



**Agricultural Building Design
Guidelines for the
Mendip Hills AONB**

**Supplementary
Planning Guidance**

Produced by the Mendip Hills AONB Partnership

Published December 2001 Revised 2013

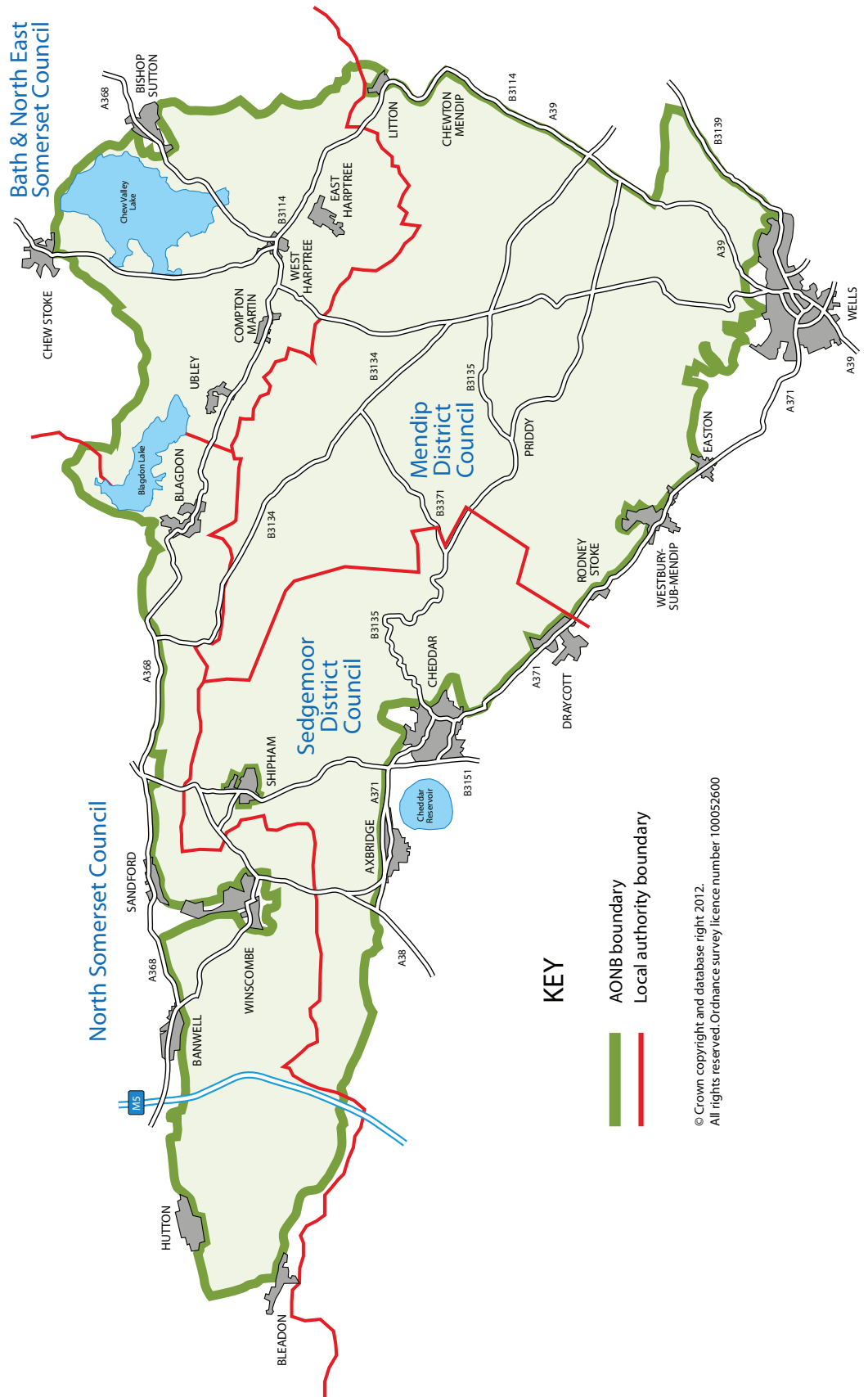
Bath & North East Somerset Council
Mendip District Council
North Somerset Council
Sedgemoor District Council
Somerset County Council

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AONB and local authority boundaries



1 Introduction

Status of this document

This document has been published by the Mendip Hills AONB Partnership Committee to act as a guide to farmers, designers and planning officers on some of the issues to consider in designing agricultural buildings in the Mendip Hills AONB. The guidance is an amended version of Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) published in 2001. This guidance has been formally adopted by North Somerset Council, Bath and North East Somerset Council, Sedgemoor District Council, Mendip District Council and Somerset County Council as SPG. This revised document updates the original version by amending or removing references to information which has been superseded.

It has been drawn up to supplement the policies and proposals of the Development Plans (see Appendix 2) and must be read in conjunction with relevant policies contained in the Development Plan for the area in which the particular proposal lies.

As required by the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW), the five local authorities referred to above have adopted the current Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan. As these Design Guidelines contribute to achieving the Management Plan Objectives, it is the AONB Partnership Committee's intention that the Councils will use the document as Supplementary Planning Guidance in determining planning applications and prior notifications in the AONB.

National Policy Context

In March 2012 the Government published the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to replace a number of previous Planning Policy Statements. The NPPF introduced, amongst other things, a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which requires the planning system to perform economic, social and environmental roles. Councils are expected to approve development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay and to grant permission where a development plan is absent, silent or policies are out of date, unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.

Under Section 28, the NPPF requires that planning policies 'support the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well designed new buildings'.

At the same time, Section 115 states that 'great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty.'

If these requirements of the NPPF are to be achieved there is a need for a high quality of design in relation to new developments of agricultural buildings in the AONB.

Local Policy Context

The AONB is located in the South West region and falls under the authority of two district councils, two unitary councils and one county council whose contact details are listed in Appendix 1. Each of the local authorities is responsible for preparing its own planning policies. The policies that apply will depend on the local authority area in which a development proposal is located.

Policy is contained in the Development Plan, which currently includes regional guidance and structure plans, local plans and local development frameworks. The Development Plan is supported by Supplementary Planning Guidance and Supplementary Planning Documents. Some of the existing documents are now of limited relevance or are due to be replaced as new documents emerge. The documents listed in Appendix 2 were current on 1 January 2013.

Each of the documents is likely to contain policies relating to agricultural developments and also specific policies on ecology, landscape and design which may be of particular relevance to this type of development.

The scope of this document

The Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), designated in 1972, is situated to the south of Bristol and stretches from Bleadon in the west to Chewton Mendip in the east as shown on the map opposite the contents page.

The AONB designation is recognition that the distinctive character and natural beauty of the area are so outstanding that it is in the nation's interest to safeguard them. The primary purpose of the designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape, to consider local economic and social needs and to promote sustainable development. For planning purposes, AONBs are treated as the equal of national parks in terms of their landscape value.

