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Alternative uses for farm buildings

Especially in the new federal states, the number of former farm buildings now unused is already considerable. Alongside the high material values, traditions and cultural values are also involved. This means that revitalisation through new functions of buildings no longer essential to farming is a most important challenge.

The introduction of the renovated building statute book (BauGB) January 1, 1998 creates improved income possibilities for farm businesses. With the extension of the law relating to the community responsibility „Improvement of agricultural infrastructure and coastal protection” August 8, 1997, the „Activities for agricultural and forestry businesses towards reutilisation of their buildings” were also accepted as subjects for support.

What is supported and how?

Representing a part of the support are investment measures helping agricultural and forestry enterprises in the changing of building uses – particularly for serving living, trading, service industry, cultural, public or community roles which help generate additional incomes.

Included here are also services from architects, engineers and consultants for such measures.

Depending on the measure, up to 40%, in exceptional cases up to 50%, of substantiated permitted costs can be awarded by the appropriate legally-authorized officials, in each case up to a maximum of DM 100,000.

Who is liable for support and what are the requirements?

Receivers of support are agricultural and forestry business enterprises.

Only in communities or community districts with agricultural settlement infrastructure, in hamlets and on single farms shall such support be given.

The total positive income representing a prosperity threshold for those receiving support and their marriage partners as estimated at time of application may not exceed an average 150 000 DM as estimated from the average positive income from the last available three consecutive annual tax returns.

The support through the reutilisation measures within the framework of these principles can only take place in close relationship with a village renovation project on the basis of an approved community development plan. This basic intermeshing should encourage public awareness and area functional

symbioses with other uses, and avoid conflicts from the very start.

Where can the application be made?

All applications for the granting of a support are to be made to the office determined by the state as responsible for the community. The responsible officials then check the entitlement validity of the application with regard to the statements of the community and the position of the adviser and, within the framework of the available budget, make a decision on the application followed by a written notice.

In the adviser's statement the economic viability, usefulness and financial feasibility of the project must be confirmed.

Alternative uses

- Agriculture/trade (holidays on the farm, direct marketing, catering facilities, handwork, service industries)
 - Creation of living accommodation, especially for the growing portion of single households and single parent families seldom in the position to secure a home of their own
 - Community sector (building yards, workshops, administration, meeting facilities)
 - Cultural and social facilities (community house, youth club, local history rooms, facilities for medicinal treatment or sports).
- The agricultural/trade sector along with a growing amount of service businesses, as important community economy bases, represent the main area of reutilisation.

In the case of reutilisation for trading purposes suitable to the locality, the great spaciousness of farm buildings offers the chance for the development of economic – in that the main buildings are already in existence – business accommodation for entrepreneurs, in horticulture or carpentry for instance.

Important requirements for the establishment of trading businesses are created through the planned improvement of the infrastructure and with investment grants for the creation of work places.

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Keywords

Cours of proceedings, alternative uses, examples



Fig. 1: Changed use of a steading quadrangle as Naturhof Zellewitz

Negotiation flexibility

If the ownership situation is clear, the occupation-method for the premises is negotiable from the point of view of village development allowing the sale, rent or lease of premises suitable for reutilisation to prospective users, as well as alternative use by the current ownership.

Before the reutilisation decision is reached, many questions have to be answered:

- Which possibilities are open to farming businesses?
- Is a high standard of advice available concerning agricultural building planning regulations and an effective alternative use planning permission strategy in existence?
- What must be paid attention to in the redesign of the buildings?
- How can a reutilisation be financed?
- How can economies be made through cost-efficient building work?
- Which fiscal advantages and financial support possibilities are available?
- Which marketing strategy is to be developed and are synergisms possible?
- Where are concrete project examples in existence for consultancy?

In the search for feasible possibilities for the reutilisation of buildings and alternatives, the conservation of the rural community structure as well as the economic aspects of reutilisation have to be considered. This takes account of the fact that in no way can the retention of every single existing commercial building within villages be planned for. Already-occurred damage to building substance can be considered as a reason for demolition as can the clearing of utility buildings that spoil the general appearance of the community.

In the process of further-development of communities it is important that the private

owners of unused farm buildings are given access to pertinent direction and advice over possible alternative use variants linked with information of the existing possibilities. In this connection, the media, the responsible officials and advisory offices have the task of actively supporting necessary information distribution regarding answers to „what” and „how” in reutilisation and thus, especially through increased private initiatives, play a role on the preservation and renovation of rural communities. The carrying-out of rural community renovation is increasingly proving a tool for encouraging activities: new impulses, the discussion of ideas, the initiating of project.

Flyleaves, brochures, the creation of building exchanges can give more emphasis to the distribution and co-ordination of supply and demand for unoccupied buildings. An example: through a variety of publicity methods the farmhouse exchange of the Minden-Lübbecke area has made itself known throughout the Ostwestfalen-Lippe region and further afield.



Fig. 2: View of the farmhouse at Mößlitz

Examples of alternative uses

- Community-owned steading quadrangle in Zellewitz

Reutilisation and extension as „Nature Farm” through many development support and work creation initiatives in the ecological-economic and sociological-cultural sector (fig. 1).

- Farm buildings in Mößlitz

Reutilisation and renovation as educational and work facilities, direct marketing of agricultural produce, sociological-cultural centre for children and youth and communications centre for the administration community Zörbig (fig. 2).

- Farm buildings in Bobbe

Reutilisation as ecological reserve with ecological farming, environmental centre with ecological school, hotel for holidays on the farm.

- Guesthouse „Hotel Heinemann”

Reutilisation as guesthouse and hay hotel – holidays on the farm

Reviewing possible alternative uses for buildings, it is advisable to investigate in the pre-planning stage several variants of old building reutilisation income combinations and to consider them in the light of the community’s village development concept. Careful planning and execution need not result in unrelatedly high costs. If reutilisation ideas are discussed in plenty of time within the community then supplementary solutions for several buildings can be integrated thus possibly sparing the need for necessary compromise operations later on. The willingness to invest in alternative uses for buildings is greater, even under difficult situations, when uncertainty from the point of view of future district and regional development can be reduced.