

UPOTTERY  
(Otterhead) 05/0864/COU  
(CHANGE OF USE) 16.06.05

Applicant: Mr & Mrs Wyatt

Location: Glebe Farm, Upottery  
(Grid Ref: 319479/107802)

Proposal: Conversion of agricultural building to provide additional holiday let and support accommodation.

### **Consultations**

#### **County Highway Authority**

The County Highway Authority would not wish to raise objection from a highway viewpoint if this building is considered to be suitable for conversion to a holiday let and support accommodation.

#### **Environment Agency**

No comments.

### **Planning History**

App. No.	Year	Proposal	Date and Decision
P0629	1997	Conversion of redundant agricultural buildings to farmhouse and holiday unit	26.06.97 Approved
P1183	1983	Agricultural building	30.08.83 Approved

### **Parish Council**

No objection but concerns discussed were:

1. The increased vehicular traffic on a narrow winding road.
2. The unusual circumstances of a newly built steel barn as opposed to an ancient stone built one being made redundant and converted.
3. The fear of this setting a precedent.

### **Ward Members**

The Ward Member, Councillor D R Key, has called the application to Committee and comments as follows:

“This building, although a modern type structure, is obsolete and would in part make a very convenient disabled holiday unit which is in great demand due to the shortage.

It is situated in a very secluded position within the existing holiday complex.

The building could be stone faced and have the upper half removed to be replaced with an apex slated roof to match the units opposite”.

### **Location**

Glebe Farm is located approximately ½ mile west of the village of Upottery and lies immediately opposite Aller Farm. It comprises the original farmhouse and a complex of traditional buildings alongside arising from the planning permission for conversion granted in 1997 comprising new farmhouse in one range of former barns and holiday accommodation in the other. Glebe Farm is still an agricultural holding although agricultural activity has diminished in recent years.

## **The Proposed Development**

Opposite the existing holiday accommodation there is an existing steel framed agricultural building with open shed to the front erected approximately 20 years ago. It is proposed to expand the holiday letting business by converting the building to provide a flexible 4 bedroom unit plus games room, laundry, kitchen gallery and library. The unit would have a small sunken garden projecting westward into the adjoining field.

The existing building is a modern steel framed farm building with walls constructed of concrete blocks, steel sheeting and Yorkshire boarding. The roof is corrugated asbestos sheet and comprises a monopitch. The footprint of the building has a floor area of approximately 201 square metres. Access is direct to the adjoining Lane and one vehicle bay is provided for occupants of the building.

One of the applicants is a chef who runs an outside catering business and requires the kitchen on the ground floor for that part of the business allowing for an element of commercial cooking and food preparation.

As part of the application an Ecological Survey Report has been submitted and whilst no bats or other protected species were identified it is recommended that a simple access for bats be made in the new development to make a positive contribution towards conserving the local bat population.

## **Planning Policy**

### Devon Structure Plan 2001 - 2016

Policy ST1 (Sustainable Development)  
Policy C03 (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty)  
Policy C06 (Quality of New Development)  
Policy TR1 (Devon Travel Strategy)  
Policy TR10 (Strategic Road Network)

### East Devon Local Plan

Policy S4 (Countryside Protection)  
Policy D1 (Design and Local Distinctiveness)  
Policy D4 (Landscape Requirements)  
Policy D9B (Re-use of Rural Buildings Outside Settlements)  
Policy EN1 (Development in Settlement Within Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty)

## **Observations**

The main issue is whether or not the application meets the criteria for the Council's policy on the re-use of rural buildings outside settlements (D9B).

Conversions Policy has evolved over the last 25 years or so and has focused on achieving the retention and re-use of buildings considered important as part of the rural scene. Indeed, a range of traditional buildings within the farm complex has been converted to a new farmhouse and holiday accommodation in recent years.

The building, the subject of the application is a modern agricultural building erected some 20 years ago. Against the criteria of Policy D9B the building performs as follows:

1. Holiday accommodation is a sympathetic use to the rural character of the area.

2. It is accepted that the building is structurally sound.
3. To meet this criteria the existing building and its conversion must be in keeping with its surroundings, local building styles and materials.

