

CLARE NASH ARCHITECTURE LTD



HOW TO AVOID 7 COSTLY MISTAKES WHEN PLANNING A BARN CONVERSION PROJECT

Welcome to our free guide to avoiding costly mistakes when planning a barn conversion project.

We hope you find it useful and that it helps you with your own project, whatever type of barn that might be.

Click here for the 2020 version of this eBook, including a bonus barn costings eBook.



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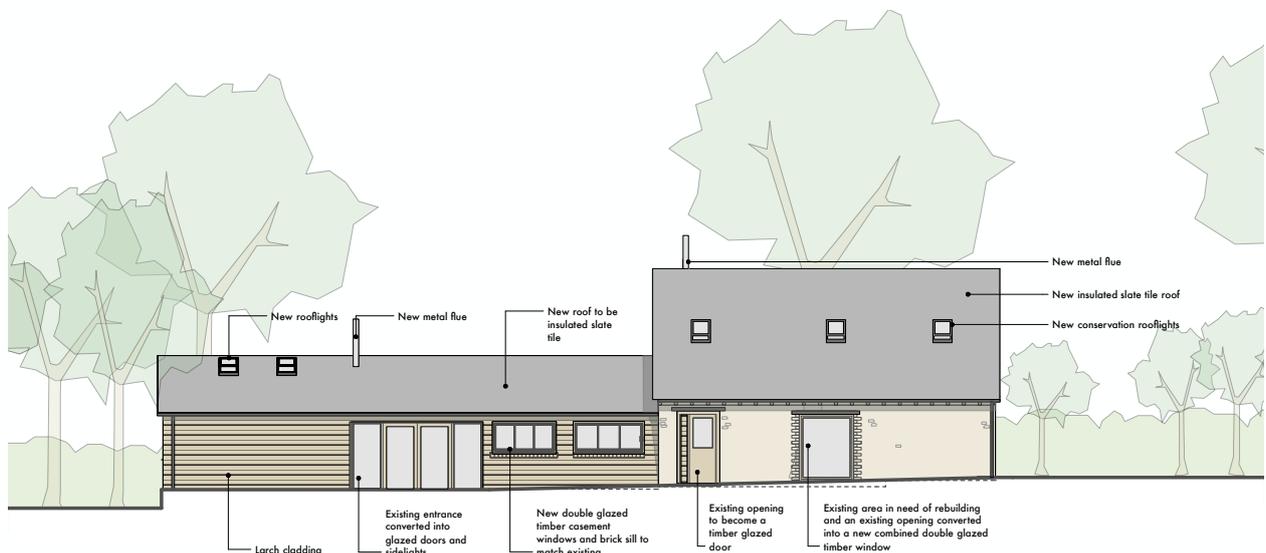
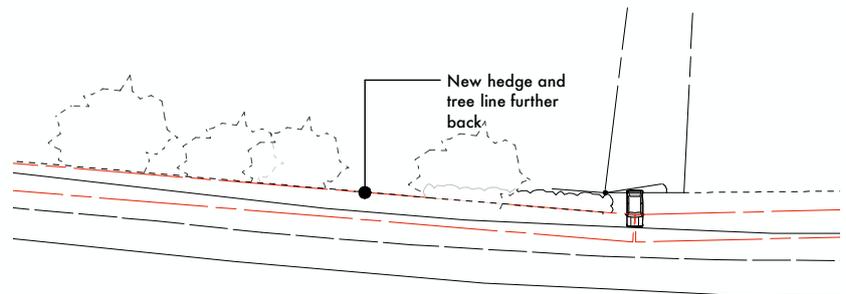
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ASSUMING YOU WON'T NEED A PLANNING APPLICATION

Though the permitted development rules have changed to allow conversion of existing farm buildings into dwellings, there are so many other factors that will need to be considered by the local authority such as bat surveys, on site contamination, traffic visibility when leaving the site, materials used in the conversion to name just a few. It would therefore be prudent to submit an application anyway. This will give you full opportunity to iron things out with the planners and ensure there are no hiccups once building work starts.



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OVER BUDGET

Barns are not cheap to convert. Surprisingly, considering they already have 4 walls and sometimes a roof, it can cost almost as much as starting from scratch and building a new build home on the same site. But, then you wouldn't be living in a lovely old barn, with wonderful features and potentially a lovely site with views. If you budget for building a new-build house of similar size, you should fall comfortably under that figure. Of course there are many ways to save money when converting a barn. Quite often carpenter made windows can work out cheaper than off the shelf ones - it seems unlikely but it's often true. Omitting glazing bars or mullions is much cheaper and is more in keeping with the original simple barn openings. There are also many menial but time consuming jobs such as lime pointing that can be done yourself to save money. Using natural, local materials are in keeping with the area and can also save money. The cedar cladding shown below weathers to a silver grey not requiring any treatment as it's natural oils prevent it from rotting.



