to the criteria in PANEL E1.

6. Riding Stables/Boarding Kennels: subject to the criteria in PANEL E1.

7. Institutional Use: The conversion of existing redundant buildings is acceptable subject to the criteria in PANEL E1. Where it can be demonstrated that conversion and/or adaption of existing buildings is not practicable, or will not suffice to allow a new use to operate, consideration will be given to an element of redevelopment subject to the approval by the council of a comprehensive planning brief designed to ensure the protection and enhancement of the Greenbelt, and to satisfy the criteria in Panel E1, and where necessary appropriate listed building consents; in addition no increase in "building footprint" would be permitted nor any diminution in the amount or quality of open space.

8. Mineral Extraction: subject to the provisions of POL E13.

9. Waste Disposal: Subject to the provisions of POL E12.

10. Cemeteries.

11. Other small scale land uses essentially in keeping with the character of those in the foregoing list, and subject to the criteria in PANEL E1.

12. Telecommunications Development: Where there is a proven need and no alternative location; there is no reasonable possibility of sharing existing facilities; in the case of radio masts there is no reasonable possibility of erecting antennae on an existing building or other structure. Any development should be sited and designed

to minimise its visual impact, subject to technical and operational considerations, and where appropriate should be subject to the criteria in PANEL EI.

Justification: The definition of a greenbelt and a related policy is essential to the protection of the countryside from uncontrolled development. Where development is appropriate, particular attention to detail is required in terms of scale, design, and landscaping to protect the countryside environment. Appropriate advice, also applicable to other land uses, is contained in the recent PAN 36 on the subject of house design in the countryside.

## **PANEL EI**

### **Greenbelt Development Criteria**

Where development within the Greenbelt is considered appropriate in principle, applications will be tested against the following criteria:

- a) No loss of prime quality agricultural land.
- b) Traffic and access requirements.
- c) Pollution risk.
- d) Effects on public water supply, watercourses.
- e) Effect on topography and landscape quality of the area.
- f) Effect on skyline.
- g) (i) Buildings which are an attractive feature in the landscape or from surrounding roads will be considered for conversion only if they are constructed in the vernacular style, or if they are of marked architectural quality or historic interest;  
  
(ii) All buildings for conversion are to be Structurally sound and capable of conversion without substantial rebuilding.
- h) Design, scale and grouping of buildings.
- j) Appropriate landscaping proposals.
- k) Availability of services.
- j) Effect on nature and landscape conservation areas.

Footnote: vernacular style comprises buildings of traditional form, generally constructed in stone with pitched, slated roofs and built before 1914.

## APPENDIX 2

### Guidelines from

**Rural Buildings of the Lothians, Conservation and Conversions, A Guide for Practitioners, Historic Scotland, 2000**

### 1. Masonry and Pointing.

**Repair.** A good repair will match the qualities and performance of the existing/original masonry so that there is no disruption to the way it functions (weathering and movement) and no disturbance or accelerated decay is caused to surrounding masonry.

**Reconstruction.** Where a wall is to be taken down and rebuilt, photographs should be taken and the stones marked prior to demolition.

**Patching the surface.** No attempt should be made to make good the surface of old stone walls by building up in mortar to a thickness of greater than 8mm without inserting stones.

**Repointing.** Where original pointing survives in good condition, it need not be replaced. Where joints are over approx. 8mm wide, stone pinnings should be used in the joints, keeping the quantity of mortar to the minimum.

**Mortar.** All repointing should be carried out in a mortar as close to the original as possible in mix and appearance. An analysis of the original mortar and preliminary samples of the proposed pointing materials and methods can help.

**New walls.** Selection of mortar should be suitable for the type of stone (a little softer and more permeable than the stone itself) and the exposure of the masonry.

**Working methods.** Techniques of working with lime mortar are very different from cement mortar, and if contractors do not have experience of them, they are advised to undertake training.

Protection. New pointing with lime mortar takes longer to cure than cement mortar, and needs to be protected from frost, rain, wind or strong heat during this process.

