

- Available technologies and designs for reducing energy consumption e.g. smart control systems maximising natural daylight and ventilation - free heat
- Sustainable water use e.g. grey water - ideal for hosing down, flushing toilets
- Appropriate sewage systems e.g. newer efficient and adaptable cost effective technologies

Having an environmental consultant on the team will provide new ideas for development and the costs of these need not be additional to 'normal' building costs. Environmentally friendly refurbishment carried out in the Lake District utilised innovative methods such as sheep's wool for insulation, PV Panels and solar water heaters, biodegradable paints and FSC certified timber products.

The consultant is able to implement cost saving ideas throughout the project and give projected savings on building running costs, providing an attractive selling point.

Within the rural environment water quality can be a prominent issue especially when looking at discharge consents. Septic tanks are a common method of sewage treatment however, their performance varies and consent levels can be breached causing pollution incidents. There are newer technologies such as aeration and biological treatment system using the Submerged Aerated Filter (SAF) process. These systems are seen as the simplest and most cost effective means of sewage treatment.

These are just some examples of how an environmental consultant can influence a development project from a house or barn to the development of a large business park. We turn our attention now to the ecological consultant and provide suggestions on their input to the project planning process.

The ecological consultant will evaluate the suitability of the land for the proposed development and at this stage will be able to provide advice. For example, the potential for the development to impact on protected species or a designated habitat such as a Special Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI) or Biological Heritage Site (BHS), the presence of an invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed and raise conservation related legislative instruments that will become relevant during the project.

Throughout the process the ecological consultant can provide assistance with landscape design putting forward ecologically sound planting or providing information to architects such as incorporating owl boxes, bat bricks or designing nest friendly roof elevations for swallows, swifts or house martins. In areas where badgers are present specially designed accesses can be added to boundary fences to prevent badger movement being impeded. The design of hard standings and kerbstones can be altered slightly to be 'newt friendly' and are easily incorporated into the design element of a project.

The involvement of the consultant can continue through to completion and can include habitat creation activities as part of a landscaping scheme and the provision of site management plans ensuring long term development success.

It is our hope that this article stimulates proactive project management involving a team of professionals from the beginning through to completion. The principle of a multifunctional project applies to any size of development and is a sure way to beat the reams of guidance, best practice, regulations and legislative requirements while achieving cost effective and successful development.

Jackie Webley  
Landmark Environmental Ltd  
101 Ashleigh House, Harris Knowledge Park, Fulwood, Preston  
PR2 9AB  
01772 713555

## FARM DIVERSIFICATION AND THE PLANNING SYSTEM: A PANACEA FOR FARMERS??

By Alison Roland

In recent years, farm diversification has become a buzz word in Planners vocabulary. This is all the more so as farmers have been forced to consider alternative sources of income following the devastation wrought by foot and mouth, not to mention changes in European policy which have dictated a restructuring of the market. This article will focus on diversification opportunities outside the farming industry, namely those that will usually (but not always) require planning permission.

One of the most popular options considered is the tourist sector, whether bed and breakfast or conversion of a redundant building into a self contained holiday let. The former does not require planning permission provided it is ancillary to the occupation of the farmhouse (i.e 1 bedroom or similar, depending on the size of the farmhouse).

Generally speaking, holiday lets as a matter of principle, do not pose too much of a problem in terms of securing planning consent. Typically Local Planning Authorities will view them as an alternative source of income for the farm, which is preferable to asset stripping, where buildings are converted to conventional residential development and sold off. The latter was once commonplace, but in line with Government guidance, many Local Authorities prohibit conversion to residential use; the overall intention being to retain employment opportunities in rural areas. Development Plan policies will typically only allow consideration of residential use, if the building has first been marketed for alternative employment uses.

A further common area for diversification lies with horse related development in the form of livery stables or similar. These can sometimes be the subject of contradictory Local Plan policies, which on the one hand seek to foster farm diversification, but in the Green Belt for example, policies will only allow for "small" stables. The latter is often interpreted by Planning Officers to mean only 2 or 3, which would often not prove commercially viable. Further problems can arise when if the initial consent is secured, associated facilities such as covered riding arenas, horse walkers etc are required. These can fall foul of landscape designations although more pragmatic Authorities will allow such proposals subject to appropriate landscaping.

Farm shops and cafes form another popular option. Problems with highway matters often arise in such cases, particularly (as is commonly the case), the site is accessed by a less than perfect road network. It can sometimes be beneficial in such cases to offset the proposed increase in traffic against the pre-existing agricultural activity. Although a number of car borne visitors may be associated with such proposals, these should be weighed against any reduction in agricultural traffic such as large commercial feed wagons, slurry tanks and the like. Local Authorities may often place conditions on farm shops limiting the type and range of produce which may be sold. This is in order to avoid a dispersal of retail activity away from villages and small settlements.

Caravan sites tend to be particularly problematic due to their obvious landscape impact. Certain Authorities who are already well supplied have included Local Plan policies to the effect that they will not allow any new sites within their District. This may effectively only leave scope for those proposals which do not require express planning consent, such as a 5 van site certified by the Camping and Caravanning Club.