The AONB landscape has evolved through centuries of settlement, industry and agriculture into a unique place, which often evokes strong feelings of wildness and remoteness. The open, weather-beaten plateau contrasts with the soft character of the Chew Valley, whilst the steep wooded slopes of the hills have a character all to themselves. This variety in landscape has been largely influenced by the underlying geology and also by human activities of mining, quarrying and agriculture.

Like everything, the countryside is always changing and the AONB is no exception, but the area continues to be a living and working

landscape where agriculture remains the primary land use despite increasing pressures from 'non farming' interests. The Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan provides a framework for action for the care of the AONB and, as indicated in the Introduction, these Design Guidelines contribute to achieving the Management Plan Objectives.

The need for design guidelines

As the principal land-use of the AONB, agriculture has played a particularly important role in the development of the landscape. The AONB Partnership has recognised that without the continued stewardship by farmers and landowners the characteristic stone walls, hedgerows, limestone grassland and stone buildings would be lost. A thriving agricultural economy must be encouraged and therefore new agricultural development must be considered. It is vital, however, that any new development is a positive addition to the landscape, which enhances the distinctiveness and diverse qualities of the AONB.

When these guidelines were published in 2001, the agricultural industry was undergoing major restructuring with farmers needing to either diversify or expand. This trend has continued as has the pressure for new development in the AONB.

The aim of the design guidelines

Consequently these guidelines have been updated to encourage those requiring and/or designing new agricultural developments to fully consider their impact on the landscape. The open landscape of the AONB means that new development can be particularly intrusive unless careful attention is paid to siting and design. This guide is written to assist farmers, landowners, advisors, designers, planning authorities and building manufacturers.

It was felt that one of the most important considerations in producing this guide was to ensure that it could be easily understood by all. Every effort has been used to ensure that the guide is as simple and user friendly as possible.

With this overall aim in mind, the main purpose of the guidance is:-

- To encourage farmers to consider carefully new development so that it can be practically integrated into the landscape with due regard being taken of planning principles.
- To balance the functional need of new development with the need for minimal intrusion on the landscape.
- To raise awareness of good design principles and the ease with which early planning can greatly improve the physical appearance of buildings.

- To provide practical suggestions and ideas for improving the design of farm buildings.
- To reduce surface water run-off from high ground into the lower reaches of the catchment.

All new farm buildings and structures now fall within the scope of the planning system through either the Prior Notification process for permitted development or through the requirement for the submission of a planning application.

General advice can be obtained from Annex E of Planning Policy Guidance Note 7 "The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic & Social Development" (1997) available at HMSO, and on the web link below:
<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120206163653/http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/annexeps7.pdf>

It has been retained as stand-alone guidance following the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Need for Planning Permission:-

- Agricultural buildings may require planning permission, especially if they are to cater for livestock and are within 400 metres of a dwelling or exceed 465 square metres in area.
- In other cases, a prior notification should be sent to the local planning authority. If no objections are raised, the building can be erected without the need for planning permission.
- This guide seeks to provide local guidance as an aid to the design process for buildings within the Mendip Hills AONB.
- In all cases when considering new agricultural development, after following the guidance in this document and associated references, contact should be made as soon as possible with the local planning department who will be able to advise on specific cases.

2 The Mendip Hills AONB

THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MENDIP HILLS AONB LANDSCAPE
There are eleven distinctive landscape character areas within the AONB identified in the 'Mendip Hills Landscape – Landscape Assessment (1998)' Countryside Commission (CCP 545). These areas are shown on a map in the current Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan.

The geology of an area influences the shape of the landscape and its use. The AONB is characterised by the underlying Carboniferous Limestone, which outcrops in the dramatic gorges cut into the hills. The limestone ridge was created as a result of the rock being folded and uplifted. On the hilltops where the limestone is eroded the underlying Devonian Old Red Sandstone can be seen. Around the edges of the hills and within some of the more fertile valleys the land is underlain by Dolomitic Conglomerate, a hard rock which is known for its attractive red colouration.

This geology and interaction between the three rock types have combined to produce the bold landforms of the plateau and the slopes and hills to the west, and dictated the availability of water and thus settlement patterns. The interaction between limestone and water created a karst landscape of dry valleys, swallets, sink holes and closed basins. These indentations in an otherwise flat and harsh landscape offered ideal shelter for settlements, so that today we see villages located in the larger valleys whilst smaller indents, some man made and some of archaeological importance, were only suitable for isolated farms. The lack of water and harsh conditions on the plateau have had an important influence and are the main reasons for the sparse colonisation of the hills.

An important feature of the AONB is that limited 19th and 20th century development has meant that the characteristic openness and simplicity has been retained. It also means that new development is even more visible.

The AONB is also of importance for biodiversity, containing a diverse range of habitats which are of local, national and international importance. These include European designations at Chew Valley Lake (Special Protection Area), North Somerset and Mendips Bats, Mendip Limestone Grasslands and Mendip Woodlands (all Special Areas of Conservation). There are also 27 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and a number of more local wildlife and geological sites. More details are included in the AONB Management Plan.

In addition to protecting habitats it is important to consider protected species, which are protected through the European Habitats Directive or through national law. Bats and barn owls, in particular, are protected species often associated with agricultural buildings in the AONB.

THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF LOCAL BUILDINGS AND ARCHITECTURE

Human groups exploited the Mendip landscape intermittently in the warmer intervals which occurred during and between the successive phases of the last ice age. Continuous use of the area began with the retreat of the last ice age, some 10-12,000 years ago. **Consequently the AONB has a rich and diverse historic environment.** This important heritage includes buried archaeological sites, artifacts and features, cave

archaeology, individual historic buildings, structures, sites and features and extensive historic landscapes. Among the best known historic features are the many Bronze Age barrows, the lead working remains and the large geometrically shaped fields set out in the late 18th century. During the medieval and early post-medieval periods, settlement was mainly concentrated in the villages and hamlets which ringed the hills and in the few settlements which dotted the plateau – for example, Priddy, Chewton Mendip and Rowberrow. With the Parliamentary Enclosure activity of the late 18th and 19th centuries came a new development phase, which saw the foundation of farmsteads among the freshly created fieldscapes.

Most settlements in the AONB are in the form of small villages, hamlets and isolated farmsteads. **The typical Mendip farmhouse** was built in the late 18th or early 19th century. The design is generally simple - a rectangular building of local stone, roofed with grey slates or red tiles. The front elevation is usually symmetrical, with a central doorway, and windows placed on either side. The first floor windows sit above those on the ground floor and there is often a small central window on the first floor. Ancillary buildings are often placed at right angles to the farmhouse, although sometimes they may continue on the same alignment as the house.

A square or rectangular yard with ranges of buildings or walls on each side is an arrangement often found on Mendip farmsteads. To enable easy access to a number of fields, the farmsteads were sited where a number of fields met, and not in an open fieldscape situation.

