Traditional Farm Buildings Toolkit

Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority



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Introduction

Introduction

Why do traditional farm buildings matter?

Traditional farm buildings, particularly field barns, are part of the special qualities of the Yorkshire Dales National Park. Alongside their importance as part of the highly distinctive landscape, they are a key element of the vernacular architecture of the Yorkshire Dales, and a valuable record of local building styles and historical farming practices. Traditional farm buildings are generally functional and rugged and many still retain their original character and features, at least externally.

What are the pressures on traditional farm buildings?

Traditional farm buildings were constructed in a very different social, economic and environmental context. Mechanisation and an increase in average farm size through the course of the 20th century had a significant impact on traditional farming methods and buildings. Silage-based foddering and higher animal welfare standards mean that traditional barns are often unsuited to modern farming practices.

Meanwhile, hill farming has become a marginal economic activity. Investment in the upkeep of little-used traditional farm buildings is seldom a viable prospect for many farmers and landowners. At the same time, public subsidy has steadily declined to the point where it is no longer available for any but the most significant buildings. A sample survey revealed 40% of all buildings and 45% of field barns to be in poor or very bad condition[1].

Why have we produced this guidance?

The role of traditional farm buildings as functional parts of the farming landscape has diminished, but their visual and cultural importance remains one of the Yorkshire Dales' biggest assets. One of the greatest challenges facing the National Park Authority, farmers and landowners is how we can ensure that this valuable resource has a sustainable future.

We need to find new ways to use more of these buildings if we want to keep them. This document informs the application of policies in the Yorkshire Dales Local Plan 2015-2030, in particular:

- Policy L2 Conversion of traditional buildings – acceptable uses
- Policy L3 Conversion of traditional buildings – building treatment
- Policy L4 Demolition and alteration of traditional farm buildings.

The policies are intended to help retain traditional farm buildings by allowing them to be adapted or maintained for agricultural use or to be converted to a range of other uses, where the building and its landscape setting have the capacity to absorb it. Where that is not possible, the choice becomes stark: find public money to invest in conserving the most significant buildings or accept and manage their loss.

This document provides guidance on how to assess the significance and capacity for change of any traditional farm building, and what options can then be applied.

What are the options for a traditional farm building?

The four broad options for managing the future of each traditional farm building are:

- Maintain
- Conserve
- Adapt
- Manage Decline

The significance of each traditional farm building and its capacity for change is based on a combination of factors. The options outlined in the table below should be seen as a scale rather than discrete categories. This guidance is intended to help farmers, landowners and planners make these often-nuanced judgements on a case-by-case basis. It seeks to ensure buildings are managed in a manner consistent with their significance, allowing change where there is capacity for it and ensuring continuity and conservation where it is needed.

Where possible, it is recommended to look at traditional farm buildings across whole holdings to allow integrated management.

As part of our pre-application planning advice service, the Authority will use this toolkit as the basis for discussing the options with landowners, including where trade-offs between the four options might be made. This might, for example, include looking at how conversion of suitable buildings, or recycling building materials from ruinous buildings, could help generate revenue and materials to invest in the conservation of other buildings that have greater significance.