### 2. Lime Coatings

**Selection of materials.** Select materials on the basis of any existing lime coatings (which should be preserved wherever possible) and the character of the underlying masonry, local climate and conditions. If possible use pre-made matured harling mixes from a specialist supplier. Otherwise use well-matured lime putty or fresh hydraulic lime hydrates (powder) as appropriate, and clean, well-graded sharp sand.

**Preparation of materials.** A typical mix might be two parts lime to four-and-a-half or five parts concrete sand. Thoroughly beat the mix before use. The harling mix should be sufficiently liquid to be cast on in a thin coat. Mortar for making good the masonry surface should be plastic and sticky.

**Types of lime.** Non-hydraulic lime mortar is not suitable for use in permanently wet situations. Feebly or moderately hydraulic lime mortars might be suitable for harling and rendering in more exposed situations. Do not use 'builders lime', ie. non-hydraulic hydrated lime from the builders merchant, or agricultural lime. Use only appropriate traditional materials.

**Strength.** The coating should be weaker and more permeable than the host masonry. Cements and strongly hydraulic limes are not suitable.

**Detailing.** Harling should be of a consistent thickness, up to 8mm per coat, avoiding variations in thickness caused by uneven masonry backgrounds. Avoid forming ledges or horizontal surfaces which will catch the rain. Finish edges of harling into rebated checks or feather out to avoid thick exposed edges.

**Preparation of surfaces.** Allow saturated walls to dry out before coating them. Remove all dirt, dust and debris, and dampen masonry where necessary to control suction. Provide a mechanical key where suction is inadequate. Build out excessive hollows using lime mortar with small fragments of stone, etc. to eliminate deep recesses, and allow to cure before applying the harling.

**Application.** Apply harls and renders in thin coats, usually up to 8mm max, leaving an open texture to the surface and avoid excessive working of the material. Allow each coat to cure before re-coating. Good, and appropriate, site practice is essential for successful application.

**Limewash.** The use of a limewash finish (six or more very thin coats) will prolong the life of the harling. Apply by brush, working limewash well into the surface. Allow each coat to cure.

**Protection.** Ensure that roof coverings and rainwater goods are functioning. Carry out work in suitable weather and provide adequate protection, to guard against over-rapid drying, excessively dry or saturated conditions, and frost action. Do not apply non-hydraulic mortars after the end of September, to allow sufficient curing time before the winter.

### 3. Roof Repairs Alteration & Conversion

**Survey.** Develop an understanding of the roof materials, construction, condition and potential. Seek specialist advice where necessary.

**Materials.** Retain the existing materials and detailing, repairing them where necessary. Search out sources of matching material, second-hand or new.

**Design.** Preserve all characteristic features such as finials, louvred ventilation shafts, etc. Ensure that interventions (such as new dormers, rooflights, chimneys or flues etc) are kept to an absolute minimum, but where essential are located sensitively and designed in an appropriate way (for example - formal, symmetrical, imposing - or vernacular, small-scale, irregular) to fit in with the existing building.

**Setting.** Look at the building from a distance, in its settings, considering the visibility of the roof from all directions. Make sure that any changes are as unobtrusive as possible and do not disrupt important views (of the building or of the countryside). Try to retain its rural and agricultural character.

**Building regulations.** If anything more than repair is proposed, check which regulations will apply to the works proposed, and discuss with the building authority at an early stage in the project to establish requirements and resolve any problems.

**Planning and Listed Buildings controls.** Check the listed or scheduled status of the building, and any local plan policies which may affect it. Discuss any proposals for the building (if they go beyond pure repair) with the planning authority at an early stage.

### 4. The Alteration of Openings

**Existing doors and windows.** Wherever possible, existing external doors and windows should be retained as they are, and repaired if necessary. The timber is of better quality than modern timber, and the glass is authentic and cannot be reproduced by modern methods. Propriety methods of draught proofing are preferable to double glazing if improvements in the thermal efficiency of the windows are desired.

**Replacement joinery.** If the poor condition of existing joinery makes it necessary to replace it, new joinery work should exactly match the original detailing, window form and fenestration pattern.