The two principal building stones of the AONB are Carboniferous Limestone and Dolomitic Conglomerate the latter being a very rich and varied material often deep red. Occasionally in some of the grander buildings Douling Stone, a warm honey coloured oolite, was used. The use of local stone gives local colour, texture, harmony and distinctive character, linked back to local geology. Tile or slate roofs are now the norm across the Mendips, however, most early buildings would have originally been thatched.

A characteristic of the buildings within the AONB is their **scale in relation to their surroundings**. Agriculture on the hills has always been difficult due to the lack of water and poor soils. As a consequence the impact of modern farming techniques took a relatively long time to arrive. Intensive farming was only possible in the 1950's with the advent of mains water for the first time. These factors have combined to mean that a relatively high number of the small traditional stone cow byres and sheep pens have remained. Unfortunately, despite being characteristic of the AONB, traditional farm buildings have few uses for today's farmers and the demand is for large modern single span buildings.

3 New Agricultural Buildings

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

First Stages

- Seek professional advice as soon as possible when considering new agricultural development. Having considered this design guidance and its associated references, it is important to seek further clarification or guidance from your local planning department on specific matters relating to that local authority area. Speak to the landscape officers as well as planning officers. Some authorities may make a charge for this advice. Both the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) have members accredited in conservation. RIBA offers a Client Advisory Service to potential clients on their projects.
- The first stage of any planning process is to ensure any new building is absolutely necessary and if so that it meets the current needs of the farm and also has regard to any possible future needs. These factors will influence the siting of the building.
- Before applying for planning permission it is a legal requirement to notify the Environment Agency who will advise as to whether the proposed site will be acceptable in the water environment (*See Pollution considerations on page 24*).

Design principles

- Consider function and suitability to surroundings. *See pages 19 to 27*.
- If a large building is required, two smaller units may be more sympathetic to the location and surroundings with an L – shape and / or stepped roofline to reduce the impact. *See Roof Construction pages 14 to 16*.
- Take care when considering the roof structure and materials. Consider stepping pitches and ridges, creating shadow lines to help merge the building with its surroundings. *See Roof Construction pages 15 to 17*.
- Construction materials should be chosen carefully to preserve the local character of buildings and to blend in with the surrounding landscape. *See Use of Materials pages 16 to 17*.
- Roof materials/paint should be matt - dark colours against existing planting and light colours (slate blue and light grey) where viewed against the sky. *See Colour of Materials page 16*.

Siting and location *(see pages 19 to 24)*

- The siting and location of a new farm building are two of the most important factors to consider. It must be remembered that it does not matter how well a building is designed, if it is poorly sited or located it will be intrusive in the landscape and appear as an eyesore.
- Regard must always be had to the integration of the new building with the existing farmstead or farm buildings and on a broader basis with the landscape as a whole.
- When choosing a site, check that it is not a site of significant archaeological, wildlife or geological interest.

Integration with Existing Buildings *(see pages 21 and 22)*

- New buildings should relate to existing buildings and where possible be retained within the farmstead.
- A degree of separation from traditional buildings is desirable.
- The height of new rooflines should not exceed that of existing adjacent buildings.
- If breaching a well defined boundary the scheme should include appropriate enclosure by walls or hedgerows.

Integration with Surrounding Countryside *(see pages 22 to 23)*

- Always view the proposed site from near and far and take advantage of any existing natural screening, e.g. natural dips, hills or woodlands.
- Integrate the new building with existing stone walls or hedge lines.
- Avoid skylines and sites where the building may dominate the landscape such as on the plateau or where particularly visible from publicly accessible viewpoints.

Landscape Treatment *(see pages 24 to 27)*

- It is important to look around and judge the character and pattern of existing vegetation cover before designing a tree planting or other landscaping scheme.
- New planting can help to integrate the building into the surrounding landscape. It is not necessary to totally screen the building; fuzzing and blurring effects of partial tree and shrub planting will generally look more natural.
- Avoid planting in rows, particularly on banks and avoid using Leyland Cypress or other fast growing non-native species.

Pictorial Key Siting and Design Summary

Illustrating some of the points mentioned above



Figure 1a



Figure 1b



New farm buildings to be developed in sympathy with the existing, traditional pattern of the farmstead.

Ridge and eaves height should be in scale with existing buildings.

New build at right angles to existing buildings works well but the contour of the site should be considered.

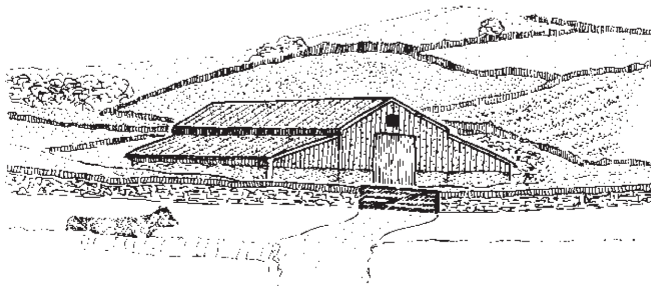
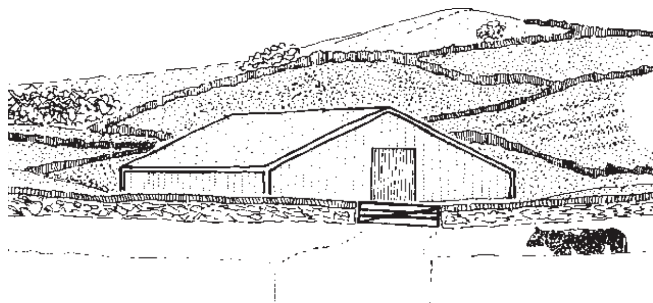


Figure 2a



Figure 2b



New farm buildings should be integrated into the surrounding countryside.

Regard should be taken of the background when choosing a colour of roofing material.

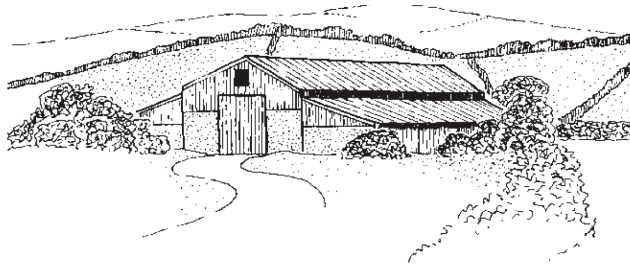
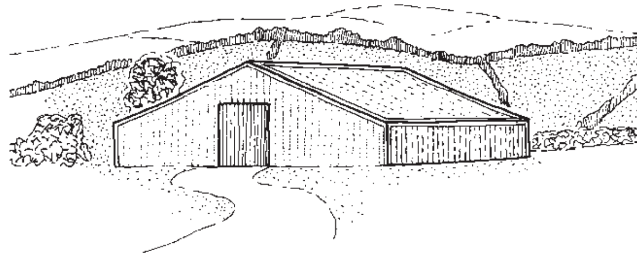


Figure 3a



Figure 3b



Stepped roof and appropriate planting can help integrate a large building into the landscape.

