

Section 12 Farm Buildings

Traditional Farm Buildings

Traditional Donegal farmyards usually comprised of a cluster of moderately scaled buildings constructed from stone and other local materials. Such yards were surrounded with trees and located in sheltered tucks or hollows within the farm. As a result traditional farmyards and ancillary buildings integrated, complemented and often enhanced their surrounds. Our traditional farmyards retain great character and charm and remain an integral element of our rural landscapes.

Modern farm buildings are larger than their traditional counterparts due to increased and intensifying agricultural practices. The use of modern materials in their construction and gain in mass can result in buildings that are large and ungainly. Such buildings can dominate within rural landscapes.

Good siting and design, appropriate colour and finish, the planting of suitable trees, and the retention of existing attractive features are methods that can all be used to successfully integrate new and existing farm buildings into the landscape and maintain the balance inherent within our traditional farm structures.



12.1 Siting

- New buildings should be sited to integrate with existing buildings and developed within existing farmyards in so far as is possible.
- Care should be taken to ensure that the existing farm dwelling and farm buildings are not adversely impacted upon.
- Do not site buildings on the skyline.
- Utilise hollows and tucks in the landscape to provide shelter and reduce impact
- Utilise natural backdrops such as trees, hills etc. to reduce impact.
- When choosing location avoid possible pollution and odour problems, take stock of prevailing winds and water courses, contact the Environmental Health Officer if unsure.
- Ensure your building does not cause damage to historic/archeological monuments or adversely impact on their setting.
- Retain stonewalls, traditional structures and traditional pillars and gates, these are unique features of the Donegal landscape; their retention maintains identity and character.
- Avoid removing existing hedgerows and trees; orientate buildings in order to utilize them.
- Always reinstate hedgerows and stonewalls should removal be necessary.
- If at all possible avoid leveling or excavating large sites as this practice can permanently scar the landscape.



12.2 Design and Materials for New Buildings

- It may be possible to restore, convert or extend traditional buildings, particularly as general-purpose housing. Structural soundness, health and safety requirements, cost and how best to retain the building's character should be taken into account.
- Large new buildings will dominate existing smaller buildings and the farm dwelling. They are difficult to integrate, consider two or three smaller span buildings grouped together.
- Avoid unnecessary height.
- Attempt where possible to match the shape, details and character of existing traditional buildings.
- Large span buildings will often appear unsightly on sloping sites. Consider two or three smaller span buildings. Step buildings down or along land contours.
- Consider roof form, attempt to shape roof slopes to the contours of the land, curved roofs are often more suitable with regard to this, gentle curves integrate more readily than harsh or straight lines.
- Building appearance can be greatly enhanced by careful use of building materials. Where possible, use materials that are traditional and are in keeping with the local area. The use of stone finish on gable walls for example will help the building integrate with the landscape.
- Use render finish to external walls. Exposed concrete block finishes should always be avoided.
- Avoid the use of too many contrasting materials.
- Large expanses of walling of the same texture will appear unsightly and uninteresting. Create vertical breaks by using painted upright stanchions, this will break up form, add interest and prevent monotony.
- Contrasting walling or cladding can also be used to break up form or add interest to building appearance.
- If possible use human scaled doors and openings on visible elevations. Large Openings increase the overall "feeling of size" in buildings. Good proportioning will add to the character of the building. Sheeted doors are most appropriate.
- Good finish, workmanship and discrete connection of services will enhance the general appearance of the building.

12.3 Colour

- Painting prolongs building life; sheeted metal in particular should always be painted. The use of colour in traditional buildings added greatly to their charm and can make all the difference to the general appearance of a farm complex.
- Darker colours are recommended, aim to complement existing buildings.
- Consider traditional dark green or red oxide, dark grey or brown.
- Light and bright colours should be avoided; they dominate within landscapes and will become lighter with weathering.
- If two colours are to be used the darker colour should always be reserved for the roof. Dark roofs make buildings look smaller and less conspicuous.
- Paint the sides of buildings first as it is difficult to avoid spray drift from the lighter coloured sides onto the roof.
- Use brighter colours to highlight features within the farmyard, such as doors and window frames, traditional gates etc.
- Use good quality paint and always ensure that it is lead-free, avoid the use of too much thinner
- Never dispose of waste paint or paint washings to drains or watercourses. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for disposal. The Council operates collection schemes for waste paint.
- Pre-painted panels are now widely available; care should be taken to ensure they meet the above colour criteria.

12.4 Screening

Tree planting should be undertaken around farmyards in order to soften the outline of buildings, aid integration and provide shelter from the elements, particularly wind.

Where it has not been possible to site buildings in the most appropriate location planting is particularly important.

- Screening with an earth mound that is then planted with trees or shrubs is the most effective way to disguise a conspicuous building.
- Always make good use of any available natural backdrop of trees
- Trees planted to the rear of buildings will soften, harmonise, and blend buildings into the landscape
- A mixture of species, particularly broad-leaved trees, is preferable
- Avoid planting single species rows, non-native, and large trees such as Poplar, Leylandii, Sitka or Norway Spruce. They appear unnatural and inappropriate in the open countryside, associated leaf and needle fall can block drains and large root systems damage foundations
- A mix of native tree species is appropriate to most landscapes, for example, Oak, Ash, Birch, Rowan or Scots Pine. Consider interplanting with shrubs such as Hawthorn, Hazel and Holly. Where space for planting is limited or close to buildings, use small trees such as Rowan or Birch along with Hazel, Hawthorn and Holly. See Appendix for native species and soil suitability.
- Clumps of trees and shelterbelt planting should be utilised rather than single lines, this gives greater shelter. A belt of trees about 10 metres (30 feet) wide can provide shelter for an area equal to twenty times the height of the trees.
- Clumping trees will appear more natural and add interest to the farmstead.
- Ensure planting will not interfere with the future development of the farmyard. As a general rule, plant as far away from a building as the expected height of the tree.

12.5 Avoid Untidiness

- General untidiness around farmyards detracts greatly from rural areas. Buildings should be fully finished and excess materials removed from site. Do not let farm dumping develop; this presents a particularly bad public image of the agriculture industry. Dispose of infill in a proper and safe manner.