1. A condition survey of traditional farm buildings in the Yorkshire Dales National Park 2006 – 2007 (YDNPA)

Option	Description	Outcomes
Maintain	Retain the building in some form of agricultural use.	Maintenance regimes are kept up, though some alteration might be needed to make any limited use cost effective and suitable for modern farm practices. Retaining the building keeps open the option of an alternative use in the future. Examples of potential routine work under this option could include: maintaining the integrity of the roof with timely small-scale repair when needed, ensuring effective drainage around the building, and maintaining pointing and preventing exposure of wall cores. Where there is a greater level of deterioration some structural repairs may be required, such as bracing of roof structures, replacement or repair to lintels or beam ends, or addressing the causes of cracked or bulging walls. More extensive alterations could include the replacement of a failing stone roof with a modern metal or fibre cement roof, or the insertion of larger openings to allow tractors and other machinery access. Such alterations generally require some form of planning consent and must be justified for the purposes of agriculture. Such changes seldom enhance the traditional appearance of buildings but are a practical solution that helps to prolong their lifespan. They are, therefore, most suited to less important buildings that have a greater scope for change. In some cases, changes such as these would allow a building with no immediate viable use to be 'mothballed'.
Conserve	Acceptance that the building is very unlikely to have a commercially viable use but that it is significant enough in terms of historic or architectural interest, and/or landscape setting to warrant public investment in its conservation.	The building is maintained, repaired or restored using traditional materials and techniques that ensure its significance as a heritage asset – or as part of the wider historic landscape – is conserved for future generations. The emphasis should be on minimal intervention, affecting as little of the original fabric as possible and undertaking only those works that are required to ensure the building is weatherproof and structurally sound. This will typically involve localised repairs, including: repointing eroded mortar joints using lime mortar, installing new rainwater goods and drainage to shed water from the building, re-fixing slipped slates, spliced repairs to, or bracing/doubling up of, damaged roof timbers, or 'stitching' masonry cracks by bridging them with stone and applying new mortar. Periodic investment in on-going maintenance will be required in addition to up-front capital costs, but once repaired, continued use for agriculture is more likely. Beyond public grant schemes, it may be possible to generate finance for conservation repairs through a development opportunity under the 'adapt' option (below).
Adapt	Make changes (internal and/or external) to the building that enables it to be put to an alternative use.	The building is converted to an active use that generates a return for the owner and, therefore, incentivises its maintenance. Physical changes will have altered the character of the building to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the building's significance and capacity to accommodate that change. Different buildings have the capacity to accommodate different uses, which in turn have a range of different impacts, both positive and negative. The Local Plan provides scope for 'high intensity' residential, visitor accommodation and business uses (in the less significant buildings) in the most accessible locations. More remote and/or more sensitive buildings will only have a capacity for a lower intensity of use, for example as camping barns or barn pods.
Manage decline	Acceptance that the building is not sufficiently significant to be worth conserving, and is in either a location of a condition that makes re-use impossible.	Use and maintenance of the building ceases, resulting in gradual though managed deterioration and, ultimately, ruination. Loss may be speeded up if the building poses a risk or offers building materials for use elsewhere. Every effort should be made to avoid complete loss of a traditional farm building by exploring options to maintain, conserve or adapt it. Nonetheless, there are occasions where loss may be unavoidable, usually where the building is already in very poor structural condition. This option should be a last resort. It can be managed in one of three ways: consolidation as a ruin (maintaining the building's landscape presence), managed decline, or active demolition. It is estimated that 18% of traditional farm buildings are already in this category, with a further 22% soon to be consigned to the same fate unless intervention is made to stop their decline. Some further loss of traditional farm buildings is inevitable. The challenge lies in recognising those cases where it would cause real harm to the landscape, either through the loss of single significant buildings or the cumulative erosion of the qualities of particular building groups. Conversely, there may be instances where the loss of a less significant building can be used to benefit the coherent management of others that are more significant; for example, if the materials are recycled for conservation of other structures.

Assessing Significance and Developing the Options

Background Reading

A good deal of policy, research and guidance is available to inform choices on traditional farm buildings. A list of recommended further reading is included at the end of this guidance, but a few of the most relevant documents are highlighted below.

The most important policy for the management of traditional farm buildings is the YDNPA Local Plan. The policies within the Local Plan underpin this guidance, and it is against these policies that the suitability of proposals will be measured.

In addition to this document, and the YDNPA Design Guide, guidance on conserving and managing traditional farm buildings has also been prepared by Historic England - the Government's statutory advisor on heritage issues. This guidance outlines the assessment of farmsteads, the conversion and maintenance of farm buildings and includes fully-sourced and illustrated statements on the historic development and character of farmsteads. Historic England guidance will be an important consideration in planning and other decisions made by the Authority.

