

# FARM BUILDINGS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE



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Department of  
**Agriculture and  
Rural Development**

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# FARM BUILDINGS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

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## IMPORTANT FACTS

Traditionally, farm buildings were constructed from stone and other local materials. They were sited in the most sheltered part of the farm and were generally surrounded by trees. The result? The farmyard and its associated farm buildings became an integral part of the landscape, complementing and often enhancing it.

Modern farm buildings are generally much larger and use modern materials in their construction. The potential result? Buildings that 'stand out' and dominate the countryside.

However, this need not be the case. Sensitive siting, good design, appropriate colour and finish, good painting techniques and the planting of suitable trees, coupled with the retention of existing attractive features, can all be used to successfully integrate new and existing farm buildings into the landscape.

*Farm Buildings in the Countryside gives practical advice on the siting and design of farm buildings to ensure they complement the Northern Ireland landscape.*

## SITING NEW BUILDINGS

Most new buildings are sited next to the existing farmyard. This makes it easier to integrate them with the existing farm buildings.

### General Guidelines

- ~ Whenever possible, avoid siting buildings on the skyline.
- ~ Use hollows and natural backdrops to reduce the impact of the buildings.
- ~ Avoid detracting from the farm dwelling.
- ~ Avoid damage to historic monuments, or spoiling their setting.
- ~ Consider possible pollution and odour problems.
- ~ Do not site effluent handling facilities within 10m of any watercourse.

Many new agricultural buildings are currently exempt from planning permission. You are, however, advised to contact [Planning Service](#) before any carrying out any work. You should also ensure that the proposed works do not break any byelaws, obstruct rights of way or affect oil, gas or water pipelines or electricity or telecommunications lines.

If intending to build on uncultivated land, or in a semi-natural area, you must first obtain consent from [DARD Environmental Policy Branch](#).

Contact the [Environment and Heritage Service](#) if the site for the proposed building is:

- ~ near an ancient monument or historic building;
- ~ likely to affect a tree protected by a Preservation Order;
- ~ within an Area of Special Scientific Interest (or other designated site).

## DESIGN AND MATERIALS FOR NEW BUILDINGS

Consider current legislation, animal health and welfare requirements, health and safety, and the [Codes of Good Agricultural Practice for the Prevention of Pollution](#). Where appropriate, buildings should have adequate effluent collection facilities. Clean roof water should be directed to the storm water system.

### Size

- ~ Large, new buildings will dominate existing smaller buildings and the farm dwelling. They are therefore difficult to integrate.
- ~ Avoid unnecessary height.

### Shape

- ~ Where possible, match with the shape, details and character of the existing buildings.
- ~ Retain as much as possible of existing vernacular farm buildings, outbuildings, gateways, dry stone walls and other features.
- ~ Large span buildings are generally unsightly on sloping sites. Consider two or three smaller span buildings, stepping down with the land contours, although this may sometimes be difficult and costly to achieve.
- ~ Match the roof slopes to the contours of the land. Roofs should, in general, be steeply pitched.
- ~ Consider roof form, shape and the proportion of roof to wall in the general appearance of the building.

### Materials

- ~ The appearance of the building can be greatly improved by carefully choosing the building materials. Where practical, use materials which are traditional and are in keeping with the local area.
- ~ Wood gives a pleasing appearance and facilitates good ventilation, for example, when used as space boarding.
- ~ Use render finish in preference to concrete block finish.
- ~ Avoid mixing too many different materials.
- ~ The use of stone finish, for example, on a gable wall, will help blend the building in with other traditional buildings or adjacent stone walls.

### Details

- ~ Large expanses of walling using the same texture look uninteresting. Vertical breaks can be created and emphasised by using painted upright stanchions.
- ~ Use contrasting walling and cladding or use different types of cladding to make the appearance of the building more interesting.
- ~ In a lot of cases, vernacular buildings have a very simple eaves detail which involves a half round cast iron gutter finished almost flush to the building. This detail is very traditional and should be replicated. Barge boards are often unnecessary, with the gable walls finished in a very plain detail.
- ~ Sills should be of sufficient depth to reflect vernacular building details.
- ~ Good proportioning of the doorway with balanced in-line spacing of windows and wall openings adds to the character of the building.
- ~ Always pay attention to good finish, workmanship and connection of services. These all enhance the general appearance of the building. In a lot of cases, sheeted doors are often the most appropriate finishes.

### CHOICE OF COLOUR

- ~ Painting prolongs the life of a building. The choice of colour can make all the difference to the general appearance of a farm in the countryside.
- ~ Select a colour to complement existing buildings.
- ~ Do not use light and bright colours. They dominate the landscape and will become even lighter over the years.
- ~ Avoid light greens, bright blues, pinks and mauves.
- ~ Darker colours are recommended. Consider dark green, dark grey, brown and the traditional red oxide.
- ~ Pre-painted panels are available in colours recommended by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.
- ~ If considering two colours, use the darker colour on the roof. Dark roofs make buildings look smaller and less conspicuous. It is difficult to avoid spray drift from the 'lighter' sides onto the roof, so paint the sides first.
- ~ Use brighter colours to highlight features within the farmyard, such as doors, window frames and traditional gates.

## GUIDELINES FOR PAINTING

### Preparation

Thorough preparation is essential:

- ~ remove all dirt, greasy deposits and flaky paint;
- ~ wire brush any rusty areas and treat with a zinc primer;
- ~ use an etching solution to ensure that the paint will bond to the galvanised sheet (where the sheet has not been weathered for over two years);
- ~ all surfaces must be clean and dry before painting.

