

**From:** Paul Crick – Director, Planning & Environment

**To:** David Brazier – Cabinet Member, Transport & Environment

**Decision No:** 13/00046

**Subject:** Kent Farmsteads Guidance – guidance for landowners, developers and planners to assist in understanding the character of historic farmsteads

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Past Pathway of Paper:** The Kent Farmsteads Guidance was previously discussed by the Environment, Highways & Waste Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee in April 2011 & 19<sup>th</sup> June 2013.

**Future Pathway of Paper:** N/a

**Electoral Division:** All electoral divisions

**Summary:** The report explains the background to the Kent Farmsteads Guidance, summarises the Guidance, explains its purpose, and recommends that the committee endorses the Guidance and advocates adoption by Kent local planning authorities, as part of their local plan or as supplementary planning guidance.

**Recommendation:** That the Cabinet Member agree the Guidance by Kent County, in order to encourage its use by landowners, applicants and planners and to achieve the aim of promoting sustainable development. As the County Council is no longer able to adopt supplementary planning guidance, it is requested that the Council also recommends adoption of the Guidance by district planning authorities and Medway Council as supplementary planning guidance to their local plans.

## 1. Introduction

1.1 Traditional farm buildings are the most numerous type of building in the countryside, contributing to local distinctiveness and sense of place for visitors and local people alike, providing habitats for wildlife and offering a range of uses that benefit local economies and communities. Traditional farm buildings are largely redundant for modern agricultural purposes, and have been under the greatest threat, of both neglect and development, of all rural building types. Research conducted since 2006 by English Heritage and its partners shows how evidence can be developed which highlights the heritage and economic potential of traditional farmsteads in the context of their landscapes and communities, and the need for a locally adapted approach. The Kent Farmsteads Guidance provides landowners, planners and applicants with simple guidance for understanding the key issues to inform sustainable development including conversion, new build and the provision or restoration of habitats.

## 2. Financial Implications

2.1 The decision will have no impact on Kent County Council capital and revenue budgets or spending plans.

### **3. Bold Steps for Kent and Policy Framework**

3.1 The Guidance will help to achieve two of the ambitions in Bold Steps for Kent: *'To help the Kent economy grow'* and *'To put the citizen in control'*. This will be achieved by providing guidance which will help avoid delays in the planning process and assist sustainable development, and by making accessible information to help landowners or applicants prepare development proposals or management plans for their property.

It will also help to achieve the aims of the Kent Environment Strategy, particularly *Theme 3: Valuing our Natural, Historic and Living Environment*, by helping to find sustainable uses for historic farms.

### **4. The Report**

#### History

4.1 The *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF) emphasises the delivery of sustainable development whilst stressing the importance of understanding local character and distinctiveness in determining planning applications, plan-making and decision-taking, as well as local economic and community circumstances; it notes the importance of landscape character assessment in helping to deliver this. Government has long sought to promote the use of redundant buildings to support rural economies, most recently within the *Growth and Infrastructure Bill* through the creation of Permitted Development rights to allow the change of use of agricultural buildings to other non-residential uses.

4.2 The Kent Farmsteads Guidance is subdivided into six parts summarised in Appendix 1. The accompanying Kent Downs AONB guidance document is part of the Kent Downs AONB suite of guidance supporting the AONB Management Plan. Guidance based on the approach developed in Kent, led by English Heritage in partnership with Kent County Council and the High Weald and Kent Downs AONBs, is now in preparation for Cornwall, Lincolnshire, Staffordshire, Shropshire, Wiltshire and Worcestershire.

#### Aim of the guidance

4.3 The Kent Farmsteads Guidance aims to inform and achieve the sustainable development of farmsteads, including their conservation and enhancement. It can also be used by those with an interest in the history and character of the county's landscape and historic buildings, and the character of individual places. Traditional farmstead groups and their buildings are assets which make a positive contribution to local character. Many are no longer in agricultural use but will continue, through a diversity of uses, to make an important contribution to the rural economy and communities.