The Historic England document Living Buildings in a Living Landscape: Finding a Future for Traditional Farm Buildings (2006) will shortly be updated. This contains national and regional summaries of the historic character of traditional farmsteads and their buildings, and the drivers of change that affect their management. It states that approaches to reuse should be informed by an understanding of their historic character and significance, and their sensitivity to and potential for change.

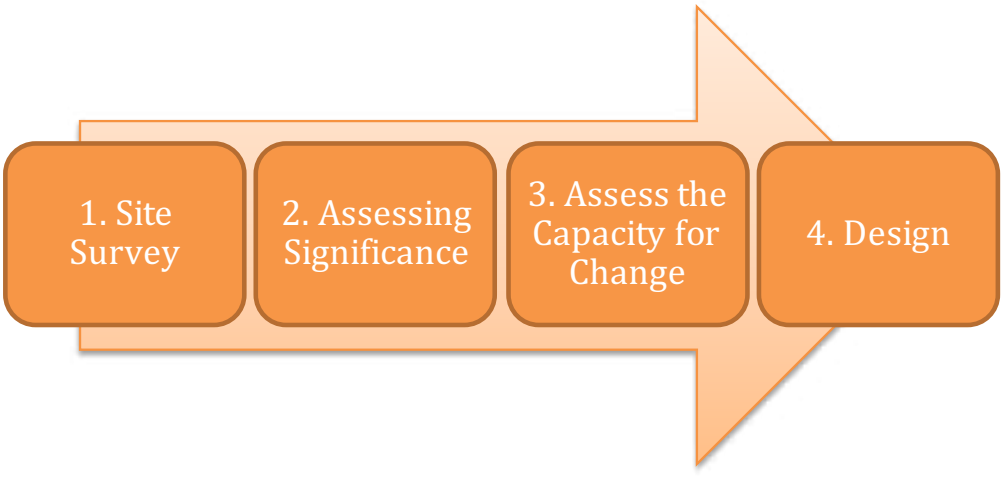
Farm buildings & change on the Bolton Abbey Estate (2009) applied the national approach to traditional farm buildings to an estate in the Yorkshire Dales. This project again emphasised the need to underpin management with sound understanding, both at a site-specific and landscape level.

Other useful references include: Farmsteads and Traditional Farm Buildings – NCA21 Yorkshire Dales (2011); NCA17 Orton Fells (2014); and NCA18 Howgill Fells (2014). These statements explore topics such as landscape and settlement context, different farmstead and building types, materials, dates and styles, and of particular importance to Stage 2 below, they explore the significance of traditional farm buildings. These documents should be considered required reading for anyone considering management options for traditional farm buildings in the Yorkshire Dales National Park.

In addition to these documents, the YDNPA maintains the Historic Environment Record (HER): a digital and physical archive containing information on the archaeology and historic buildings of the National Park. The HER is a valuable source of information for any heritage considerations and can be consulted by appointment.

Understanding buildings and their locations

The starting point for the management of any single structure or group of traditional farm buildings is to understand and assess both their significance and capacity for change. This process is relatively straightforward and can be divided into four main stages:



Stage 1 – Site Survey



This stage provides the foundation to ensure that everyone involved in making decisions about the future of a building or buildings has all of the important facts. It is essentially a brief description of the site and its buildings, accompanied by a plan.

The two key tasks are to understand site and management issues and historic character. This needs a good knowledge of the site and attention to detail. A guide to the information required is set out in the table below.

It is also important to consider wildlife significance, particularly if the fabric of the building may be disturbed in any way. Understanding which species are present, where they roost or nest, and what their access points are may be key to a final decision. Many species of wild birds and bats are protected so should not be disturbed, but opportunities to enhance wildlife habitats should also be considered.