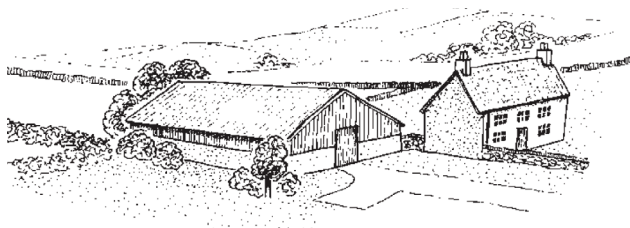
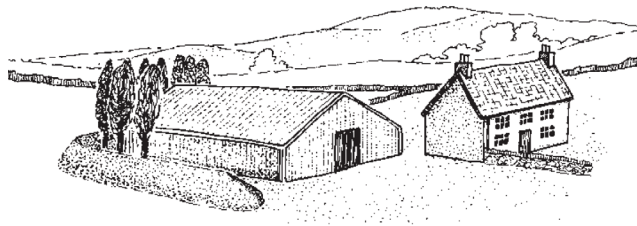


Figure 4a



Figure 4b



Sensitive landscaping and natural planting, rather than artificial bunds and non native trees, are important.

COST CONSIDERATIONS

The design of agricultural buildings generally concentrates on whether a design is suitable for its proposed use and its cost in monetary terms. Farming is a business and the construction of new buildings requires substantial amounts of capital, therefore new buildings must provide a favourable rate of return. This could be achieved by providing additional room for increased stock, improving efficiency by housing stock in a better location, by allowing the use of modern machinery or by improving production by providing a more favourable environment for stock. Often new buildings will be built for a combination of these reasons.

Adapting proposals to meet these guidelines does not necessarily increase building costs. It is intended this design guide will show how minor structural and siting changes can greatly improve the visual integration of a building without major expense. Adaptation of existing buildings and/or reuse of traditional materials should always be considered.

The first stage of any planning process is to ensure any new building is absolutely necessary and if so that it meets the current needs of the farm. It should also have regard to any possible future needs. These factors will influence the siting of the building.

THE DESIGN PRINCIPLES

New development in an area of national landscape value, such as an AONB, is challenged by the need to address all of the constraints this presents, to provide sensitively designed and located buildings.

Farmers and designers should consider both the function of the proposed building and its suitability to its surroundings.

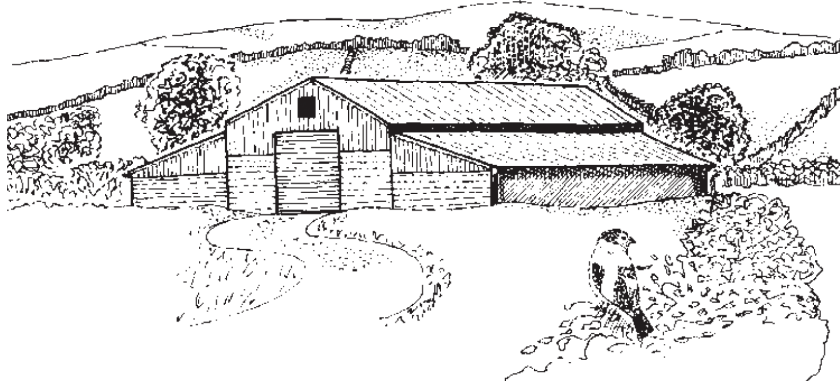
BUILDING FORM

Modern farm buildings tend to be large single span structures with shallow pitched roofs based around a portal frame construction. The width allows flexibility for large numbers of livestock, machinery, crops, forage or feed to be housed under one roof at a cost-effective price. As a result of these changes modern buildings can often be out of scale with their surroundings, especially if the landscaping design is poor.

This issue is especially relevant in an area of high landscape value such as the Mendip Hills AONB. The visual interest of areas of open ground like the Mendip plateau can be significantly affected by the introduction of a large farm building.

Considering the actual size required, and its impact, carefully can reduce this effect. By constructing two smaller units or an L-shape building it may still be possible to satisfy functional requirements and have less visual impact, although it is appreciated that this will not be the case in every situation.

If a particularly wide building is required it would be preferable to consider a stepped roofline. The stepped appearance and resultant shadow lines created by the eaves will help to reduce the impact of the large roof area. (See Figure 5 below)



✓ *Figure 5*

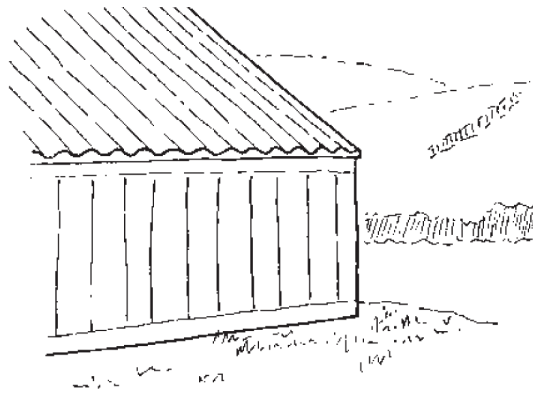
By stepping the roof of larger buildings the impact of large structures can be reduced. Cutting a rectangular hole into a blank gable can add interest and give a more traditional appearance.

ROOF CONSTRUCTION

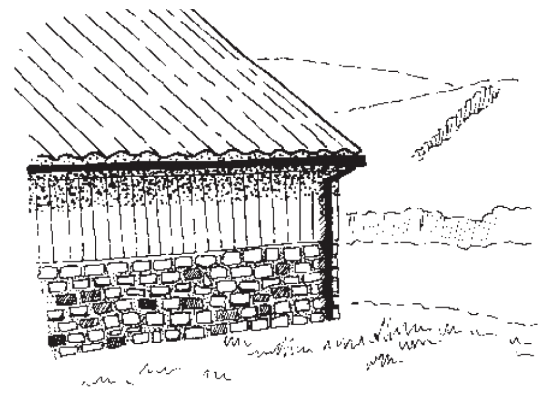
The appearance of the roof is often the most important aspect of building design as it is usually the most visually prominent part of the new building. This is particularly true when the building is located in a prominent position in an open landscape where it may be visible from some distance. Accordingly great care is required when designing both the roof structure and in the choice of the most appropriate material and colour.

In most circumstances a modern building will have a roof pitch of 11 to 15 degrees, although generally a lower pitch will reduce the impact of the building in the landscape.

The appearance of a large building can be improved by stepping pitches and ridges (see Figure 5). Detailing of roofs can be improved by considering the impact of shadows, wide bargeboards and the design of gutters and down pipes. Shadow lines in particular can enable a new building to merge with its surroundings by giving the effect of reducing the scale of the building. An eaves overhang - extending the roof cladding beyond the eaves achieves shadow lines (see Figure 6). Care should be taken in exposed conditions as it may increase the potential for wind damage. There can also be a benefit with over-hung eaves if feeding stock forage along the outside of a building via a feed fence.