4.4 It provides a framework for assessing and understanding the character of farmsteads in Kent. It is intended to speed up the planning process for proposals within historic farmsteads and to avoid wasted time and money through the submission of schemes which may be found unsuitable. In line with the NPPF it aims to facilitate sustainable development, indicating where development may be appropriate whilst retaining and enhancing the character of the environment.

4.5 There are no direct costs to KCC associated with endorsement of this Guidance and no direct risks. Endorsement of the guidance should have a beneficial effect for Kent's citizens in encouraging sustainable development.

#### Consultation and Communication

4.6 Initial consultation with stakeholders took place at a workshop in January 2010. Two linked draft documents, Kent Farmsteads Guidance and Kent Downs AONB Farmsteads Guidance, were produced, reflecting the comments of the consultees. The latter provides additional information on the specific character of localities within the AONB. Public and stakeholder consultation (including relevant KCC departments) took place on these documents between 29<sup>th</sup> March 2011 and 24<sup>th</sup> May 2011. A stakeholder workshop was also held on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2011. The Consultation Report (Kent Downs AONB Unit 2012) is available on the Kent Downs AONB website (see below). The Guidance documents were extensively redrafted and simplified following the consultation. They were also updated during 2012 to reference the new NPPF. The Guidance was adopted by the Kent Downs AONB Joint Advisory Committee in 2012. Now that the NPPF and Duty to Co-operate are fully in place it is appropriate to bring the Guidance to Cabinet Committee for endorsement.

4.7 It is intended to launch the Guidance jointly with Kent Downs AONB at a stakeholder event in late June or early July this year. A joint press release will be prepared and presentations will be made to key bodies including

#### Legal implications

4.8 There are no legal implications to be considered.

#### Risk and Business Continuity Management

4.9 There is a slight risk that the Guidance could be misinterpreted by some as promoting unsuitable development in the countryside.

#### Equality Impact Assessments

4.10 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and is available on the Kent Downs AONB website (see below).

#### Sustainability implications

4.11 This proposal is entirely consistent with the sustainability objectives of environmental enhancement and building a sustainable economy. It will facilitate the reuse of historic buildings and will be promoted in a way which creates equal opportunity for all.

#### Alternatives and Options

4.12 No alternatives have been considered.

### **5. Cabinet Committee Comments**

The Environment Highways and Waste Cabinet Committee considered and endorsed the proposed decision at its meeting of 19<sup>th</sup> June 2013.

## 5. Conclusions

5.1 Traditional farm buildings are the most numerous type of building in the countryside, contributing to local distinctiveness and sense of place. Such buildings are largely redundant for modern agricultural purposes, and have been under the greatest threat, of both neglect and development, of all rural building types. Guidance has been developed which highlights the heritage and economic potential of all traditional farmsteads in the context of their landscapes and communities, and the need for a locally adapted approach.

5.2 The Kent Farmsteads Guidance provides landowners, planners and applicants with simple guidance for understanding the key issues to inform sustainable development. This is in line with the NPPF which emphasises the delivery of sustainable development whilst stressing the importance of understanding local character and distinctiveness in determining planning applications, in plan-making and in decision-taking.

5.3 The Guidance will help to achieve two of the ambitions in Bold Steps for Kent: *'To help the Kent economy grow'* and *'To put the citizen in control'*. It will also help to achieve the aims of the Kent Environment Strategy, particularly *Theme 3: Valuing our Natural, Historic and Living Environment*.

## 6. Recommendation

### Recommendation

That the Cabinet Member agree the Guidance by Kent County, in order to encourage its use by landowners, applicants and planners and to achieve the aim of promoting sustainable development. As the County Council is no longer able to adopt supplementary planning guidance, it is requested that the Council also recommends adoption of the Guidance by district planning authorities and Medway Council as supplementary planning guidance to their local plans.

