



**Isle of Man**  
Government

Planning Circular 3/91

# **GUIDE TO THE DESIGN OF RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE COUNTRYSIDE**

Department of Local Government  
and the Environment.

Office of Architecture  
and Planning

Government Offices,  
Douglas, Isle of Man.

Rheynn Reiltys Ynnydagh  
as y Chymmlytacht.



£1.00

## GLOSSARY

### Catslide Roof

A section of roof over a single storey extension, usually at a lower pitch than the main roof.

### Corbel

A projecting block, usually of stone, supporting a beam or other horizontal member.

### Cornice

Moulded ledge.

### Dormer

A window placed vertically over a sloping roof with a roof of its own.

### Drip Moulding

Projecting moulding above an opening to throw off water.

### Fanlight

A window over a door.

### Fenestration

The arrangement of windows on an external wall face.

### Gable

Area of wall usually triangular at the end of a double pitched roof.

### Kneeler

Horizontal projection at eaves level on a gable wall.

### Reveal

The side of an opening in a wall between the front edge and the frame of a door or window.

### String Course

Intermediate moulding projecting from the surface of a wall, usually corresponding to an internal floor level.

### Vernacular Building

Buildings designed by those without formal training in design but using local materials and constructional methods formed over many years by local tradition.

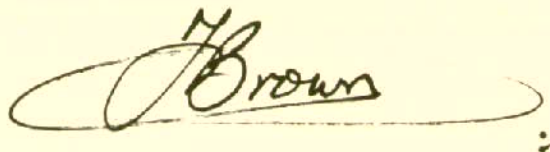
### Weathering

Inclined projecting surface to keep water away from walls and joints.

## Foreword by the Minister for the Environment

This circular, published in the form of a guide, sets down some basic principles which are intended to form a constructive approach to further protecting the quality of the countryside. Two of these objectives are the conservation of existing rural buildings and features and the sympathetic design of new development.

Similar guides are proposed for areas having townscape quality. Taken together, these guides will provide a framework to assist in the preservation of the special character of the Island's environment and its buildings.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Tony Brown". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish that extends to the left and underlines the name. A small semicolon-like mark is visible at the end of the flourish.

TONY BROWN

## INTRODUCTION

This Circular is intended to guide applicants, architects and builders on suitable ways to design and construct residential buildings in rural areas. It has been prompted by the need to conserve existing buildings of quality and to maintain the Island's individual identity.

The landscape character of the countryside stemming from its geology, climate and agricultural use, is of high quality. It has been largely retained by strict planning restraint on development.

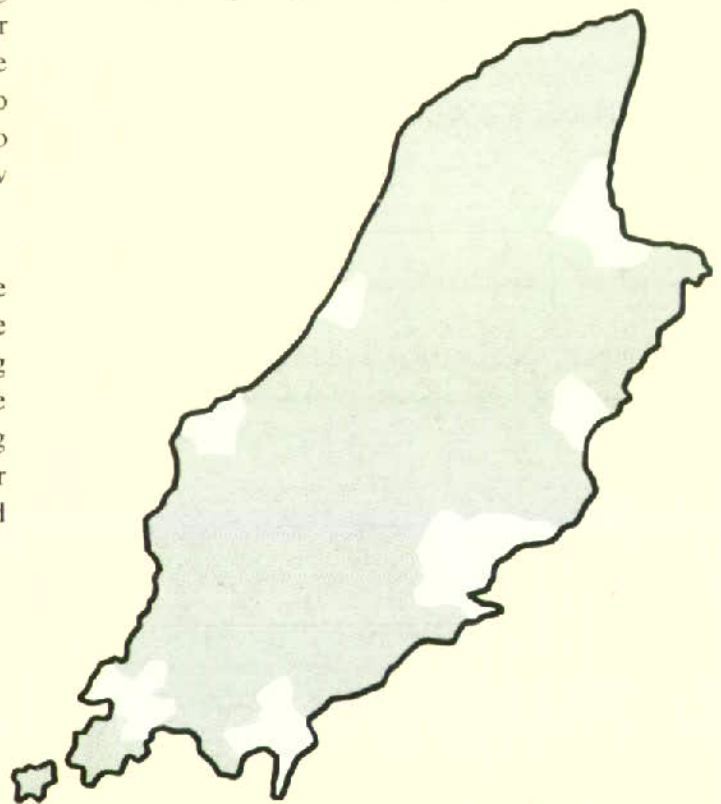
Where new building is allowed under present controls, it is considered that this should respect the established rural character which has been the result of the vernacular and Victorian building of the past. Early farmhouses as well as being visually harmonious are still functional and their form is valid in terms of present constructional methods. They are simple, rational and visually faultless. Later Victorian buildings also contribute to the quality of the rural landscape. The essential building characteristics which act as patterns for proposed new residential buildings are described. These then form a basis by which to measure the acceptability of extensions to existing buildings or the design of any new permitted dwellings.