✗ Figure 6a



✓ Figure 6b

The illustration on the right shows how the creation of shadow lines at the eaves, together with the use of traditional materials reduces the impact of the building.

MATERIALS

Use of Materials

It is important to try to preserve the local character of buildings. There may be an opportunity to re-use material from on-site demolition or, depending on the location, it may be important to incorporate stone walling as part of the design.

Modern materials are now available in a wide range of colours and this is often one of the most practical ways to improve the appearance of a new building. Unless the setting requires its use, traditional fibre cement, grey cladding or roofing is unlikely to be acceptable for modern buildings unless treated with cattle slurry/lime to encourage growth of lichens etc. When weathered, fibre cement blends extremely well with the local stone and pattern of colours within the AONB. Use space timber for cladding in preference to sheet cladding materials. Do not use reflective or glossy cladding.

Colour of Materials

The choice of colour can have a considerable impact on the integration of a building with its surroundings. This is particularly so for the AONB, where there is an abundance of traditional farm buildings and a high degree of public interest. If the new building is to be constructed from traditional materials they should match the original materials. When using modern materials the colours should blend in with the surrounding landscape.

One of the most important rules concerning roof colouring is to ensure that the roof colour is darker than the walls. The only exception to this is when a building will be viewed against the sky. Here, light colours, such as slate blue and light grey, should generally be used. Dark colours, such as green, slate grey or brown, should be generally used where the roof of a building is being seen against existing planting/landscaping.

The roof materials/paint should be **matt** rather than gloss in appearance. Natural colour fibre cement (the asbestos cement replacement) may be particularly suitable as it has qualities that allow it to weather and has a rough surface attractive to lichens and therefore readily weathering into the surroundings (See Use of Materials - above).

Sustainability of Materials

The emphasis of the planning system is now on sustainability and this has been confirmed by the National Planning Policy Framework. Given the national importance of AONBs, it is appropriate for the local councils to seek high standards of sustainability in these areas. For example, new developments should consider whether there is scope to reuse or recycle materials, or at least to source them locally to reduce road miles.

Where new materials are used they should be selected so as to minimise their carbon footprint and to sustain the availability of the resource. A number of certification systems exist to help to ensure that building materials are obtained from sustainable sources.

VENTILATION AND LIGHTING

It is absolutely vital that buildings are both well ventilated and lit. Modern welfare standards are becoming increasingly demanding and failure to comply can result in lower stock prices at market. Many traditional buildings are now considered unsuitable for housing livestock on health and welfare grounds. Modern buildings offer greatly improved living conditions.

Natural ventilation is created by the entry of wind into the building below the eaves through timber space boarding which then descends, as it is relatively cold. The animals produce a cyclic effect through the heat generated by their bodies. Warm air rises to the ridge vent and exits the building, thus ensuring a constant supply of fresh air and reducing the risk from disease. The design of the space boards will affect the amount of air that can enter and will vary depending on the stock housed. The number of stock and type must be calculated carefully to ensure that the amount of air circulating is adequate.

Multi-span buildings will normally require some form of additional ventilation:

- If spans have different roof levels due to sloping ground, sufficient inlets can be built below the eaves.
- Battens can be placed between individual roof sheets so as to raise the roof sheets slightly (raised roof ventilation).
- Leave longitudinal gaps between each roof sheet (slotted roof ventilation).

The landscape around the new building will also affect the amount of ventilation to the building. A narrow valley is not an ideal location as it will often act as a wind tunnel and create excessive draughts. Likewise a building located in a wider valley or one partly surrounded by high banks can suffer from inadequate ventilation.

In exposed parts of the AONB, depending on the position of the building, not all elevations will need to be space boarded. Some elevations can, for example, be close boarded, especially on the southwesterly side.

For most agricultural buildings natural light is the cheapest and easiest method of **lighting**. This can be provided by the use of translucent sheets in the roof but these should be put on the least visible side of the building. However, if this is not suitable from a visual aspect, then side openings in the boarding should be considered.

The potential impact of developments within or outside the AONB on the 'dark skies' of the designated landscape is an issue identified in the Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan. The Management Plan includes an objective (under D1) to maintain or improve the existing level of dark skies. The AONB Partnership Committee has issued a statement urging all local authority partners to consider light pollution when dealing with planning applications e.g. influence the orientation and design of buildings to reduce the need for security lighting and to promote sensitive lighting schemes.

If artificial lighting is proposed in new development, care should be taken to avoid excessive light spillage (e.g. from roof lights) which could erode the dark skies of the AONB.

ANCILLARY DEVELOPMENT

Silage Clamps

Effluent from crops stored in any enclosed pit or silo is one of the most concentrated and harmful pollutants on the farm. Even small amounts of pollutants in a watercourse can cause tremendous damage to the environment. The main causes of pollution are silage clamps that are not designed or maintained properly. **The Water Resources (Control of Pollution) (Silage, Slurry, and Agricultural Fuel Oil) (England) Regulations 2010 regulate the construction of new silage clamps.**

The Regulations set out a number of detailed requirements under Schedule 1, which include having an impermeable base with channels surrounding it to catch the effluent. The base and drains must be able to resist corrosion and are therefore often made out of reinforced concrete. These requirements mean that there is little scope to alter the materials used in their construction, however their siting can be considered.

Although silage clamps should not be placed within 10 metres of a watercourse or field drain they can still be placed into sloping ground.

This means that the excavated soil can be used to form screening banks outside the perimeter drains. However, the Environment Agency does not permit clamps made from purely earth banks. As with bunds, referred to earlier, any earth modelling needs to be gentle grading to provide slopes that are unobtrusive in their surrounding landscape. *See also Pollution Considerations page 24.*

Waste Storage

Slurry will be produced from beef, dairy or pig housing which does not use much straw or bedding material. There is, therefore, a need for a facility to store slurry. Dirty water is created from rainfall falling onto dirty surfaces, and this will also need collecting. Under the Water Resources (Control of Pollution) (Silage, Slurry, and Agricultural Fuel Oil) (England) Regulations 2010 slurry and dirty water must be kept in a reception pit or slurry storage tank, unless it is kept temporarily in a tanker. See Schedule 2 of the Regulations.

Enamelled steel circular stores for liquid waste storage can, if sited poorly, be very intrusive. By using the natural contours of the site the visual impact of the store can be significantly reduced.

Some suppliers of stores can offer alternative colour schemes and this should be considered in the planning process. *See Colour of Materials page 16.*

Outdoor Feed and Grain Bins

Outdoor feed bins are generally very tall and constructed from galvanised steel to reduce the possibility of vermin attack. This is a very intrusive material due to its reflectivity and bins should be carefully integrated with other buildings wherever possible, ie. in yard complexes. Therefore, colour and siting of such structures are very important.

