



# **IMPROVING YOUR PLANNING APPLICATION**

**A GUIDE FOR FARMERS**

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This booklet has been prepared by Norfolk Rural Business Advice Service (NRBAS) as part of Shaping the Future's ongoing programme of action under the Norfolk Rural Strategy. NRBAS identified the need to devise and promote a system that could be used by farmers to support planning applications in relation to their farm diversification proposals.

The Guide has been endorsed by planning officers from all of Norfolk's District and Borough Councils.

This guide should be read in conjunction with 'A Farmer's Guide to the Planning System', published by DEFRA and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2002).

# INTRODUCTION

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Farm diversification is an opportunity for many farmers to make better use of their resources. Of necessity, it brings many more farmers into contact with the planning system, as they may require planning permission to convert a building or to introduce a new activity onto the farm.

'The Farmer's Guide to the Planning System', published jointly by DEFRA and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2002), explains how the planning system works. It helps farmers to decide whether a planning application is needed and how to go about it. It also points out the value of providing the planning authority with additional information, to cover the reasons for the application and the benefits that will flow from it.

This booklet, 'Improving Your Planning Application', provides a format and template for that extra information that is described in the text. The template in MS Word may be downloaded from the NRBAS website or can be requested on disk. Local planning authorities have welcomed the guidance that is provided to farmers in this Norfolk Rural Business Advice Service publication.

# **IMPROVING A PLANNING APPLICATION FOR FARM DIVERSIFICATION**

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## **A Farm Development Programme**

When making a planning application for a farm diversification project, it will help planning officers with their decisions if some additional information is presented. This should be a short document that explains the changes that you are proposing, putting them into the context of the whole farm business. It describes the reasons for change to farm systems and facilities, and also sets out future options that you are considering. It describes the steps that you propose to take to ensure the survival of your farming business. It also describes the impact this development will have on the local community, the environment and the economy.

## **Why is a Farm Development programme needed?**

Local planning authorities have to ensure that planning applications for farm diversification schemes are part of a genuine attempt to support and maintain an existing farming enterprise. A planning application will not normally provide sufficient information about the whole farm business, its history and its results to judge this. A Farm Development Programme can reassure the planning authority that an application for diversification would assist in maintaining farm income. It will also outline other benefits that will arise.

The Programme will enable the local authority to weigh up all the issues and speed up the decision making process, as it will be better informed.

## **What are the benefits of preparing a Farm Development Programme?**

A Farm Development Programme provides additional information alongside a normal planning application for a farm diversification scheme. You can easily prepare it yourself.

- A Farm Development Programme will help to demonstrate that you intend to continue farming.
- The continuation of the farming business will:
  - maintain rural employment levels
  - ensure the maintenance and protection of the countryside. Without farming, landscapes will deteriorate.
- Local authorities are justifiably concerned about these matters and will be reassured that others are working towards the same ends.
- Farm Development Programmes help both you to think proposals through and planners to understand them more fully.

## **PREPARING A FARM DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

There is a template for a Farm Development Programme later in this booklet. It includes some guidance notes as to what each section might contain. The template in MS Word format may be accessed from our website ([www.ruraladvice.co.uk](http://www.ruraladvice.co.uk)), or if required we can supply a copy on a disk. However, there is no rigid procedure to follow and you should include enough information to help planning authorities understand your application fully. Using a form does mean that you are likely to think of all the relevant points; it also means that planning officers see the facts in a clear and logical structure that they are familiar with. The appendices to this booklet contain contact details of organisations and publications that will give you further information on the planning system and on diversification.

### **What information should I include?**

Generally, a Farm Development Programme should attempt to cover these basic areas:

- Physical farm details that are not covered on the planning application form.
- A description of current farming activities.
- The reason why the farm needs to diversify into the proposed activities.
- The proposal – including details of existing and new buildings and their size; estimated car parking requirements and daily traffic generation; and numbers of new or retained employees.
- Statement of future intentions for the farm. This is where any future plans or ideas you may have for a second phase of farm diversification are explained. It helps planners if they understand the whole scheme from the outset.
- The implications for the farm and surrounding area if the diversification proposal is implemented. This includes its impact on the environment, on the local economy and on employment prospects, as well as your own farming system. These are all items of concern to your local authority.

You may wish to submit financial information if you think it will help your case. Submitting a financial appraisal that demonstrates the viability of a scheme may show the planning authority that the scheme has been well thought through, and that you are serious. Summary information is normally sufficient.

### **How should I present the information?**

The aim of the Farm Development Programme is to be something that you can easily prepare with little or no expense. The template is a guide; completing it should mean that you have presented all the necessary information concisely and neatly.