The focus on this criterion is to restrict conversions to buildings whose form, bulk, general design and materials are in keeping with traditional rural buildings. The existing building with its concrete blocks, steel sheeting and boarding with a roof of asbestos fails utterly to meet the policy. In addition, the mono-pitched nature of the roof creates a crude form of building totally out of keeping with its setting adjoining traditional buildings and the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in which the building is situated. Whilst the proposed conversion suggests that the steel frame will remain the major external alterations, whilst leading to an architectural solution, are so extensive as to result in a building of totally different appearance. As a consequence it is considered the proposal would be out of keeping with its surroundings, local building styles and materials.

4. The character of the existing building is one of a modern farm building. Whilst it could be argued that the proposal damages this character the applicant has come forward with an interesting architectural solution which makes the most of this unconventional form of building. In this context, therefore, the proposals, in strict architectural terms, will enhance the building and will certainly not have a damaging effect. However, the proposal is tantamount to a new structure in the countryside and the policy objections are not overcome.
5. The proposal will not substantively add to the need to travel by car, lead to a dispersal of activity or uses on such a scale as to prejudice village viability.
6. The applicant puts forward the opinion that the building is redundant. Without further information on the holding's farming practices it is difficult to argue that the building is not redundant. It is considered, nevertheless, that the proposal is unlikely to undermine the viability of the existing agricultural enterprise.

Glebe Farm lies in a particularly sensitive part of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the building is conspicuous from the road leading from Upottery village westwards. The impact of what is, for all intents and purposes, a new building in this form would fail to enhance the landscape character of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty nor would it respect traditional local building styles.

The Committee may be aware of an appeal against the refusal of permission for the conversion of a cowshed to holiday cottage (02/P0188) at Bidwell Farm, Upottery constructed of block walls and pitched asbestos roof. Although the appeal was dismissed in 2003 on other grounds, the Inspector considered that whilst the building was relatively modern and of no particular architectural merit, it was of an informal design and in keeping with its rural surroundings. A subsequent permission was granted and work is currently being carried out on the building. It is not considered that this decision has any bearing on the current application which comprises a totally different form and character of building.

The Ward Member's views are acknowledged but it is not agreed that the building is in a very secluded position. He also goes on to suggest stone facing, removing the upper half and constructing a traditional pitched roof. This would involve effectively the construction of a new building. It would not be a conversion.

Whilst the Parish Council raised no objection a number of concerns are set out in their observations.

## **Conclusion/Summary**

It is noted that the applicants wish to diversify further their agricultural activities by expanding the holiday enterprise they already run. Whilst this is a laudable aim it is clear that the building proposed for conversion is a totally unsuitable candidate for such expansion.

The integrity of the planning system is of the utmost importance and there are limitations on the types of building suitable for conversion. Unashamedly modern and recently erected agricultural buildings are considered unsuitable for conversion to residential use and whilst the applicants have put forward an adventurous and interesting scheme the planning objections to the proposal are strong. If the building is genuinely redundant its removal from the site would be an alternative solution.

The proposal is, therefore, recommended for refusal.

**Recommendation** REFUSE for the following reasons.

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## **Reasons**

1. The Local Planning Authority considers that the retention, re-use and conversion of buildings can, in certain circumstances, make a positive contribution to the rural scene and economy. In the opinion of the Local Planning Authority the building is not one whose retention would be an asset to maintaining the character of the surrounding countryside. It is not considered capable of conversion without the need for substantial alteration nor is the form, bulk and general design of the building and its proposed conversion in keeping with its surroundings, local building styles and materials. The proposal would also add to the need to travel by car to the detriment of the rural character of the area. Consequently, the proposal is contrary to Policies ST1 and C06 of the Devon Structure Plan 2001 – 2016 and D1 and D9B of the East Devon Local Plan, Revised Deposit.
2. The proposal lies within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty where development will only be permitted in exceptional cases. In the opinion of the Local Planning Authority the development is tantamount to the erection of a new building which fails to conserve and enhance the landscape character of the area and fails to respect traditional local built forms including the setting of adjacent buildings and policies on development in the countryside contrary to Policy C03 of the Devon Structure Plan 2001 – 2016 and Policy EN1 of the East Devon Local Plan, Revised Deposit.

## **List of Background Papers**

The file containing all letters, consultations, and documents referred to in the report.