SITING AND LOCATION

It should be appreciated that siting and location of a new farm building are two of the most important factors to consider in the context of these guidelines. Thus, however well a building is designed, if it is poorly sited or located it is likely to have a significant detrimental effect on the landscape.

Even if new buildings are to be placed within or close to existing farmsteads careful planning is required. Infilling of areas between existing farm buildings is not always the most appropriate solution as it can damage the appearance of the farmstead without actually improving the farm efficiency.

HISTORIC AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL FEATURES

In preparing an application for agricultural buildings, applicants will need to determine at an early stage whether there is likely to be any

archaeological interest in the area and choose the siting of the building accordingly. During the planning process all applications will be checked with the local authority archaeologist to ensure that new buildings are not placed on sites of archaeological interest. However not all historical sites are recorded by English Heritage or the local authority and may not be easily distinguished. Information on sites of local importance can be obtained from the Historic Environment Records held by Somerset County Council, North Somerset Council and Bath & North East Somerset Council.

The AONB is noted for its historic landscape and often the dips and swallet holes can contain important historical information and are themselves important features. Great care should therefore be taken when choosing a site and advice can be obtained from the local planning officer and/or the local authority archaeologist.

WILDLIFE AND GEOLOGY

Ecological appraisal is now a key part of the planning process and the onus is on the applicant to consider potential impacts on protected sites and species. Local authority ecologists can advise on the level of assessment required. Local government has to consider the environmental impact of any new building and local planning authorities check all applications for their impact on sites of wildlife or geological interest. Accordingly it is advisable to avoid locating a new building on or close to a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), County Wildlife Site (CWS) or Regionally Important Geological Site (RIGS) (or County Geological Site in Somerset). To check the location of these contact Natural England for SSSIs and the appropriate Wildlife Trust for CWSs and RIGS. Information on national sites is also available on the website www.magic.gov.uk

Protected species also need to be considered in locations outside the protected sites. Bats are a particular example of this. Further guidance on issues such as rural buildings, bats and barn owls can be obtained by reference to the online "biodiversity planning toolkit", which is available at www.biodiversityplanningtoolkit.com Consider taking the opportunity for making provision for barn owls and bat roosts within new building design.

If the new build is to be sited on steep isolated ground it could be possible that the development may inadvertently destroy unprotected herb or flower rich grasslands. Care should be taken to avoid such sites as, wherever possible, developers should aim to maintain species rich habitats.

Have regard to existing trees and hedgerows by siting new buildings beyond branches and the spread of hedges. Ensure that branches and roots are protected from construction work.

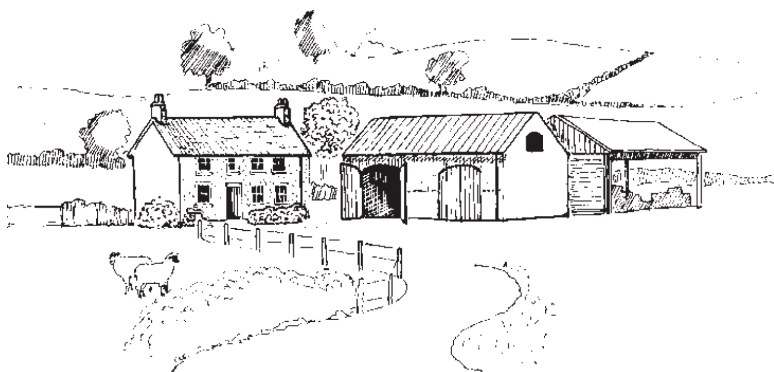
INTEGRATION WITH EXISTING BUILDINGS

Most farms in the AONB will be characterised by a main farmhouse around which the farm buildings will be placed. It is vital that new buildings are well related to the farmhouse and it should not swamp the farmhouse or alter the appearance of the immediate setting.

Regard should be taken of the existing limits of the farm buildings and any new development should be retained within the farmstead, for example within existing stone-walled enclosures.

Usually farm buildings will be required on already developed farm sites, where they will be placed near existing buildings. In these situations the development should relate to the local pattern of farm buildings in the landscape by scale, style, and materials (see Figure 7). Generally this is desirable from a landscape point of view, however there are a number of factors that should be considered:

- New buildings should be orientated with the main alignment of buildings on the farm. Right angle relationships work well, but the contours of the site should be considered.
- Rooflines – actual height and perceived height relative to traditional buildings as viewed from key vantage points will be relevant.
- Buildings should relate to existing buildings rather than stand in isolation. They should have some degree of separation.
- Ensure that the new building will not limit the future potential for further development.



✓ *Figure 7*

New farm buildings should be developed in sympathy with the existing, traditional pattern of the farmstead. Ridge and eaves heights should be in scale with existing buildings. New build at right angles to existing buildings work well, but the contours of the site should be considered.

For those farms with a particularly high landscape value it may not be acceptable to site new buildings in the vicinity of the existing farm building complex. In these circumstances consideration should first be given to the repair or modification and re-use of existing buildings.

Regard should always be taken of listed buildings. As above, the construction of a new farm building may not be considered acceptable where it has a significant detrimental effect on the associated listed buildings or their curtilages.

INTEGRATION WITH SURROUNDING COUNTRYSIDE

The Mendip Hills AONB plateau is relatively flat and exposed and careful consideration should be taken of the siting of new buildings here. In particular, buildings should be located in sheltered positions below the skyline where possible. Similarly buildings on prominent hillsides need careful consideration, as they will be visible from some distance away.

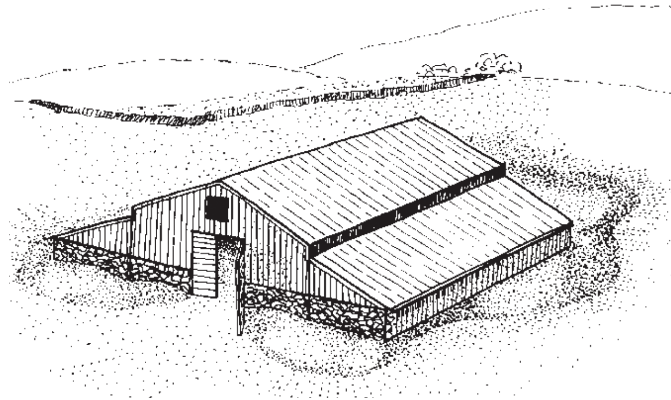
In planning any development, viewpoints from which the building would be seen should be identified. Approach roads, public rights of way and high points surrounding the site should be investigated in order that the potential impact of the building can be judged. It is important to consider not only the building itself, but also the impact of associated features such as driveways, hard-standings, fencing and fuel tanks. Where a planning application is required, these matters should be covered in the Design and Access Statement, with photographs identifying key views from publicly accessible vantage points. In some circumstances, such as prominent or sensitive sites the Local Planning Authority could require the preparation of a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. This is normally undertaken by a landscape architect and involves a photographic survey and a commentary identifying likely impacts on key views and viewpoints.