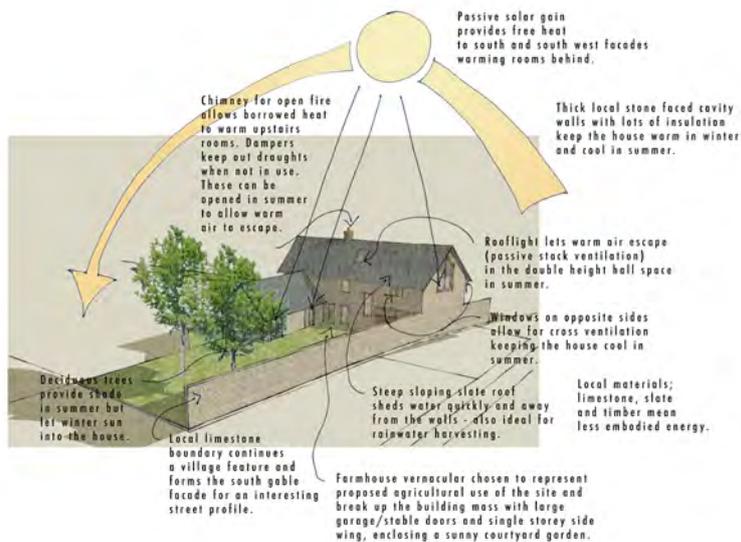
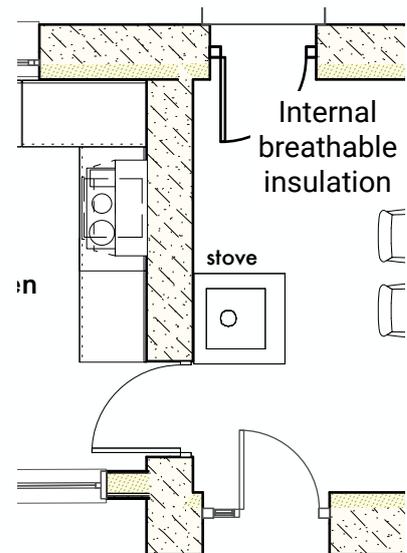
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NOT BEING GREEN

A friend with a renovation project was advised that the insulation he put in 'would comply with building control' and would be 'nice and warm'. She has found that in practice this has not been the case which is because just complying with building control is not enough! To really save money on running costs of a sizeable barn conversion, you need to insulate far beyond building control levels and potentially also install underfloor heating combined with renewables. This especially applies if you are living in an area using oil as the main fuel. There are many possibilities for using renewable technologies such as photovoltaics or an air source heat pump, but it's important to get the whole scheme right. Don't just bolt on renewables to any old design. It needs careful thought and consideration to work well.



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MISSING DETAILS

Barn conversion design requires quite a different set of rules to general house design. Usually there is a very large space in the middle dominated by a large glazed area where the original barn doors were. How you deal with this space is important, this will most likely be where you enter and you will pass it every day on your way to other rooms. A feature stair and a view always works well, as do half landing/gallery areas. The function of this room could be a grand hall or an even grander dining room.

Think about ventilation on hot days. Installing roof lights and low level windows will ensure you get a good flow of air using the passive stack effect (where cool air enters and rises as it warms creating air movement).

Hardwood windows require no maintenance and look beautiful on an old farm building. With such a large glazed area, the choice of windows is important.

Below: Vaulted kitchen space leading to double height hall; right from top: hardwood windows, a timber gable window in a bedroom, spiral stair under construction



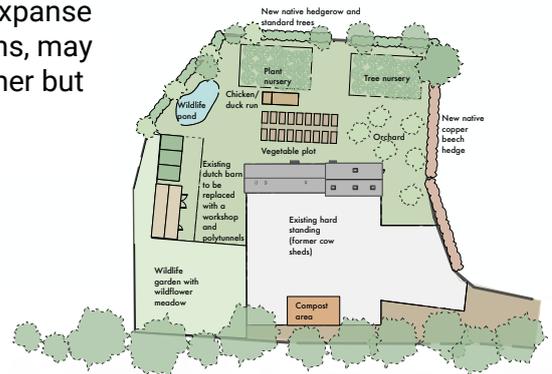
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FORGETTING LANDSCAPING

It's easy to concentrate so much on getting the conversion of the building right that you forget all about the outside. Landscaping is a key part to selling your scheme to the planners. They will see that you have really thought about the project and have given consideration to the environment and setting. In addition from a practical point of view, it is wise to think about how you are going to approach the barn, is it on a slope, where will the best views be, where will you want to sit on a sunny day? Also consider shade, a large expanse of glazing such as those common in barn conversions, may require a pergola that will provide shade in the summer but let light through in the winter when the sun is lower.