Site and management issues	• The boundaries of the holding/farmstead • Ownership and tenancy status • Uses of the site and surrounding area • Existing Stewardship agreements • Access to the site, and any capacity issues with them • Routes within and around the site, including public rights of way • Availability of key services and utilities • The condition of the building(s) • Contamination, flooding risks or other environmental constraints • The presence of any wildlife within or around the building(s), in particular bird and bat roosting/nesting sites.
Historic character	• Age of the building • Designations e.g. Listed Building, Conservation Area, nature conservation, environmental protection etc.
Draw a sketch plan or annotate a large-scale map or aerial photograph to show the building or buildings in their setting:	• Views to and from the site (showing the building's position in the landscape). How does topography and other buildings or vegetation affect the views? • Walls and boundaries associated with the building(s) • Plan and layout of the building(s) and immediate surroundings. Include traditional and modern buildings, access points, principal elevations, and the relationship to routeways, spaces (e.g. courtyards, foldyards) and the surrounding landscape. The more detail can be included the better-informed the management decision will be • Change over time – identify earlier and later buildings or parts of buildings. Examining old maps may help identify how buildings and building groups have developed over time • Domestic or other non-farming buildings (if any) on the site together with gardens, parking spaces etc. • Other important features such as ponds, trees, or features directly associated with the farm building such as churn stands etc. • Other archaeological features around the building.
Make a detailed description with illustrative photography of:	• Construction materials, condition, openings, internal layout, roof construction and internal features for all buildings.



Name: Jack's Barn, Parish, Dale
SD XXXX XXXX

Construction Materials:

The walls are made from limestone rubble with lime mortar and have large gritstone quoins at the corners. The walls also have large and less-regular blocks at the base. The roof is stone slate carried on sawn softwood timbers with stone coping to the gables. There are protruding through stones on the east gable. Inside, the timber hayloft survives but the stalls have been removed. Concrete and cobble floor inside and partially surviving cobbled yard to the north.

Condition:

The barn is in generally good condition with the roof currently weatherproof. There are slight cracks to the south-west corner where the rubble walling has separated slightly from the quoins - possibly poor drainage at this side has resulted in slight movement. The roof timbers are in good condition but are not original.

Openings:

South elevation (facing road): 2 forking holes with rough stone sills and lintels. Wooden doors

North elevation (facing field): 2 ground floor doors with dressed stone lintels and jambs. Wooden doors in one but the other has been half blocked with limestone rubble and mortar during the 20th century. Now a window.

East gable: No openings

West gable: Owl hole at the top. Blocked mucking hole at the base.

Internal Layout and Features:

Only door opens onto the old cattle byre (shippon). The wooden hayloft still survives though the individual stalls were taken out in the 20th century. 20th century concrete outshot demolished in the 1980s.



Figure 1 Many barns have a long history of alteration and development. With this example in upper Swaledale, evidence for the form of the earlier, smaller barn to the right can be seen in the straight join and quoin stones half way along the front wall, as well in the different construction styles. The older doorway has a wider and more roughly dressed stone surround, whereas the later extension has thin, cut stone door surrounds and regular courses of projecting through stones.



Figure 2 Although a fine surviving example of a small field barn in its own right, a key aspect of the significance of this building in West Stonesdale is its immediate, isolated and tranquil setting, giving it a prominence in its local landscape.

Stage 2 - Assessing Significance

Using the information gathered in Stage 1 the next step is to assess the significance of the building(s). This is likely to require more specialised knowledge than Stage 1, though local historical knowledge is also important, as is an understanding of why local communities might value a historic building.

Where a building has been Listed, a description will have been made, though this may not always include an assessment of significance[2]. Where the building(s) are within a Conservation Area, a Conservation Area Appraisal report may provide an overview of locally important historical building characteristics[3]. Most traditional farm buildings have not been designated in any way. Nonetheless, they remain important architectural and historic features that need to be carefully assessed before any management decisions are made.