# Guidance notes on completion of the Farm Development Programme template.

## Farm Development Programme



### Basic Farm Details

**Farmer:**

**Farm address:**

**Telephone:**

**Fax:**

**E-mail:**

**Farm area:** *In hectares.*

**Topography:** *E.g.: "largely south facing slopes, in a river valley".*

**Field size:** *Approximate average.*

**Land classification:** *Land grade can be a factor in giving planning permission; it also indicates the potential performance for the farm.*

**Farm type:** *Broad classification: arable; mixed sheep and cattle; dairy and arable; etc..*

**Farm history:** *A paragraph explaining the family involvement with the area and the community.*

**Current farming** *A more detailed description of current system, with an indication of yields.*

**Existing buildings:** *Describe the building stock in outline, especially the type and use. Detailed measurements are not required.*

**Wildlife and environment:** *What has been done to maintain or improve the environment? Are there any special features or species worthy of note and protection?*

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### Detail of Farming Activities

**Livestock:** *More detailed description of livestock; numbers; yields.*

**Cropping:** *Crops normally grown; yields.*

**Woodland:** *Woodland area; uses (including recreation).*

**Other farm income:** *Any current diversification activities.*

**Staffing:** *Both current and envisaged, with and without the proposal.*

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### Diversification Proposal

*What is planned – a simple, straightforward description of the enterprise as it will eventually be. This need not include details of how it will be developed, unless that is relevant to the planning application.*

**Justification:** *Why is it needed? Why has it been chosen? How does it fit into the rest of the farm? Why is it the best thing to do?*

**Options considered:** *What else was thought about and why might it have been rejected?*

**Future intentions:** *If this is part of a longer term development, it often helps planners to understand this.*

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**Implications of Proposed Plan:**

- Environmental:** *Impact on the natural environment.*
- Economic:** *Impact on local economy: what other businesses might benefit and how; effect on local employment prospects (full- and part-time).*
- Agricultural use of the farm:** *How will this ensure the continued use of the farm for agriculture?*
- Farm's economics:** *A brief explanation of the economic state of the business, its prospects and the impact of the development. How is farm sustainability improved?*
- Financial appraisal:** *Headline figures only, if at all, of past profitability and expected profits.*

## STEPS IN MAKING A PLANNING APPLICATION

1. Obtain a copy of 'The Farmer's Guide to the Planning System' from your local DEFRA office.
2. Study the Local Plan or Local Development Framework for your district to see what types of development may be acceptable or encouraged.
3. Contact your Borough or District Local Planning Authority and discuss outline ideas with them. A rough sketch may be useful.  
Local authorities receive planning policy guidance from national government from time to time. Recently this has been to encourage farm diversification, within limits and with consideration for local factors (PPS7). Local planning officers will be aware of any changes in policy and will be keen to implement them. They are able to inform you of current policies and local emphases. Access can cause problems with some projects. It may be helpful to discuss such issues at an early stage, with the County Council's Highways Department.
4. Ask for an application form.
5. Decide whether you need outline or full planning permission. Normally change of use requires a full application. You will need a site plan showing its location and its boundary (normally an extract of Ordnance Survey 1:2500 plans).
6. Complete the forms, prepare drawings and a *Farm Development Programme*.
7. Submit them, with appropriate fees to your local planning authority.
8. Explain your proposals to neighbours who might be affected, and to your parish council. Letters of support for your plans are valuable in persuading planners of the merits of the scheme.
9. A decision will normally take eight weeks and will be influenced by a wide variety of considerations. These will include:
  - Local and central government policy
  - Amenity
  - Highway safety
  - Car parking standards
  - Recent appeal decisions
  - Affect on neighbours
  - Whether the land has special designation, such as Green Belt, AONB, etc..
  - DesignThe authority may also seek the views of other bodies and individuals.
10. Be prepared to adjust and adapt your project to meet planners' requirements. It is often possible to arrive at compromise solutions satisfying all sides.

## **IMPORTANT POINTS TO REMEMBER**

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Before deciding on a diversification proposal:

**THINK** about your ideas, seek financial and practical advice about your diversification ideas. Norfolk Rural Business Advice Service can give general advice on diversification and will talk to you about your specific ideas. Consider getting detailed professional advice when your proposals are worked out.

**FIND OUT** what your local planning authority is likely to approve by:

- looking at the Structure Plan and Local Plan, or Local Development Framework, held at the council's offices or main libraries;
- talking to planning officers, preferably on your farm.

**DISCUSS** your diversification ideas with:

- the local planning authority;
- advisers;
- your neighbours;
- the Parish Council.

