



FACT SHEETS & GOOD PRACTICE NOTES

Number 8

GOOD PRACTICE NOTE

NEW AGRICULTURAL BUILDINGS

Background

This AONB Partnership is aware that the increased mechanisation and the size of machinery used in farming means that a significant number of more traditional buildings are inappropriate or inadequate for modern use. The AONB Management Plan notes, however, that development proposals need to be of an appropriate form, scale, and materials as well as being in an appropriate location to integrate with the character of the nationally important landscapes of this AONB. The sense of place is easily lost.

In the nationally important landscapes of this AONB, and in areas where development could impact on the AONB and perceptions of it, special care is needed. Standard designs and structures for business parks, industrial estates, and ordinary, undesignated, countryside are unlikely to be transferable to the special and sensitive landscapes of an AONB.

Key Matters

New buildings should integrate with the landscape character of the AONB and the locality. This means that, particularly in relation to larger agricultural buildings and likely visual impacts, a landscape character appraisal should be undertaken at an early stage to inform not just the location of the proposed structures but also the scale, form, orientation and mass. That may also need to take into account whether or not the structure should be cut into the ground to reduce its impact. In seeking to integrate with the landscape and visual character of this nationally important area the focus should be on three aspects, namely

- avoidance of problems,
- the mitigation of any remaining problems,
- the means of compensating for problems that have not been avoided or mitigated.

Location

Integration is frequently achieved through attention to the scale of a proposal. It is, nevertheless, vitally important to consider the location of the proposed development so that best use is made of landform and existing landscape features to help integration. Visually sensitive places, such as skyline locations, should be avoided. Locations that are isolated from existing farm buildings are also likely to be controversial. Siting a new building within an existing group of farm buildings, or on the footprint of an old one that has been removed, is frequently the most appropriate way forward. Focussing on locational and scale matters is fundamental to the process of seeking to avoid landscape and visual problems.

Materials

The AONB Partnership has noted that many of the materials favoured by the manufacturers and constructors of agricultural buildings stand out starkly in the landscape and take many years to weather and begin to blend with the grain of the countryside. It is vital, in a nationally important landscape, that necessary and essential structures integrate immediately with the landscape. With that in mind the AONB Partnership has already prepared guidance on colours in the landscape. The light coloured, so called 'grey', roofing sheets often used on agricultural buildings do appear bright white for many years. Similarly the concrete panels used to construct the walls also, although nominally 'grey', appear as white. This whiteness is particularly visually obvious in sunshine.

Mitigation of some aspects of landscape and visual intrusion can be achieved through following the guidance in this [AONB's Colour and Integrating Developments into the Landscape Good Practice Note](#).

That means focussing on matt colours, using darker colours for the roofs, the sides and the doors. Shiny and reflective material, such as stainless steel or even galvanise, should be avoided or treated with an appropriate coloured finish.

The AONB Partnership also notes that panels with raised ridges or corrugations provide a variation of light and shade. That variation more readily integrates with the countryside than the smooth finish of an extensive, flat surface. 'Space boarding' or 'Yorkshire boarding' can also provide variations of light and shade.

Opportunities for Solar Energy Capture

This AONB is aware, from experience with a number of schemes, that the extensive roofs of agricultural buildings, when facing in the appropriate direction, can be valuable sites for the capture and utilisation of solar energy, largely through photovoltaic panels but also through solar thermal panels. The darker colour of these panels enables such roofs to integrate better into the landscape than the so called 'natural' fibre cement panels.

Ways to Integrate Better with the Landscape

New agricultural buildings should not only be appropriately located and sized, but also to have dark roofs and side cladding that extends down the side of the building, preferably to ground level and at least to one metre of the ground. Access doors and roller shutters should also be of a matt and coloured finish.

Where buildings are proposed in the setting of a Listed Building or Conservation Area traditional designs and materials are likely to be more appropriate than modern ones. In any of these situations advice should be sought from the Local Planning Authority's Conservation Officer.

Further mitigation of substantial buildings can often be achieved by cutting down into the ground and through the provision of bunds. Bunds not only provide physical protection for the buildings but visually reduce the perceived scale and form of a building. Nevertheless, in a predominantly chalk landscape it is vitally important that the visible sides of such bunds should be immediately vegetated as the whiteness of the chalk is likely to stand out even more than the building. The other sides may provide opportunities for ecological enhancement.

Planting native trees and shrubs in the immediate vicinity of a building can have useful mitigation value. It may also be that some planting further away, and providing screening from key viewpoints, can also be valuable. That does, however, mean that key viewpoints of potential developments do need to be identified at an early stage when the landscape, visual character, and impact appraisals are being carried out to inform the location and design of the proposal.

Compensation for those aspects that cannot be avoided or mitigated can be in the form of habitat creation or a programme of biodiversity enhancements. It can also take the form of providing improvements to screen other elements of the farm buildings that have been erected in earlier times and that are not integrating well with the landscape.

Lights around and from farm buildings can conflict with this AONB's objectives to reduce light pollution and achieve International Dark Night Sky Reserve status. Farmyard lighting, often important for security as well as safe working, all too frequently emits light sideways and upwards. Correctly fitted modern asymmetric flat glass light units can provide more effective lighting, at a lower cost, and with minimal light pollution (see [AONB Position Statement on Light Pollution](#) and Good Practice Note on Good External Lighting).

A significant source of upward light pollution is from skylights. It is appreciated that light is needed to work within large barns and that skylights provide a simple and cost effective source. However, at night time those skylights work in reverse and emit light from within the building. Ways to overcome this issue of

light pollution need to be sought, including fitting blinds or louvers to the skylights that can be closed at night. Installing PV panels on the roofs of buildings can supply more than sufficient energy for internal lighting, hence negating the need for skylights.

Conclusions

- Proposals for essential new farm buildings should be informed by landscape and visual impact appraisals.
- Integration can be helped by the choice of location and both the form and scale of the buildings.
- Integration can be assisted by cutting into the ground and the provision of vegetated bunds.
- Screen planting with native species can also assist.
- Attention to colours and materials can be major factors in enabling a farm building proposal to progress.
- Light pollution should be avoided, and opportunities to capture and utilise solar energy incorporated.

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