## 7. Background Documents

*Kent Farmsteads Guidance, Kent Downs AONB Guidance Consultation Report*  
Kent Downs AONB Unit 2012

[http://www.kentdowns.org.uk/uploads/documents/fARMSTEADS\\_CONSULTATION\\_REPORT\\_final.pdf](http://www.kentdowns.org.uk/uploads/documents/fARMSTEADS_CONSULTATION_REPORT_final.pdf)

*Kent Farmsteads Guidance Equality Impact Assessment* Kent Downs AONB Unit  
and Kent County Council 2010

[http://www.kentdowns.org.uk/uploads/documents/Farmsteads\\_Equality\\_Assessment\\_May\\_2011.pdf](http://www.kentdowns.org.uk/uploads/documents/Farmsteads_Equality_Assessment_May_2011.pdf)

*Kent Farmsteads Guidance* English Heritage, Kent County Council and Kent  
Downs AONB Unit 2013

<http://www.kentdowns.org.uk/publications/kent-downs-aonb-farmstead-guidance>

*Kent Downs AONB Guidance* English Heritage, Kent Downs AONB Unit and Kent County Council 2012  
[http://www.kentdowns.org.uk/uploads/documents/Kent\\_Downs\\_AONB\\_Farmstead\\_Guidance.pdf](http://www.kentdowns.org.uk/uploads/documents/Kent_Downs_AONB_Farmstead_Guidance.pdf)

*National Planning Policy Framework* Department for Communities and Local Government 2012  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf)

## **8. Contact details**

Report Author:

Lis Dyson, Heritage Conservation Manager, Planning and Environment

01622 221535

[lis.dyson@kent.gov.uk](mailto:lis.dyson@kent.gov.uk).

Relevant Director:

Paul Crick, Director, Planning & Environment

[paul.crick@kent.gov.uk](mailto:paul.crick@kent.gov.uk)

## **Appendix 1: Summary of the Kent Farmsteads Guidance**

The Kent Farmsteads Guidance is subdivided into six parts, with an additional glossary of terms to aid the user. In addition summaries are being prepared for each local planning authority, outlining the key characteristics, significance and planning issues. The accompanying Kent Downs AONB guidance document, which links into the Kent Farmsteads Guidance framework, is part of the Kent Downs AONB suite of guidance supporting the AONB Management Plan. The Kent Farmsteads Guidance makes use of a Farmsteads Mapping project across Kent, which has identified those sites with heritage potential and placed them in their landscape context for the first time. Datasets from the project have been provided by English Heritage for incorporation in the Kent Historic Environment Record.

### **Part 1 Farmsteads Assessment Framework**

This sets out the aims and purpose of the Kent Farmsteads Guidance and is divided into two sections:

1. a Site Assessment Framework which will help applicants identify the capacity for change and any issues at the pre-application stage in the planning process, and then move on to prepare the details of a scheme.
2. Farmsteads Summary Guidance which summarises the planning context and the key principles to inform the sustainable development of farmsteads – understanding their character, significance and sensitivity to change.

### **Part 2 Planning Context**

This sets out the national and local policy context, and summarises recent research on farmsteads including for each of Kent's local authorities.

### **Part 3 Kent Farmsteads Character Statements**

Fully-illustrated guidance on the character and significance of Kent farmsteads, for use in individual applications and detailed design work, for the preparation of area guidance and for those with an interest in the county's landscapes and historic buildings. The guidance is presented under the headings of: Historical Development, Landscape and Settlement, Farmstead and Building Types and Materials and Detail.

### **Part 4 Character Area Statements**

These provide summaries, under the same headings and for the same purpose, for the North Kent Plain and Thames Estuary, North Kent Downs, Wealden Greensand, Low Weald, High Weald and Romney Marsh.

### **Part 5 Kent Farmsteads Design Guidance**

This provides illustrated guidance on design and new build, based on the range of historic farmstead types. It is intended to help applicants who are then considering how to achieve successful design, including new-build where it is considered appropriate and fitted to local plan policy.

### **Part 6 Recording and Research Guidance**

This summarises the main issues to consider when undertaking more detailed recording of a site, with a case study and research questions to guide the survey and assessment process.

### **Part 7 Glossary**

This is a glossary of terms to aid the user.

**Summaries**

Summaries are being prepared by English Heritage for each local planning authority outlining the key characteristics, significance and planning issues.