For best results, choose the right paint and apply it correctly:

- ~ when re-painting a building or when using paints from different manufacturers, make sure that the paints being used are compatible. Test on a small area first;
- ~ use a good quality paint and always ensure that it is lead-free. Do not use too much thinner;
- ~ always read the manufacturer's instructions and follow them exactly;
- ~ only use a reputable contractor;
- ~ if spray-painting is not being used, paint rollers are available which will follow the corrugations of corrugated iron.

### Recommended Painting Procedure

*New* galvanised cladding:

- ~ treat with mordant or passivating solution (these solutions must be thoroughly washed off and cladding allowed to dry);
- ~ next, apply one coat of 'quick-dry' metal primer;
- ~ follow with one coat of undercoat;
- ~ finally, apply two coats of gloss.

*Previously* painted cladding:

- ~ apply one coat of undercoat;
- ~ follow with two coats of gloss.

If bituminous paints have been used previously, two coats of a similar type should be applied.

### Fibre Cement Cladding

This material is durable and maintenance free. It is mainly used in its natural pale grey colour, which darkens with age and the growth of moss. It can look very bright when new, however, so consider using a dark colour.

- ~ Never dispose of waste paint or paint washings to drains or watercourses. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for disposal. Some Councils operate collection schemes for waste paint.
- ~ Work safely – always pay careful attention to any manufacturer's health and safety advice.

### Screening

Sensitive tree planting around the farmyard helps to soften the outline of buildings and integrate them into the countryside. This is especially valuable where it has not been possible to site buildings in the most appropriate location.

### Tree Screens and Backdrops

Clumps of trees, rather than single lines, will add interest to the farmstead and help to reduce any adverse visual effect created by the new building. Trees should be used in a positive way to improve the landscape rather than as an afterthought in an attempt to hide an ugly building. A mixture of species, particularly broad-leaved trees, is preferable. However, do not plant them where they are likely to interfere with the future development of the farmyard.

Not every site will need a front screen of trees. Trees planted behind the building can often have a softening and harmonising effect, blending the buildings into the landscape. Always make good use of any natural backdrop of trees.

### Tree Species to Use

- ~ Use a mix of native tree species, for example, oak, ash, birch, rowan or Scots pine. Consider interplanting with shrubs such as hawthorn, hazel and holly. Avoid planting single rows of trees, a group is much more pleasing on the eye.
- ~ Avoid planting non-native trees such as poplar, leylandii, Sitka or Norway spruce. They are inappropriate in the open countryside and poplars planted near buildings can block drains and damage foundations.
- ~ Where space for planting is limited or close to buildings, use small trees such as rowan or birch along with hazel, hawthorn and holly. As a general rule, plant as far away from a building as the expected height of the tree; remember leaves can block spoutings and downpipes.
- ~ Avoid planting species that produce a lot of leaves close to slurry lagoons.

### Other Methods of Screening

In exposed situations on hillsides, lowering the site by excavation will make a building less prominent but take care that this does not lead to ventilation problems in livestock houses.

Screening with an earth ramp planted with trees or shrubs may be the most effective way to disguise a conspicuous building.

## MAKING THE MOST OF EXISTING FEATURES

Extra thought must be put into the design and the materials used for the construction of new buildings, where these are to be sited alongside existing attractive or historically important features. Existing features may be used to enhance new buildings.

### Adapting Existing Buildings

Traditional buildings look attractive but are often unsuited to modern farming. It may be possible to restore or convert them, however, particularly as general-purpose housing. Planning permission may be required. Contact your local [Divisional Planning Office](#) with any queries.

Before starting, advice should be taken on the feasibility of the conversion. Structural soundness, any health and safety requirements, cost and how best to retain the building's character should be taken into account.



### Traditional Structures and Landscape Features

Try to retain stone walls and traditional pillars and gates. Stone-built pillars and flat iron gates have been unique features of the Northern Ireland landscape and farmyards for the past 150 years. In his book, *Irish Folk Ways* (published 1957), Professor E. Evans describes every farmyard as, “*having the air of a fortress, an independent unit within its jealously guarded boundary fences, defended by a heavy iron gate hung between stout gate pillars....*”

Hedges and trees should not be removed needlessly. Try to ease the building into the existing landscape. If possible, avoid levelling large sites, which can alter and scar the landscape. Reinststate hedges and stone walls following any access works.

### Historic or Archaeological Features

Historic or archaeological sites and the buried evidence they contain should not be built on or disturbed. An undisturbed zone, as large as possible but a minimum of 10 metres wide, should also be left around them. This both protects buried outlying features and avoids overshadowing or blighting visually attractive remains. For further information, contact:

Environment and Heritage Service

Built Heritage

5-33 Hill Street

BELFAST

BT1 2LA

Tel: (028) 9023 5000

E-mail: [ehsinfo@doeni.gov.uk](mailto:ehsinfo@doeni.gov.uk)

Website: [www.ehsni.gov.uk](http://www.ehsni.gov.uk)

Please also contact this address if any structures or artefacts are found below ground when preparing foundations.

### CLEAR UP PROMPTLY

Nothing detracts from the countryside more than general untidiness around the farmyard. Building materials and spoil created by building work, should be cleared up immediately after the building is completed. It is all too easy to let a farm dump develop. Such eyesores present a bad image of the agriculture industry. You should contact the Special Studies Unit of the [Planning Service](#) for permission to dispose of infill.

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# FURTHER INFORMATION

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For further information on any issue relating to agriculture and the management of the countryside contact:

Countryside Management Branch  
Annexe D  
Dundonald House  
Upper Newtownards Road  
Belfast BT4 3SB  
Telephone: (028) 9052 0922  
E-mail: [cmbenquiries@dardni.gov.uk](mailto:cmbenquiries@dardni.gov.uk)