A common approach adopted by Local Planning Authorities, requires that the proposed diversification enterprise remains "ancillary" to the operation of the primary farm unit. There is a perception that in order

to be acceptable in planning terms the proposal must of necessity be "small scale". However, I have encountered several cases where an entire unit has ceased to trade and is seeking to redeploy all resources into non farming activities. In my view there is no conflict with Government Policy in such cases, since the latter seeks to foster the diversification of the rural economy as a whole, affording increased job opportunities for local people. Planning Officers are often too precious about the landscape, and forget that a thriving prosperous rural economy is often the key to its continued preservation.

Government Policy on the form of "Planning Policy Guidance Note 7" which deals with development in the rural economy, was modified at the beginning of last year to allow diversification opportunities to extend to the erection of new buildings, rather than being confined to the re-use of existing buildings, as was previously the case. However, such Government guidance often takes a while to filter down to Local Authority level and many Authorities remain very guarded about proposals which involve the erection of new buildings.

Aside from committing to a planning application it is also worth considering diversification opportunities which do not require planning permission. The General Permitted Development Order subject to certain limitations allows for the use of land "for any Purpose". For not more than 28 days in total in any calendar year. Certain uses such as car boot sales and motor car and motor cycle racing are subject to a 14 day limit. Nevertheless, I know of farmers who have utilised car boot sales every Saturday for 14 weeks throughout the summer and much to the Local Authorities disdain, attracted vast trade.

More novel proposals such as pet cemeteries, shire horse centres, eco friendly burial sites, wind turbines and the like are becoming more common. This may perhaps be a response to market forces, whereby certain areas may have reached saturation point in for example, holiday lets. It therefore pays to do a little market research before embarking on what will most probably prove a lengthy planning process. A planning consent is no use if the proposal is not commercially viable. Similarly, if you hate people, then bed and breakfast may not be a good idea!

In summary, farm diversification proposals are often far from straightforward, in terms of securing planning consent. The general tenor of planning policies may well be favourably worded, but the devil is often in the detail. Alternatively the policies themselves contain such a plethora of detailed criteria which must be met, all of which are of course subject to interpretation. A typical example is that the proposal "must not cause demonstrable harm to any interest of acknowledged importance". This is a typical example of planning jargon which is meaningless to the average farmer! It can be taken to mean anything the Planning Officer wants it to!

Alison Roland Chartered Town Planner, operates across Cumbria, Lancashire and Yorkshire, She can be contacted on 01282 863409

## GRANTS NOW AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT ENERGY EFFICIENCY

At long last the government is beginning to take steps to help improve the energy efficiency of the existing building stock. Although the money committed to the two schemes now in place is small at £30 million, it is a start, with we hope more to come, as without some serious incentives to upgrade our existing building stock it is unlikely that UK's commitments to the reduction in carbon dioxide omissions will be met.

More about the two schemes can be found at [www.clear-skies.org](http://www.clear-skies.org) which provides details of £10 million of new grants for renewable energy installations in existing buildings, with [www.solarpvgrants.co.uk](http://www.solarpvgrants.co.uk) providing information on the £20 million of grants for community and

homeowners photovoltaics programme.

The new £10 million Clear Skies Initiative aims to give homeowners and communities a chance to become more familiar with renewable energy by providing grants and advice. Homeowners can obtain grants between £500 to £5000 whilst community organisations can receive up to £100,000 for installation and feasibility studies.

Clear Skies supports projects in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Homeowners and community groups in Scotland can apply for support under the , that has a fund of £3.7 million.

We are all becoming more aware of the threat posed by climate change. The gases, which cause climate change, are emitted from a number of sources. A major source is the use of fossil fuels to power our homes and businesses. Renewable energy, combined with energy efficiency, offers a viable and potent solution to countering the effects of global warming.

During the past few years, the Government has introduced measures to encourage the uptake of renewable energy and energy efficiency by power generators and businesses.

With the Clear Skies initiative, they are making a start at encouraging homeowners and community groups to take an active part in the climate change agenda and reap the benefits of renewable energy.

The different types of renewable energy offer different benefits but they all utilise non-polluting and effectively limitless energy sources. The technologies supported are, Solar Water Heating, Wind, Hydro, Ground Source Heat Pumps, Automated Wood Pellet Stoves, Wood fuel boilers.

Grants will only be awarded to homeowners where an accredited installer is to be used. These installers will work to a code of practice and be vetted beforehand to ensure that you get the most appropriate system for your needs, correctly installed at the right price.

Two general conditions of the scheme apply to applications. DIY installations will not attract a grant and the equipment installed must be new and not refurbished. Properties both on and off the electricity grid are eligible for a grant. Homeowners are also encouraged to seek at least two estimates before applying.

Details of the eligibility criteria are listed below. These details may change at any time without notice as the scheme develops. BRE reserve the right to decline an application.

The eligibility criteria are:

- Applicant must be the owner of the property for which grant is applied for.
- Applicant will be resident of the UK.
- Property must be located within England, Wales or Northern Ireland. Scotland has its own scheme.
- System must supply a building (mobile homes, caravans, house boats, etc are not eligible).
- System must be designed, installed and commissioned by an accredited installer.
- System must use components on the DTI's recognised product list.
- Installer will provide an estimate of the annual energy output of the system.
- Grants must be spent within 1 year of grant offer being made.
- Maximum of two grants awarded per applicant provided they are for different technologies.

One of the main benefits of using renewable energy is that it reduces emissions of carbon dioxide. When allied to energy efficiency measures, renewable energy is one of the most effective methods of reducing carbon dioxide emissions. We strongly advise all applicants to investigate all methods of increasing the overall energy efficiency of