If new services are required, thought should be given to the effect on the landscape.

- New access tracks can be very damaging to features such as trees and hedges, so existing tracks should be used wherever possible. If new tracks are unavoidable, use stone or gravel which allows vegetation to grow through and encroach from the edges to minimise impact on the landscape. New accesses and splays should be bounded with materials to match existing boundaries, such as hedges or dry stone walls.
- New gates – when considering new gates, high sheet metal gates or other solid gates are inappropriate in farm settings in the AONB and may require specific permission if adjacent to the highway. Lower barred gates, preferably wooden are more in keeping with AONB character.

Wherever possible a site location should be chosen which takes advantage of natural dips, screens and hillsides. If sited and designed well, some buildings may not need significant additional landscaping.

There may be an opportunity to enhance poor hedges. However, badly designed buildings cannot be ameliorated by the use of an artificial earth bund or planting. Minor regrading of soil at low level in the immediate vicinity of the new building may be appropriate. (See Figure 8 below.)



✓ *Figure 8*

Avoid creating artificial shapes with earth bunds to screen buildings as they are out of place in the landscape. Minor slopes and regrading around the area can enhance buildings, as shown above.

When siting the building the importance of the background must be taken in to account. For instance a new building with a wood behind may appear less intrusive than where the background is open farmland. (*See Pictorial Summary Sheet pages 12 to 13*).

Things to avoid are:

- Sites on the skyline.
- Sites where a building will dominate the landscape such as in the middle of a flat plateau.
- Buildings which would be unduly prominent or particularly visible from a public viewpoint.
- Unnecessary removal of hedges and trees.
- Unnecessary removal of stone boundary enclosure walls.

Cut and fill - If the position of a building requires 'cut and fill' techniques it is important to have regard to the existing contours of the land to reduce the extent to which the natural slope is altered around the structure. **On steep slopes it will always be difficult to achieve a satisfactory result.**

The implications of producing large amounts of excavated material should be considered. Aim for a balance that avoids issues of unsustainable removal of material from the site, particularly where it is unsuitable for spreading across the field or potentially damaging to wildlife. If spreading, do so over a large area to avoid producing unnatural earthworks such as bunds. Care should be taken to provide good ground cover and the provision of French drains to keep the proposed building safe from rising ground water. **Importation of fill is the least desirable option.**

POLLUTION CONSIDERATIONS

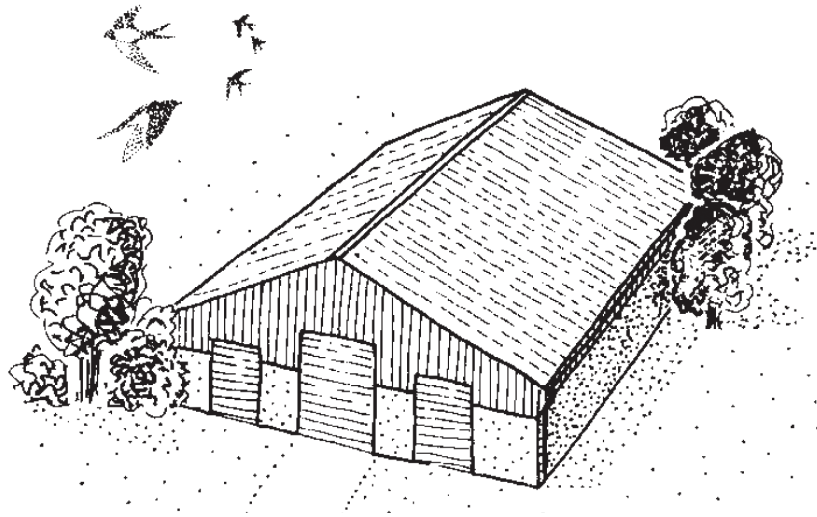
Before applying for planning permission it is a legal requirement to notify the Environment Agency, who will advise as to whether the proposed site would be acceptable in view of its potential impacts on the water environment. For further information please refer to the guidance note, **Protecting our Water, Soil and Air: A Code of Good Agricultural Practice for farmers, growers and land managers**, which is available from the DEFRA website at www.defra.gov.uk

There is a specific legislation under the **Water Resources (Control of Pollution) (Silage, Slurry and Agricultural Fuel Oil) (England) Regulations 2010 (SAFFO)** concerning new farm buildings with which farmers must comply.

Under the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010: regulations 38(1) and 12(1) it is an offence to knowingly permit or cause a discharge of poisonous, noxious or polluting matter into any 'controlled waters' without the proper authority through an environmental permit or exemption. It is extremely important that any potential site for a new building is thoroughly checked to be within the law. Actual acceptable distances of buildings away from watercourses will vary according to bed type, type of building and the method of waste disposal.

LANDSCAPING TREATMENT

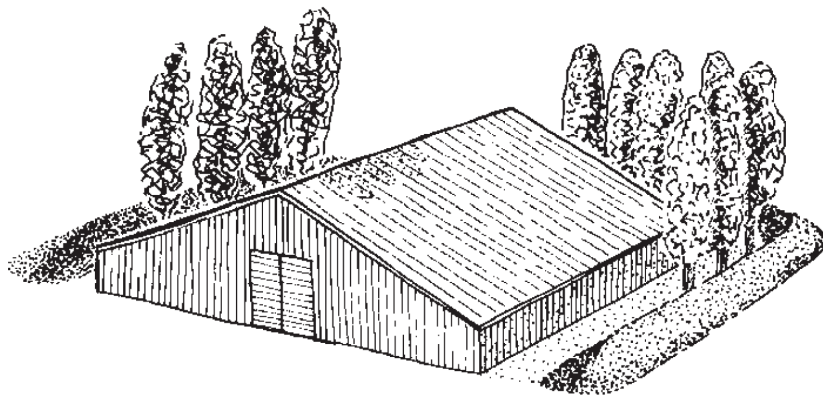
A new building should contribute to the overall landscape and should in most cases be enhanced by new planting, thus landscaping schemes are encouraged in the AONB. **New planting can sometimes be intrusive in its own right and should not be used to hide or screen a building that has been badly sited or designed.** Use the fuzzing and blurring effects of partial tree and shrub planting, rather than solid screens which may themselves become intrusive, both in front and behind buildings (see Figure 9).



✓ *Figure 9*

A new structure does not need to be surrounded by planting. A small pocket of planting can help soften a building and integrate it into the surroundings.

Earth mounding, sensitively done and echoing the local landform can be helpful: it is the straight or angular mounds that are obviously artificial and thus inappropriate (see Figure 10 below).



✗ *Figure 10*

Avoid short, straight or angular earth bunds and planting in rows, especially with non-native species such as Leyland Cypress. Trees of distinct form, for example tightly columnar or very rounded, should also be avoided.