**CHANGE** your original ideas if that makes them more likely to succeed.

**PRESENT** your plans and application with accurate and adequate information, covering all the points likely to be of concern to the local planning authority. A **Farm Development Programme** will show the local planning authority your reasons for the diversification scheme and exactly how the proposal will affect your farm and the surrounding environment.

**CHECK** that you have included everything, including the correct fee.

**FIND OUT** if you may need other consents in addition to the planning permission (for example approval under the Building Regulations).

## **APPENDICES**

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The Appendices give details of organisations with whom it may be helpful to discuss your diversification ideas, and of further useful publications.

## ***APPENDIX A***

### **USEFUL CONTACTS**

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General rural business advice	Norfolk Rural Business Advice Service	Easton College Easton Norwich NR9 5DX Tel: 01603 748 844
Borough and District Council Planning Offices	South Norfolk District Council	South Norfolk House Swan Lane Long Stratton South Norfolk NR15 2XE 01508 533 633
	Great Yarmouth Borough Council	Planning and Development Dept. Maltings House Malthouse Lane Gorleston Great Yarmouth Norfolk NR31 0GY Tel.: 01493 856 100
	Broadland District Council	Thorpe Lodge 1 Yarmouth Road Thorpe St Andrew Norwich NR7 0DU Tel.: 01603 431 133
	Breckland Council	Elizabeth House Walpole Lake Dereham Norfolk NR19 1EE 01362 695 333
	Norwich City Council	City Hall Norwich NR2 1NH 01603 622 233
	Borough Council of Kings Lynn & West Norfolk	Kings Court Chapel Street Kings Lynn Norfolk PE30 1EX 01553 616 200
	North Norfolk District Council	Holt Road, Cromer,

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		Norfolk Tel.: 01263 513 811
Highways Department	Norfolk County Council	County Hall Planning & Transportation Department County Hall Martineau Lane Norwich NR1 2DH Tel: 01603 611 122
Possibility of grants for farm diversification projects	EEDA	The Business Centre Station Road Histon Cambridge 01223 713 900
Local consultants <i>(Note: this is not an exhaustive list, neither is any recommendation intended or implied.)</i>	Norfolk Farm Management	Whitehouse Farm Marsham Norfolk NR10 5PJ Tel: 01263 733 395
	Brown & Co	Old Bank of England Court Queens Street Norwich Norfolk NR2 4TA Tel.: 01603 629 871
	Laurence Gould Partnership Ltd	Cecil Lodge Falmouth Avenue Newmarket Suffolk CB8 0GZ Tel: 01638 663 275
	ADAS	Southgate Street Bury St Edmunds Suffolk IP33 2BD Tel.: 01986 788 897
	Wilson Wraight	Demeter House 27 Risbygate Street Bury St Edmunds Suffolk IP33 3AQ Tel: 01284 700 727
	Samuel Rose Ltd	Cottage Farm Sywell Northampton NN6 0BJ Tel: 01604 782 700

## APPENDIX B

### USEFUL PUBLICATIONS

The planning process	A Farmer's Guide to the Planning System	DEFRA & The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister ODPM Free Literature, PO Box 236 Wetherby LS23 7NB Tel.: 0870 1226 236 <a href="http://www.defra.gov.uk/planning-guide/index.htm">www.defra.gov.uk/planning-guide/index.htm</a>
Planning issues:	Planning Permission – A Guide for Business	DTLR, DTLR Free Literature PO Box No. 236 Wetherby LS23 7NB Tel.: 0870 1226 236
	Local Plans and Unitary Development Plans	
	Outdoor Advertisements and Signs	
	Building Regulations – an explanatory booklet	
	'Making your planning appeal' 'Guide to taking part in planning appeals'	Planning Inspectorate, Customer Support Unit, Room 3/15 Eagle Wing, Temple Quay House, 2 The Square, Temple Quay, Bristol BS1 6PN Tel: 01173 72 372
Farm budgeting; farm diversification:	Farm Management Pocketbook – John Nix	The Pocketbook, 2 Nottingham Street, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire LE13 1NW Tel: 01664 564 508
	Farm budgeting and business planning Your guide to farm business diversification Your guide to business expansion Your guide to farm business specialisation	Lloyds TSB Agriculture PO Box 112 Bristol BS99 7LB Tel.: 0117 943 3114/5

	Specialist agricultural bookseller, with farm diversification as a topic; new and second hand.	Landsman's Bookshop Ltd, Buckenhill, Bromyard, Herefordshire HR7 4PH Tel: 01885 483 420 <a href="http://www.landsmans.co.uk">www.landsmans.co.uk</a>
Farm Development Review	The farmer's guide to alternative land use (quarterly).	Easton Press Easton College Easton Norwich Norfolk Tel: 01603 731 241