Whilst there are no easy rules for assessing the significance of a historic building or landscape, there are general approaches that can give the process more clarity. Significance is the term used for the sum of all the different elements which make a heritage asset valued. For example, the significance of an isolated but prominent field barn could come from a combination of its landscape position, the survival of a substantial amount of its original fabric and the presence of re-used medieval timber in its roof. In comparison, a combination barn at the end of a working farm range may derive its significance from being part of a surviving group of buildings with similar architectural styles, from changes in the stonework which show how the use of the building has developed over time, and from an association with a well-known historical figure who was a former owner of the farm.

Identifying all the contributory factors to significance **and** understanding the weight of each of those factors is crucial to the next stage of the process.

Whilst not exhaustive, the following table outlines some specific characteristics to look out for:

Characteristics which may indicate a high level of significance	
Historic interest inherent to the building and its immediate surroundings	• The building is Listed • Buildings that date from the 18th century or earlier • Good survival of original or historical internal features and floors • Good evidence of historical construction phases • Presence of historical (hewn not machine sawn, pre-19th-century) roof timbers • Buildings with a known date of construction, whether from an original datestone or associated documentary evidence • Unusual graffiti, markings, or known historical associations • The rarity (nationally or regionally) of the building's form and original function.
Landscape setting	• Landmark buildings of particular prominence in the landscape • Buildings which are part of a coherent building group. For example, an isolated group of barns that share similar characteristics, or the structures comprising a dispersed farmstead or outfarm • Located in a 'Barns and Walls' Conservation Area (Swaledale and Arkengarthdale or Littondale) • Located in a landscape character area where barns or traditional farmsteads make a contribution to landscape character.

2. Historic England has produced guidance on the characteristics that might make a building of listable quality: https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/dlsg-agricultural-buildings/agriculture_final.pdf

3. Appraisals for Conservation Areas in the National Park can be found at: http://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/living-and-working/historic-buildings/conservation-areas/

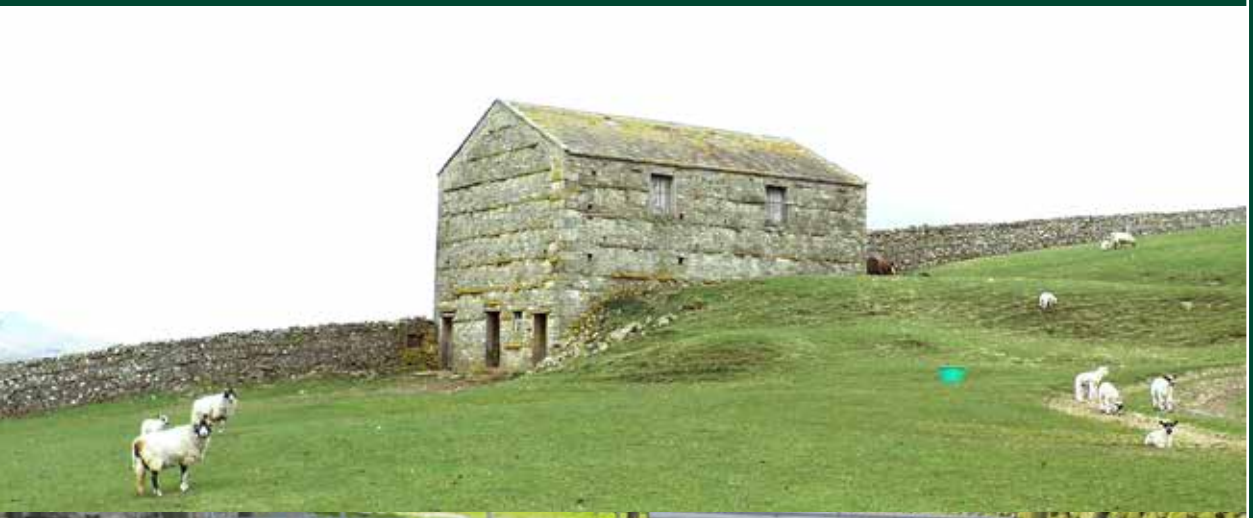


Figure 3 Good examples of bank barns (barns terraced into the hillside to allow direct access to both the ground and first floors) are rare, as are examples of barns with original entrances surviving in the gable end. This 19th-century barn in upper Wensleydale has both features, and is still in use in its original landscape setting.