The use of trees that follow the perimeter of a building and are unconnected with the existing landscape should be avoided. It is important to look around a site and judge the character and pattern of vegetation before adopting a tree planting scheme. In some cases tree planting may not be acceptable as the surroundings may be characterised by their open nature such as on the plateau. Any hedgerows should be retained and, where possible, a new building should link with such features so as to merge with the existing landscape. It is advisable to seek specialist landscape advice for the design of the planting scheme.

With all tree planting it is important to consider the passage of forty or fifty years. Trees, especially broadleaves, will dramatically change in size and stature over time.

Tree planting should avoid:

- Planting in rows, particularly on banks.
- Using Leyland Cypress or other fast growing non-native trees.

Good plans can aid integration:

- Planting should occur in groups of trees and shrubs, which link to existing hedgerows and copses.
- Planting can be used to integrate buildings and soften their impact and can help to offset the horizontal line of modern farm buildings.
- It may be necessary to consider planting at a distance from the building to ameliorate its impact on the landscape, for example strengthening hedgerows or planting individual trees.

Trees and shrubs used in the AONB should be native and characteristic of the location of the building. Contact the appropriate local authority Landscape Officer for advice on species and their management. Wherever possible trees used should be of local provenance to retain the genetic make-up of the population and to reduce road miles for delivery.

The table below lists acceptable species used in the AONB. Not all are appropriate to all sites.

Trees	Shrubs
Ash×	Holly
Sessile Oak	Hawthorn
Common Oak	Blackthorn
Common Alder#	Hazel
Sycamore*	Dogrose
Beech	Common Privet
Field Maple	Field Rose
Silver or Downy Birch+	Guelder Rose
Whitebeam	Wayfaring Tree
Small Leaved Lime	Spindle
Willow	Goat and Grey Willow

Notes

- × Avoid over reliance as presently threatened by ash die back disease, *Chalara fraxinea*
- # Avoid over reliance as presently prone to infection by *Phytophthora* near watercourses.
- * Highly invasive and should be carefully sited.
- + Downy Birch is more suitable in wet locations

The protection of new trees by shelters and weed control is essential if they are to get a good start. The level of protection depends on the presence of deer, rabbits and grazing animals. New hedges will need to be protected from grazing animals with appropriate fencing. Weed control reduces competition for moisture and nutrients and protects the landowner's initial investment.

As noted above with existing hedgerows, **the retention of hard landscaping features such as dry stone walls is extremely important**, particularly on the plateau (see Figure 11 below). Once again regard must be taken of such features so that any new building blends into the existing landscape as unobtrusively as possible.

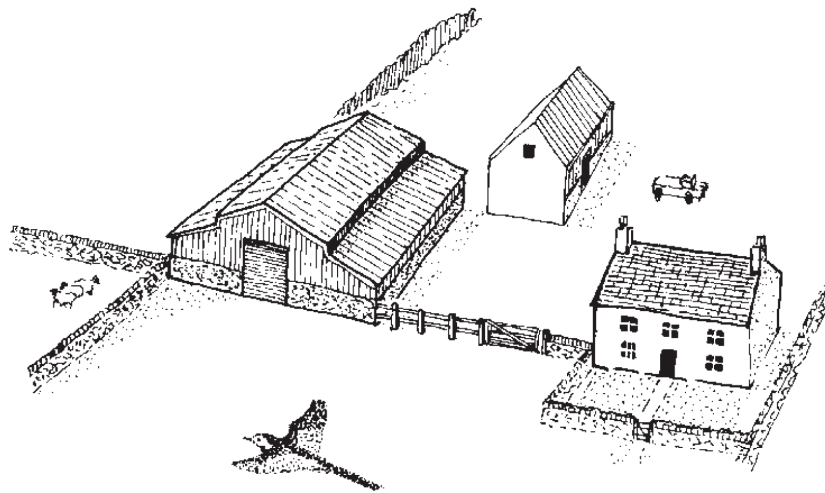


Figure 11

Landscaping can simply be the continuation of existing stone walls or hedgerows up to the new building, thus linking it to related structures and features. In some circumstances it could be achieved using fences or walls.

Appendix 1 - Contacts

Local authorities

Bath and North East Somerset Council

Planning Services
PO Box 5006
Bath
BA1 1JG
Tel: 01225 394041

Mendip District Council

Cannards Grave Road,
Shepton Mallet,
Somerset
BA4 5BT
Tel: 01749 343399

North Somerset Council

PO Box 141
Somerset House,
Oxford Street,
Weston-super-Mare
BS23 1TG
Tel: 01275 888888

Sedgemoor District Council

Bridgwater House,
King Square,
Bridgwater
TA6 3AR
Tel: 01278 435435

Somerset County Council

County Hall,
Taunton
TA1 4DY
Tel: 01823 355455

Publication contact

Mendip Hills AONB Unit

Charterhouse Centre,
Blagdon,
Bristol
BS40 7XR
Tel: 01761 462338

Appendix 2 - Summary of planning policy documents at 1 January 2013

The approved and adopted Development Plan covering the AONB comprises:-

- **Regional Planning Guidance for the South West (RPG10)** - currently still part of the Development Plan until revoked.
- **Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review 1991 - 2011** (for the part of the AONB within the county of Somerset) – policies saved but of diminishing relevance after adoption of Local Development Frameworks.
- **Joint Replacement Structure Plan** (B&NES, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire) – adopted September 2002
- **Joint Waste Core Strategy** (B&NES, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire) – adopted in March 2011.
- **Bath and North East Somerset Local Plan** – adopted in 2007. Saved policies and proposal maps form the basis for development management decisions until replaced by the Local Development Framework.
- **North Somerset Local Development Framework** (for those parts of the AONB within North Somerset Council's area) – Core Strategy adopted in April 2012.
- **North Somerset Replacement Local Plan 2007** – Includes development management policies.
- **Mendip District Local Plan (to 2011)** - Some policies saved but EN6 'Landscape value of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty' no longer in use.
- **Sedgemoor Local Development Framework** – Core Strategy was adopted in October 2011.
- **Sedgemoor District Local Plan 1991-2011** – saved development management policies are still current.

The following Supplementary Planning Guidance / Supplementary Planning Documents are relevant:-

- **Rural Landscapes of Bath and North East Somerset - A Landscape Character Assessment SPG** (2003)
- **North Somerset Biodiversity and Trees Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)** (2005)
- **North Somerset Landscape Character Assessment** (2005)
- **Sedgemoor Landscape Assessment and Countryside Design Summary** - was adopted as SPG in September 2003.

Reference should also be made to the following emerging Local Plans, currently at varying stages of preparation:-

- **North Somerset Sites and Policies Development Plan Document**
- will replace the development management policies in the North Somerset Replacement Local Plan 2007
- **North Somerset Sites and Policies Document on Renewable and Low Carbon Energy (SPD)**
- **Bath and North East Somerset Local Development Framework – Core Strategy** at Examination, adoption anticipated December 2013
- **Mendip District Replacement Local Plan** - adoption expected in summer 2013.

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