



Brecon Beacons National Park Authority

**UDP Guidance Note: Policy ES24
Conversion of Farm and Other Buildings to
Dwellings**

**The Brecon Beacons National Park (BBNP)
Unitary Development Plan (UDP) was approved by the
Authority in March 2007.**

**This Guidance Note provides further detail on the practical
interpretation and implementation of UDP Policy ES24.**

**This Guidance Note will be used in the validation and
determination of planning applications.**

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1. Introduction

Over much of the Brecon Beacons National Park (BBNP) there are numerous small farms and scattered rural settlements which between them contain hundreds of stone built barns and other rural buildings. Many of these are well integrated with the landscape and represent an important part of the cultural heritage of the National Park which, with skill, can be adapted and re-used.

This Guidance Note illustrates the Authority's position in relation to the re-use of such rural buildings by detailing the steps required in the implementation of Policy ES24 of the Authority Approved Unitary Development Plan (UDP).

2. Planning Policy Context

National Planning Policy

In the interests of maintaining the rural economy, the emphasis in national planning policy is upon restricting the change of use of redundant buildings in the countryside to residential use when they may be suitable for re-use for commercial, tourism, sport or recreation purposes (Welsh Assembly Government, 2002, Planning Policy Wales, Paragraph 7.6.9).

Local Planning Policy

The emphasis on the rural economy in national planning policy is consistent with that reflected in the Brecon Beacons National Park, Authority Approved, Unitary Development Plan (UDP). The NPA's strategy is to rely on the conversion, rehabilitation and re-use of existing rural buildings to provide accommodation for commercial, tourism, sport or recreation uses- particularly those located within or adjoining farm building complexes. However, it acknowledges that the isolated nature of many of these, rules out their potential to be re-used for commercial activity. In such circumstances it is recognised that a proportion of these more isolated buildings could make a valuable contribution to the general rural economy of the area by conversion to dwellings without unduly exacerbating poor access and infrastructure.

To this end, the NPA's policy adopts a sequential approach to determining planning applications for the reuse of rural buildings to ensure that, in the more promising locations, commercial, tourism, sport and recreation opportunities are fully explored before applications for conversion to dwellings are considered.

However, it is worth noting at this stage that there will remain some rural buildings which, because of their location, orientation or dilapidation, will never be capable of re-use without imposing an unacceptable impact on the character of the surrounding area. In such cases proposals would not be granted permission for re-use.

Unitary Development Plan (UDP) Policy ES24

In detail, the BBNP UDP policy reads as follows:

Policy ES24: Conversion of Farm and Other Buildings to Dwellings

The conversion of rural buildings to dwellings outside development boundaries will only be permitted where:

- i) it has been demonstrated that every reasonable attempt has been made to secure suitable commercial, tourism, sport or recreation use; or***
- ii) the proposal is for a live-work scheme in accordance with Policy ES10; and all the following criteria are met:***
 - a) they are suitable for the specific re-use;***
 - b) their form, bulk and general design are in keeping with their surroundings;***
 - c) they are capable of conversion without major or complete reconstruction;***
 - d) where the building is of historical and/or architectural interest conversion does not result in unacceptable impacts upon the structure, form, character or setting; and***
 - e) it can be demonstrated that the proposed use would not give rise to a demand for additional buildings which would have an unacceptable impact on the landscape of the National Park.***

they may be suitable for the re-use for commercial, tourism, sport or recreation purposes.

In order to comply with this criterion, **ALL APPLICATIONS¹ for the conversion of buildings in the countryside to residential use MUST BE SUBJECT TO A MARKETING EXERCISE** as described below (Section 3). This process will determine whether a suitable commercial, tourism, sport or recreation use is suitable at the proposal site.

ES24 Criterion ii: Proposals for 'Live-Work'

In accordance with PPW, 'Live-work' is defined as schemes where the residential conversion is the subordinate part of the overall scheme for '**business**' re-use (Planning Policy Wales, 2002, paragraph 7.6.10).

¹ Except in those circumstances where it is the NPA's opinion that the building is not suitable for the specific re-use as a 'commercial, tourism, sport or recreation' enterprise (Refer to Policy ES8 of the UDP).