Figure 4 Where original and related features survive in the immediate vicinity of farm buildings, such as this cobbled yard with drain, they allow the building's original function and form to be better understood, making a positive contribution to significance.



Figure 5 (far left) Sometimes traditional farm buildings feature original or re-used architectural fragments, such as this arched lintel with a date carved into it. Although not directly dating the barn in question, such features are an important contributor to overall significance.



Figure 6 (left) Where surviving internal features allow the original form and function of a building to be understood, as with these hewn timber and stone boskins, they will make a strong contribution to the building's significance.



Figure 7 Roof structures are often one of the first structural aspects of a farm building to deteriorate. Where early roof structures survive, these will contribute to the building's significance, particularly if they are themselves re-used from an earlier structure as with the cruck blade in the picture to the right, re-used as a tie beam in a later building. Compare the older rough hewn timber with some of the more recent sawn rafters above.



Figure 8 Architectural features of farm buildings which were once relatively commonplace, such as the arched cart entry with harr-hung doors on the barn to the right, are becoming rarer. Where such features survive, they will make a positive contribution to the building's overall significance.



Figure 9 One of the main reasons we value traditional farm buildings is that they provide a tangible link to the past. Although rare, this is perhaps best illustrated by graffiti that survives on the walls of some buildings. This example from a Swaledale field barn records the differing harvest times through three years in the mid-1950s, as well as a note about a holiday in Blackpool.

Stage 3 - Assess the Capacity for Change

This stage is about building on the understanding gained in Stages 1 and 2 to decide what the capacity for change is of the building(s). This will involve considering the constraints and opportunities to reach a sensible judgement about the options. The aim is to identify and dismiss any options that are simply unworkable. Then, for those that are workable in principle, to ask key questions about their achievability before moving to Stage 4.

A long-term view is needed as the decisions made now could determine whether a building survives or not, and whether it is conserved or compromised. Is the building functioning well in its current use? Are there relatively simple measures that could be taken to make it function better, or is a more fundamental re-think required?

