

**Cranborne Chase  
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**



**POSITION STATEMENT**

**NUMBER 8**

**FARM DIVERSIFICATION**

**Background**

The AONB Partnership is aware that smaller farms need to bring in additional income over and above that generated by their traditional farming activities to maintain their viability. Larger farms/estates also look to additional income streams to provide a broader financial base and some protection from the fluctuations in market returns. Activities that simply improve the sustainability of the farm, such as offsetting the electricity bill by installing roof mounted PV panels, are not regarded as diversification. The Cranborne Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty has been formally designated nationally to conserve and enhance natural beauty. Diversification enterprises do, therefore, have to be considered in relation to their appropriateness for one of the nation's finest landscapes.

**Definitions**

There are a lot of definitions of farm diversification. In connection with this AONB the definition is based upon the supplementation of farm income through activities that are subsidiary to the fundamental farming enterprise. A key aspect of diversification, especially when involving planning permission, is that the change of use would be legally linked to the farm so that it continues to support the main farming enterprise. Being subsidiary to the farming and subsidiary in scale to the landscape and local character are important factors. It is recognised that members of a farm family may generate additional income by working off the farm.

**Appropriate and inappropriate activities**

Activities that create significant transport issues, such as warehousing and distribution activities, or that need workers to travel in from towns and other villages, are unlikely to be genuinely sustainable and hence not appropriate for this AONB. That said there may be one or two activities that have to be on the farm because that is where the resource occurs. That might, for example, involve bottling water from a local spring, although if it were possible to pipe the

water to a farmstead for the bottling facility that could have less impact on the character of the designated landscape.

### **The significance of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**

A key aspect in the consideration of farm diversification activities is the status of the AONB as part of the nation's heritage assets and natural capital.

The Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB has been established under the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act to conserve and enhance the outstanding natural beauty of this area which straddles three County, one Unitary and five District councils. It is clear from the Act, subsequent government sponsored reports, and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 that natural beauty includes wildlife, scientific, and cultural heritage. It is also recognised that in relation to their landscape characteristics and quality, National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are equally important aspects of the nation's heritage assets and environmental capital. The [AONB Management Plan](#) is a statutory document that is approved by the Secretary of State and is adopted by the constituent councils. It sets out the Local Authorities' Objectives and Policies for this nationally important area. The national Planning Practice Guidance [Natural Environment paragraph 004] confirms that this AONB and its Management Plan are material considerations in planning.

### **Changes in Farming**

The AONB Partnership recognises that with increased mechanisation in agriculture, and a greater focus on animal welfare, traditional and traditional scale farm buildings and farmsteads are less likely to be useful in 21<sup>st</sup> Century farming. Nevertheless, some of these buildings may be appropriate for re-use as part of farm diversification. Diversification activities tend to split into three groups.

- There are those that are linked quite directly to the farm, its products and the local countryside.
- The second group is those that use the farmland for recreation and tourism purposes.
- Thirdly there is that group of activities that have little direct link with the farm or the countryside.

### **What are the Problems and what could be Appropriate?**

Often it is the activities that are not in some way linked to the farm that are the most problematic. Whilst traditional farm buildings may be suitable for conversion to offices, unless the farmstead is close to a village where there is a resource of appropriate potential users and employees that activity is likely to involve considerable commuting. Commuting is not favoured by national planning policy, and additional vehicles on the narrow and quiet roads of this AONB would conflict with tranquillity and policies and actions aimed at sustaining tranquillity. Local planning strategies are aimed at reducing the need to travel.

Rural activities that may not be directly related to a particular farm, but can be seen as part of the rural scene, could contribute to a farm diversification programme. An example could be re-employing farm workers that have had to leave the land due to increased mechanisation or a change from livestock to arable. The establishment of craft or specialist skills workshops providing employment opportunities for small numbers of local people, and hence minimising the need to travel, could be worth investigating. Issues of transportation would, again, be significant but craft skills that utilised local resources and local skills could well be appropriate.