To ensure that the residential use (C3) is subsidiary to the Business use (B1), BBNPA require the latter to be greater than 50% of the proposed floor space. This must be clearly demonstrated on the submitted plans. Supporting information relating to the details of the business also need to be submitted to the NPA. This includes: the nature of the business; and a business plan. In this respect it is important to note that 'Live Work' is not home working (for home working, refer to UDP Policy ES9).

Access, traffic generation, parking and the amenity of local residents will become crucial factors in assessing the suitability of the re-use of the building for 'live-work'.

Appropriate 'live-work' schemes will be subject to appropriate planning conditions. These should include tying the business to the property and also ensuring that the residential use remains subordinate to the business use. Any subsequent applications for the change of use to a wholly residential use, including the removal of conditions, will be strongly resisted. Finally, in the case of re-sale, any prospective purchasers/occupiers would be informed of the mixed use of the property.

ES24 Criterion C: 'Capable of Conversion without Major or Complete Reconstruction'

Only those buildings suitable for **conversion** will be given planning permission. This means that those buildings that require substantial reconstruction will be considered unsuitable for conversion. Even those buildings which may appear to be suitable for conversion may not be able to be easily adapted to the requirements of modern day living without the need for major reconstruction.

With this in mind and in accordance with a recent appeal decision (appeal details in here) **BBNPA require all applications for the conversion of rural buildings to dwellings to be accompanied by a Structural Survey.** In line with the requirements of Validation Best Practice, the structural survey should be completed prior to the submission of a planning application. **Any application received by the Authority without the relevant documentation will be determined invalid.**

3. Marketing

All applications for the conversion of rural buildings to residential use will be expected to be marketed for sale or lease for "commercial, tourism, sport and recreation" purposes **PRIOR** to submitting a planning application.

In the absence of details of marketing the Authority will issue a direction under Regulation 4 of the Town and Country Planning (Applications) Regulations 1988 requiring the provision of such details. The application will be determined as being INVALID UNTIL THE NECESSARY INFORMATION IS RECEIVED.

The marketing period should last for a continuous period of at least 6 months from the date of the first advert and must be marketed as follows:

“For commercial, tourism, sport or recreation use only”.

In this regard, please note that marketing for a ‘commercial use only’ would not be sufficient as this would not cover the possibility of tourist, sport or recreation uses.

The Brecon Beacons National Park Authority will expect a marketing exercise to comprise the equivalent of the following:

- Active marketing through a recognised and independent commercial property agent covering South and Mid Wales (to include Monmouthshire, Powys, Carmarthenshire, Torfaen, Merthyr, Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent, RCT) and Herefordshire;
- Notifying other organisations who may have an interest in promoting the site (e.g. Economic Development Sections of the relevant Unitary Authority)

4. Supporting Statement

The Brecon Beacons National Park Authority need to be satisfied that genuine attempts have been made to market the property. Once the aforementioned marketing exercise has been completed, a supporting statement should be submitted with the planning application. This 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);
- 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.

In addition to the above, the following factors may be listed in a supporting statement as evidence that a commercial, tourism, sport or recreation use is not practicable or desirable:

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. 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 commercial, tourism, sport or recreation use in any subsequent applications. In such cases the extant planning permission is a significant material consideration that may outweigh the requirements of this Guidance Note. However, in such circumstances, the period for commencing works will be limited to the unexpired period of the existing permission.

With regard to situations where there is an extant permission, it is important to note that this will not outweigh the requirements of the Guidance Note if the current proposals are fundamentally different to the original application (For example, where the number of units is increased). In such cases, the applicant should be required to demonstrate why a 'commercial, tourism, sport or recreation use' is not viable as stated above.

Finally, any application for the **renewal of an expired permission** should be subject to the requirement to prove that a 'commercial, tourism, sport or recreation' use is not appropriate, in accordance with this Guidance Note.

A planning application for the conversion of a building in the open countryside to residential use that is NOT accompanied by a supporting statement (incorporating the results of the marketing exercise along the above lines) will be determined as INVALID.