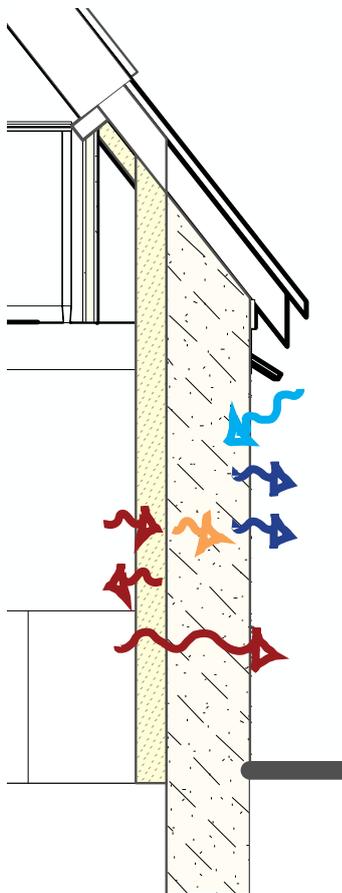
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NOT LETTING IT BREATHE

Old barns generally have stone or brick solid walls. When renovating it is important to ensure the wall can still breathe otherwise you may experience damp problems and the wall fabric may start to decay. Breathability is achieved by ensuring that lime and not cement mortar is used and using breathable insulation materials such as hemp, sheeps wool, cellulose or wood fibre board.



When rain hits the stone wall a breathable lime mortar lets the water leave the wall as vapour. Cement mortar is impervious which will cause damage to the stone over time

The breathable insulation lets warm water vapour in the air pass back and forth, ensuring it stays dry and warm on the inside



From top: Thermafleece; Hemp; Cellulose; Wood Fibre Board

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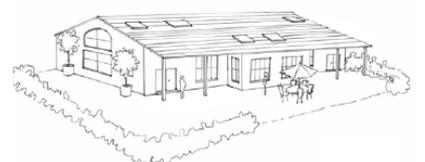
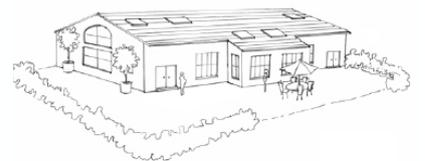
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NOT FINDING THE RIGHT DESIGNER

Converting a barn is an exciting but challenging process. It is possibly one of the most stressful things you will do, but the outcome is potentially priceless. There are ways to reduce the stress, one of those is by choosing the right architect to work with. It is important that they really understand how you live, how you want to live, as well as your aesthetic preferences. If you are interested in eco-design, ensure that they are as passionate as you are about it. If you love timber and green roofs, probably best to choose an architect familiar with both rather than one who prefers steel and glass minimalism.

Decision making can be a daunting and energy-sapping aspect of the design process. An architect can guide and inform you, as well as providing specialist services such as visualisations of your design options. These can help you to decide what you really want, and persuade planners and investors of the merits of your proposal. You can discuss all aspects of the project with your architect before you embark on it. This will give you the time, fore-planning, information and expert insight to put your mind more at rest than if you had to make important decisions alone. Even just an hour discussing your plans with a professional can make a marked difference to your approach and peace of mind.

Building is a risky business. With so many things to think about, juggle, and schedule, having an architect to manage the process for you can greatly reduce your risk of going over budget and over time, and hopefully preserve some of your sanity during what will be an incredibly busy time! When it comes to your home you are considerably emotionally invested, and having somebody who can take an objective



Above right: Hand sketch of a traditional stone barn conversion by Clare Nash at CNA, artist's impression of a modern barn conversion by Sally Dunkley, hand sketches for a modern barn conversion by Julia Healey at CNA.

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NEED MORE INFORMATION?

If you have a project in mind or are considering converting a barn, shed, workshop, stable or any other type of conversion project, please get in touch and we will do our very best to help you!

We have worked on and gained planning permission for several barn conversions over the years. Not just traditional barns either, we have worked on concrete and steel, more modern barns too!

Personally, the director has lived in three barn conversions, all were converted in slightly different ways and she finds that this experience is very useful when working on projects. She understands how to live in barn conversions, what works and what doesn't and knows many of the common pitfalls.



ABOUT

Clare Nash Architecture Ltd is based in Brackley and Oxford covering South Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, Warwickshire and Buckinghamshire.

We like making Inspiring Places, Smarter Spaces, Happier Faces...

CNA design focus takes inspiration from the vernacular. Focusing on people, site, climate, location, context, sustainable and beautiful materials to produce buildings that sit well in their surroundings and suit the people who reside in them.

We listen to you in order to understand how to achieve what you want within your budget. We have many clever, value adding ideas and we love it when our clients don't need to spend as much as they thought they would. We have a specialism in eco design and will use that to your advantage, saving you money on energy bills as well as thinking holistically about daylighting vs overheating.

Our focus is on making happy homes, in whatever form that might be. We believe in a strong environmental approach including landscaping and garden design.

We are a young and friendly team and enjoy working closely with you on your dream home, without the drama and within your budget.

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