### **Products, processing and sales**

The aspects of farm diversification that are linked most directly to the farming activities are those that fall in the bracket of 'farm to fork', and product processing. Often these activities are more suited to the older and traditional style farm buildings and are an effective way of re-using farmstead buildings. That can be particularly important where the farmstead has a particular character or is seen as sufficiently historically important to be formally Listed or within a Conservation Area.

Linked to this type of activity there is also the potential attraction of farm gate sales and a farm shop. However, that may only be a realistic proposition if the farmstead is adjacent to or very close to a main road. However, if a village shop is under pressure it may be that a relocation of the village shop to a farm shop might work out. Examples of processing can be such things as cheese making or the smokery / charcuterie processing unit in another AONB that utilises old, but contemporary style, farm buildings to house the specialist structures for this particular small business.

### **Recreational activities**

In the group of activities that uses the land as a resource for others to enjoy there could be 'camping barns' for the more rugged walkers and explorers of the countryside through to 'glamping' for those prepared to pay for a higher end holiday experience in a rural situation. A variation on that could be 'horse tourism' where riders either bring their own horse or hire one from the site to explore the area and stay a few days. Clearly the recreation / tourism aspects link to other facilities and these are likely to be more appropriate where there is a village shop and a village pub providing food and refreshment. As with all aspects of farm diversification the appropriateness of scale is important. It is likely that the 'handful' scale is going to be more appropriate than the 'couple of score' scale.

A number of farms within this AONB already have parallel diversification activities based on pheasant and partridge shooting. These high end recreational activities tend to be on a par with the farm business. However, processing and handling of the shot product could be a diversification activity, as could dog training activities for those that use their dogs for shooting. The breeding of birds for the shoot tends to be on the basis of buying in from existing

game farms, and the large number of pens required for on-site rearing could create an issue of visual intrusion. In parallel, any significant increases in release programmes could lead to increases in potentially intrusive release pens in woods and coverts.

### **Taking the idea forward**

Proposals for farm diversification activities should take into account the likely employment opportunities, how the activity would be a sustainable addition to the fundamental farm business, and how issues such as unsustainable commuting are avoided.

Sustainability should embrace environmental, heritage and social issues, maintain natural capital, and not focus solely at the bank balance!

All schemes should demonstrate how they relate to AONB Management Plan Objectives, the impacts they would have on the landscape and sense of place, and how the activities will be linked back to the farm so that they remain as subsidiary activities.

Projects that utilise local resources and products, and are readily perceived as local, are likely to be appropriate. Similarly, proposals that have to be located within the AONB because of a special feature of the locality are more likely to be viewed sympathetically than those that do not need to be in one of the nation's finest landscapes. One way of assessing the appropriateness of a potential diversification idea is to see how it scores against the criteria of 'on the farm, for the farm, from the farm'.

The AONB Partnership is supportive of farm diversification activities that are subsidiary but individually, and in total, support the basic farm enterprise. Potential schemes should be discussed with the local planning authority and the AONB team before too much effort or resources are invested in working up a scheme. That could enable individual or unique ideas to be considered in relation to AONB criteria at a very early stage.

Clearly any restoration or renovation of buildings should be done with respect to local character and sense of place as well as to a high standard. Renewable energy capture and utilisation should be appropriate for the building and enterprise concerned. Diversification enterprises may require energy, but the installation of large scale wind turbines or field scale photovoltaic panels is perceived as the commercial generation of power and not a farm diversification exercise. Renewable energy generation in support of diversification should be of a scale which simply off-sets the farm and farmstead's energy usage. In connection with renewable energy an old barn might be appropriate for storing wood whilst it seasons as part of a one or two man log business or for storing wood chips for wood fuel systems.

### **Endorsing this Position Statement this AONB Partnership urges**

farmers and farm managers to

- Consider the range of opportunities available to them
- Assess the potential impacts on the character and sense of place of the AONB
- Avoid the need for commuting and frequent transshipments of goods / materials
- Consider how their diversification could benefit the local community
- Utilise local skills and resources
- Consult with the AONB team and local planning office at an early stage

and local authorities to

- consider how proposals contribute to sustaining the rural economy without impacting adversely on the character and attributes of the nationally important AONB countryside
- ensure approved activities are legally linked to the farm to ensure continued support for the farm.

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