



THE MULTI-FUNCTIONAL APPROACH

By Jackie Webley, Ecologist

Welcome back to the wonderful world of environmental and ecological issues. In last years issues of Countryside Building, Landmark discussed environmental legislation looking at impacts of development, conservation legislation and how it affects the developer; within this article we broached the subject of protected species. Protected species are a major issue to consider when building in the rural environment and so our next article delved into the complexities of protected species legislation and proposed legislation change. Also included were project case studies to provide working examples. The direction shall move away from protected species for this article to discuss the issue of project planning.

This article will discuss the various roles of the environmental and ecological consultant during the planning and implementation process of countryside development. The focus will be on what you need to think about and the options that are available.

It is the time of year where all energies are on planning new projects, budgets, work programmes and the last thing on everyone's mind is the potential environmental and ecological impact of countryside building. This is exactly the right time of year to begin considering possible consequences of development. Why?

- To prepare realistic budgets
- Reduce unforeseen costs
- To bring on board the relevant specialists at an early stage
- To allow time for technical research
- To provide cost options

Within the specialist fields there appears to be a new wave of thought - multifunctionality. Relating to development this idea looks at bringing together ALL the relevant professionals at the BEGINNING of a project thus creating a functional project that successfully addresses all concerns. This approach will provide realistic budgets, accurate work timetables and an informed development project. The principle is the same irrespective of development size or location - bring a team of all professionals together at the beginning.

When dealing with buildings in rural locations there is an increased possibility of an environmental or ecological problem, be it development in or near a sensitive site requiring ecological impact assessment, proposals that will alter site hydrology potentially impacting on surrounding land, a land contamination concern or the old familiar protected species.

An environmental and ecological consultant can view a project brief, provide comments on any information that could suggest an area of concern and provide advice on how the project could be affected including potential costs and timescales. This process can be carried out with other relevant professions for example architects, building contractors, surveyors, planning advisors, engineers, archaeologists, geologists (the list is endless and will depend on the project). Within each profession different issues will be addressed and so a concise planning approach can be established. Having carried out this process the project manager is able to determine who needs to be brought on board to plan the project.

Environmental and ecological consultants have the capabilities to cover a range of issues relating to development. For example,

Environment:

- Advice on environmental legislation
- Waste disposal and recycling options
- Development of environmental management systems
- Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) and ISO14001
- Sustainability in building design e.g. providing solutions for efficient energy, water and materials use
- Addressing sewage and water quality
- Land contamination concerns and potential problems (involves specialists in this field)
- Project management advice

Ecology:

- Advice on conservation legislation and site designations
- Ecological impact assessment
- Protected species mitigation
- Habitat and species survey
- Control and eradication of invasive species
- Management plans and habitat creation
- Preparation of reports for planning committees
- Project management advice

The disciplines listed above provide an example of the scope consultants address when reviewing and providing comment on a project brief. Combined with other professions the exercise can be minimal cost and highly valuable.

There are many areas where environmental and ecological input can be provided to assist in projects, the following content in this article will discuss the main areas of input, hopefully promoting ideas and thought that can be incorporated into this year's plans.

An environmental consultant provides information that relates to the abiotic factors included in development projects such as waste, water, contamination and sustainability issues. The presentation of a project brief to this consultant will raise different concerns and provide a new set of options.

The design of the building is a major issue. What is it being built for? How can the design build in sustainable and cost reducing systems and technology? An environmental consultant would assess the building in terms of,

- Expected energy consumption, heating, lighting, ventilation (rural properties can have significantly higher energy needs than those in urban areas, ambient temperatures tend to be lower as a result of altitude, wind chill and lower heat gain)

- 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.

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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