**Modification.** Where new uses demand that existing windows or doors are modified, they should be changed as little as possible (for example wooden shutters might be glazed or replaced by glazed side-hung casements if extra daylighting is essential), and all detailing and opening methods should be retained or matched.

**Standardisation.** When putting new doors and windows within existing openings in a conversion, resist the temptation to standardise the form or domesticate the style (for instance by making all windows sash and case) instead of retaining the original diversity.

**Alterations to openings.** No attempt should be made to create larger openings by heightening, lowering or widening the existing ones. It may be possible to satisfy any need for additional daylighting or ventilation by other means.

**New openings.** The number of new openings should be kept to an absolute minimum and restricted to the least visible and important parts of the building. Matching natural stone should be used for the surrounds to new openings, tooled and detailed in the same way as existing surrounds. Design and locate new openings in a manner which is appropriate to the style of the building.

**Altering external doors.** A disused door can be retained in position and locked, or blocked behind. If a window is needed the masonry opening can be neatly filled with a window in the upper part and a recessed blocking below or the door can be retained and partially glazed.

**Wide openings.** Leave cart arches, pends and implement sheds unenclosed if at all possible, and use for an appropriate purpose such as garaging, storage or childrens play areas.

**Doors to wide openings.** Retain double or sliding doors to openings where these remain or renew to match if in poor condition. If an opening is to be blocked doors can screen the alteration or if it is to be glazed the door can be closed at night preserving authenticity and giving additional security. Even where there are no existing doors the provision of new doors of an appropriate type (based on doors elsewhere in the building or buildings) can be a useful way of treating an arch infill.

**Glazing to wide openings.** Use glazing for the full height of the openings and deeply recess it keep window divisions to a minimum and make the framing as slender as possible and dark-coloured.

## 5. Repair Alteration or Conversion

**Survey.** Thoroughly investigate the condition of the interior and the reasons for any problems. Seek specialist advice if necessary.

**Conservation.** Give consideration to the architectural and historical qualities and relative importance of the elements of the interior. Retain as much as possible restoring any altered details if there is good enough evidence and reinstating missing features if suitable second-hand replacements can be found.

**Intervention.** Keep intervention to a minimum. Design any changes sensitively and incorporate existing features into the scheme in an appropriate way.

**Consultation and approvals.** Before finalising any design for alteration or making any changes check if listed building consent building warrant or any other approvals are needed. Consult the planning and building control authorities for advice on policies and requirements.

## 6. Outside Spaces

**Landscape context.** Any development should respond to the qualities of its own particular landscape setting and priorities should be set accordingly.

**New requirements.** Consider these at an early stage and discuss them with the local authority so that they can be properly integrated into the design. Be realistic about how many new dwelling units can be fitted into an existing complex without major changes to its character.

**Setting.** Try not to affect the settings adversely by the introduction of obtrusive suburban clutter such as roads and lamp posts garages unscreened parking areas fences and pavements.

**Gardens.** Only the dwellings originally had gardens. Keep new garden areas around other converted buildings as simple open and unobtrusive as possible.

**Steading courtyards.** Retain the original character as far as possible. Do not introduce new divisions walls or fences and do not add clutter with street furniture planting and new paving materials.

**Vehicles.** Vehicular access should be restricted either to courtyards or to outside areas. Adequate provision for parking and servicing should be made but with as little change as possible to the outside spaces and landscape setting.

**Lighting.** Restrict the areas of strong lighting and use lights which answer the needs of each location.

**Boundaries.** Do not over-domesticate an agricultural or industrial setting with new fences walls and hedges particularly in new materials.

**Outhouses and extensions.** Reuse existing buildings rather than building additions where possible. Ensure that any extensions sheds and greenhouses are sympathetic in scale discreetly located and designed to fit in with the character of the existing buildings.

**Hard landscaping.** Use traditional local materials and detail them appropriately.

**Planting.** Use species already growing successfully in the vicinity. Do not plant exotics in an agricultural countryside setting, or impose strong new forms with hedges or evergreens. Any new planting should relate to the existing planting and landscape.

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This guide was adopted by Renfrew District Council in 1995, adopted by Renfrewshire Council in 1996, and edited and reissued in 2001.

