

By: Bryan Sweetland, Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste and
Paul Crick, Director Planning and Environment

To: Environment, Highways & Waste Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee, 8 April 2011

Subject: Kent Farmsteads Guidance

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: Kent County Council, English Heritage, Kent Downs AONB and High Weald AONB have collaborated to produce guidance to help keep Kent's fine legacy of historic farmsteads in active use. Draft guidance will be published at the end of March 2011 to help achieve sympathetic new uses for farmstead buildings which are no longer needed for agriculture.

The main consultation draft '*Kent Farmstead Guidance*' provides help in assessing the historic value of farmsteads and determining how best to conserve, enhance and develop these assets without destroying their value and ensuring their long term economic use. The second document '*Kent Downs AONB Farmstead Guidance*' provides easy access to the main consultation draft from locations within the AONB, and gives specific advice on rarity and significance in that particular locality.

An informal 8 week consultation with stakeholders on both documents will run from 29th March 2011 to 24th May 2011.

Members are asked to endorse the guidance and support the next steps, including consultation and adoption by Kent local authorities as appropriate.

1. Introduction

1.1 Kent is essentially a rural county with 85% of its land classed as rural, 29% of its population living in rural areas and 36% of its businesses similarly located. All considerably above the national average. Rural areas are currently experiencing high levels of change with globalisation of markets, agricultural policy reforms, escalating house prices, ageing populations, increasing water scarcity and climate change.

1.2 High quality and distinctive landscapes are also a feature of rural Kent; together the Kent Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty cover 32% of Kent's land. Historic character makes an essential contribution to the quality and distinctiveness of the countryside and farmsteads are an essential part of this character.

1.3 Pressure for change within farmsteads is nothing new. Over the centuries new types of steading and buildings have been developed as agricultural practices have changed and whole farmsteads have moved to new sites or been abandoned. However, recent research has shown that historic farm buildings are presently under the greatest pressure for change of any common building type in the countryside. Buildings and whole farmsteads have become separated from agriculture because of post-1950 intensification and restructuring, the merger of farm holdings, changing animal welfare standards, changing patterns of tenure and more recently the collapse of farm profitability.

1.4 Kent has very high rates of conversion to residential use, particularly in the Weald and also high levels of farm diversification: 76% in Kent compared with a figure of 67% for the south-east and 46% for England. Conversions to new uses are strongly associated with the development of a new 'rural economy' involving high levels of enterprise and professional home-working, for which the attractiveness of locally-distinctive buildings and landscapes plays an important part.

1.5 Further change is inevitable. Farm businesses will experience an increasing demand for new multifunctional sheds and the adaptation of older buildings for diversified uses. Inappropriate conversion of traditional buildings or inappropriate placing of new buildings is the main threat to the character of historic farmsteads and their surrounding landscapes.

1.6 Kent County Council, English Heritage, Kent Downs AONB and High Weald AONB have collaborated to produce guidance which will help owners, agents, and local authorities understand the significance of their farmsteads and identify potential new uses which respect their character, are sensitive to the landscape and offer a sustainable future.

1.7 Two linked documents are provided. The main consultation draft '*Kent Farmstead Guidance*' provides help in assessing the historic value of farmsteads and determining how best to conserve, enhance and develop these assets without destroying their value and ensuring their long term economic use. The second document '*Kent Downs AONB Farmstead Guidance*' provides easy access to the consultation draft from locations within the Kent Downs AONB, and gives specific advice on rarity and significance in that locality.

1.8 Both sets of guidance have been produced by English Heritage as guidance for Local Planning Authorities, Planners, Conservation Officers, consultants, agents and landowners to help develop and determine sound and sensitive development proposals for historic farmsteads in Kent and the Kent Downs AONB. They set out the farmstead and building type within their historic character areas, identifying what is rare, significant and sensitive, and provide a method of how to assess development potential and design guidance appropriate to each farmstead type and layout.

2. Progress to date

2.1 In January 2010, English Heritage, Kent County Council, the Kent Downs AONB and High Weald AONB Units held a stakeholder consultation meeting to gauge the interest and form in which the guidance would be most useful.

Responses were generally very positive and the need for improved guidance was recognised.

2.2 As discussed above two linked guidance documents have been prepared.

2.3 An informal consultation, seeking the views of key stakeholders on the draft guidance documents, will run for eight weeks from 29 March 2011 to 24 May 2011 through Kent Design Initiative. Opinions on content, accuracy, general usefulness and any areas not covered will be sought.

2.4 Following consultation revisions will be made to the documents as appropriate

3. Recommendations

3.1 Members are asked to endorse the guidance and support the next steps, including consultation and adoption by Kent local authorities as appropriate.

4. Background documents

Kent Farmstead Guidance English Heritage, Kent County Council and Kent Downs AONB 2011

Kent Downs AONB Farmstead Guidance Kent Downs AONB 2011

Links to copies of the draft documents are provided via the Kent Downs AONB on:
<http://www.kentdowns.org.uk/kentdownsAONBfarmsteadsguidance.htm> or
<http://www.kentdowns.org.uk/> (under publications)

5. Author contact details

Lis Dyson, Heritage Conservation Manager, Planning and Environment
Tel: 01622 221535; email: lis.dyson@kent.gov.uk