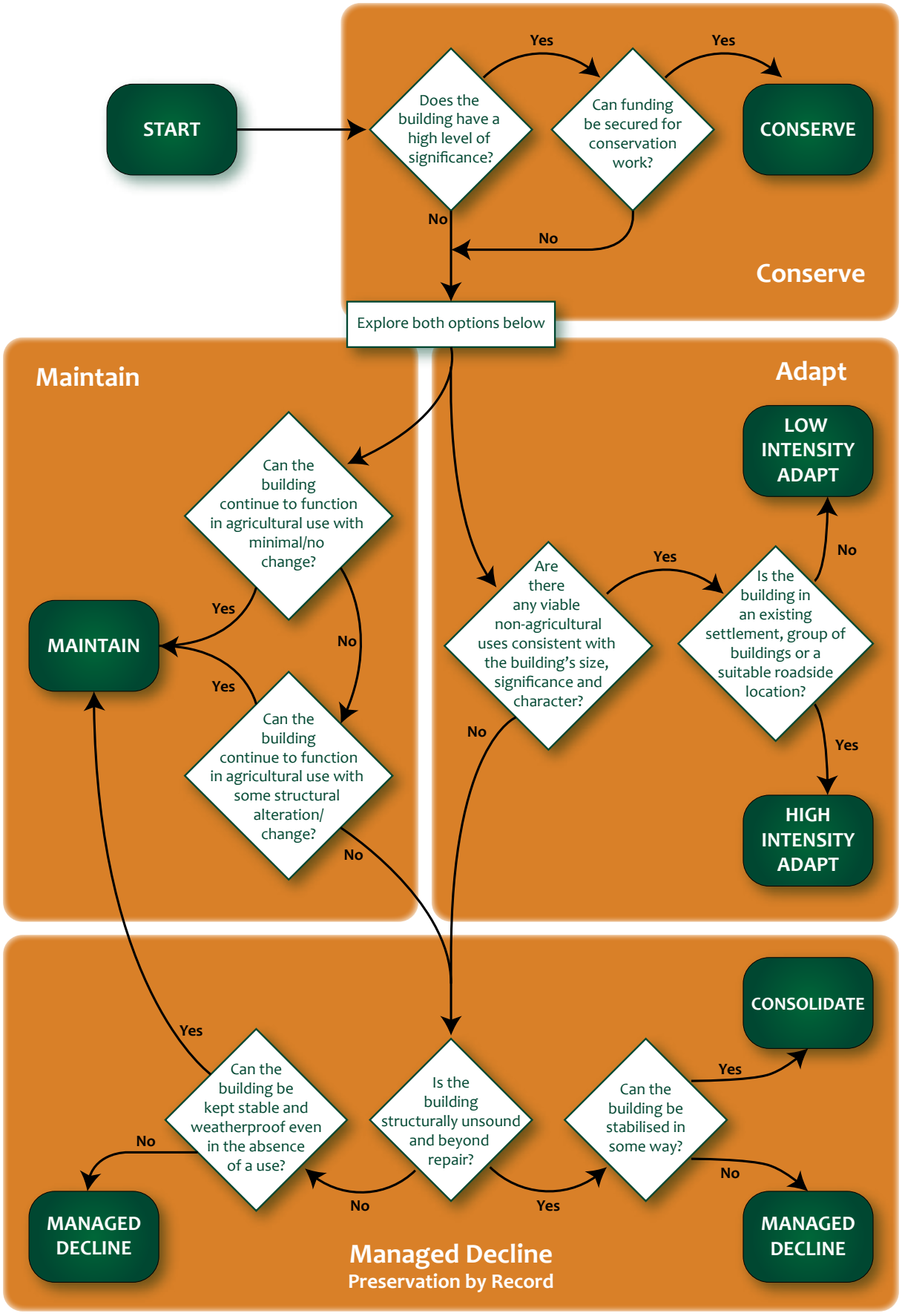
The flowchart to the right is designed to help guide the process. By answering a series of key questions it can help you to identify how many of the options may be applicable.

Where a need for more fundamental change is identified, consider the capacity of the site and building(s) to accommodate it, as well as any wider implications.

It is essential that a critical approach is taken. Think about the practical issues that might crop up when applying for planning consents, funding etc. By the same token, keep an open mind – don't dismiss potential options out of hand before considering them carefully. Look for opportunities you might not have considered – involve other people as far as possible to gain new perspectives.

Questions to consider:	• How might adaptation or conversion affect the structural integrity of the building? What measures might be required to secure the building's condition, and how invasive will they be? What are the cost implications? • Would the existing layout and relationship of different buildings and their current uses conflict with any proposed new use? • Where are the current access points into the site and what is the current capacity for circulation/parking space/residential curtilage? Could these areas cope with intensification in use? What physical alterations might be required? • What is the current availability of services? Would these need upgrading? What combination of mains and non-mains services might be required? Could decentralised energy and services be used (e.g. renewable energy, rainwater harvesting, non-mains drainage)? • What are the current sources of natural light into the building(s)? What uses might be possible without creating new openings? What additional sources of light might be required and could they be achieved with little impact? • What opportunities are there to retain, better reveal, or mitigate against impact on the building's significance. Could less attractive modern buildings or extensions be removed as part of a proposal? How far will it be possible to retain the significant historical features? • If there are flood or contamination risks , how will they be managed? • What is the potential to avoid, or mitigate against wildlife impacts?[4] • How will a change in use or management affect any associated farm or other business? Where a building has an existing use that will be lost, how will this be mitigated against in the future? • How do the proposals fit with the relevant planning policies and/or funding criteria? Will any additional consents be required? If funding is required, how does your proposal relate to key funding criteria? • Will proposed works, including access works, adversely affect existing Countryside Stewardship or other agri-environment agreements?

4. A range of national and international legislation protects wild birds and mammals, and their habitats, so that intentionally or recklessly disturbing species and their habitats is illegal. Bats and breeding birds are commonly encountered in traditional farm buildings. You need to know your responsibilities in this respect.


START
Does the building have a high level of significance?
Yes
Can funding be secured for conservation work?
Yes
CONSERVE
No
No
Conserve
Explore both options below
Maintain
Adapt
Can the building continue to function in agricultural use with minimal/no change?
Yes
MAINTAIN
No
Yes
Can the building continue to function in agricultural use with some structural alteration/ change?
No
Are there any viable non-agricultural uses consistent with the building's size, significance and character?
Yes
No
Is the building in an existing settlement, group of buildings or a suitable roadside location?
No
Yes
LOW INTENSITY ADAPT
HIGH INTENSITY ADAPT
CONSOLIDATE
Yes
Can the building be kept stable and weatherproof even in the absence of a use?
No
MANAGED DECLINE
Is the building structurally unsound and beyond repair?
No
Yes
Can the building be stabilised in some way?
Yes
No
MANAGED DECLINE
Managed Decline
Preservation by Record

Stage 4 - Design

Whatever option is finally chosen, getting the design right will be essential. The understanding gained from the earlier stages will help to prepare a scheme that retains the building's significance, both in terms of its historic interest and its landscape character. Detailed guidance on design can be found in the YDNPA Design Guide, which has been compiled to dovetail with this document and should be referred to for specific guidance on interior and exterior arrangement, form and treatment of openings, roofing, materials, extensions and curtilage.

In general, successful and acceptable conservation and adaptation of traditional farm buildings is based on five key principles:

Understand the context, character and significance	The process described in stages 1 to 3 above.
Understand the condition and construction	Where in doubt, a survey of the building will be needed to confirm the structural soundness of the building to show the building is capable of adaptation with no more than minor structural work. The survey should also look at construction techniques used in the building and any later phases of development to inform what changes can be made whilst protecting its structural integrity.
Conserve and enhance architectural and historic interest	Work on any traditional building should be designed to conserve and enhance the architectural and historic interest of the building, as well as considering its surroundings and landscape setting. A balance often needs to be struck between the conservation of the original building and the demands of a new use. However, conversion proposals can present an opportunity to create new and interesting designs which use the features of the building to enhance the converted space.
High design standard	A traditional building requires sensitive repair, compatible materials and a bespoke design response to integrate the new use without harming its characteristics and features. People with the skills and experience of working with traditional buildings will often need to be involved.
Minimal intervention	The best new use for traditional farm buildings is invariably a low-key use which has a minimal impact on the fabric of the building and its setting. However, often the greatest demand is for more radical changes. High intensity uses such as living accommodation can involve changes that would significantly and irreversibly alter the character of a building and its surroundings. For some buildings, the impact of any intervention, however minor, can have a severe impact and may mean the building is unsuitable for adaptation. However, many buildings can be adapted providing there are realistic expectations about what a building can accommodate. The key is to adapt the building in the least intrusive way possible.



Useful References

Below is a selective list of sources relevant to understanding the types and significance of traditional farm buildings in the Yorkshire Dales. Historical mapping, which can be consulted through the YDNPA Historic Environment Record, can often provide a good overview of the development of buildings.

Policy and Guidance

Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority. 2015. *Yorkshire Dales Local Plan 2015-2030*.

Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority. 2015. *Design Guide*

Historic England. 2006. *The Conversion of Traditional Farm Buildings: A guide to good practice*.

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Historic England. 2015. *National Farmstead Assessment Framework*

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Understanding the Significance of Traditional Farm Buildings

Brunskill, R.W. 1999. *Traditional Farm Buildings of Britain and their Conservation*.

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