The advice on housing design in the countryside is meant to apply primarily to the area outside settlements and urban areas covered by existing Written Statements and Planning Circulars. The area in question is indicated on the adjoining map. The definitive boundary should however be determined with reference to the approved Town Plans.

The guide seeks to set a standard for the typical housing requirement in rural areas. It is intended that other guides to new building within a Victorian or Edwardian context will be prepared.

An important related subject concerns agricultural buildings. This will need to be the subject of a separate Circular that deals with the retention and use of traditional farm buildings and the siting and design of new structures.

*Area covered by this  
Planning Circular*



## PRESENT PLANNING POLICIES

Current Circulars relating to residential buildings in the countryside emphasise both the need for the renovation of older houses and restrictions on development. New buildings are limited to essential agricultural activity which cannot be accommodated in existing buildings. These restrictions apply equally to extensions or minor works. Only certain items are excluded from the need for planning permission. These, together with work requiring permission, are summarised in Appendix 1.

In general, present advice stresses the importance of relating new and existing buildings and of using traditional materials. These policies continue and are supplemented by more detailed design advice contained in this Circular.

### POLICY 1

The removal or replacement of traditional elements including materials, windows or external works will generally not be acceptable. Work to buildings which date before 1920 should as far as practicable retain the original materials and form of the building.

## THE VISUAL IMAGE OF THE MANX COUNTRYSIDE

There is a visual image that symbolises for many the essential Manx countryside. This comprises lowlands of green undulating pastures contained by hedgerows and stone walls. This landscape is punctuated by simple rectangular crisp white farmhouses with slate roofs set amongst less prominent stone farm outbuildings and tree clumps. Above this comfortable habitat, the fields become steeper and change character, culminating in heather or rocky summits. The resulting prospect is a rich green land form scattered with small white houses on its lower slopes.



*This image is the context which any new building must respect. The advice in this Circular is aimed to achieve this objective.*

# DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR RURAL DWELLINGS

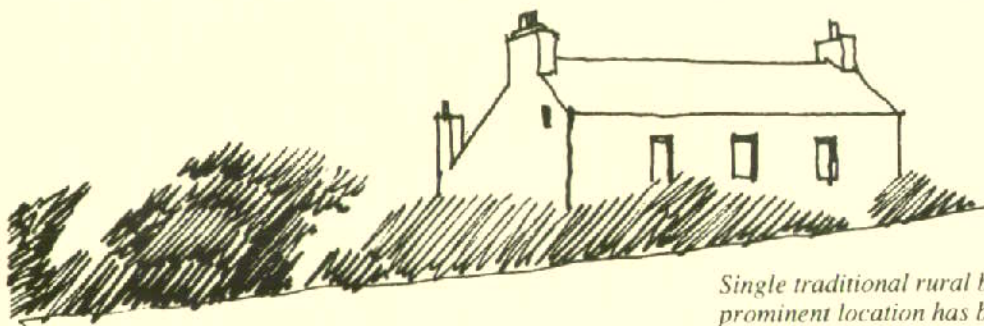
## SITING

The siting of buildings may be in small groups or singly. Where single, they are often prominently placed in the landscape. New building groups should be located below the skyline. To achieve sympathy with the land form and for constructional economy, buildings generally should be placed along the contours rather than across them.

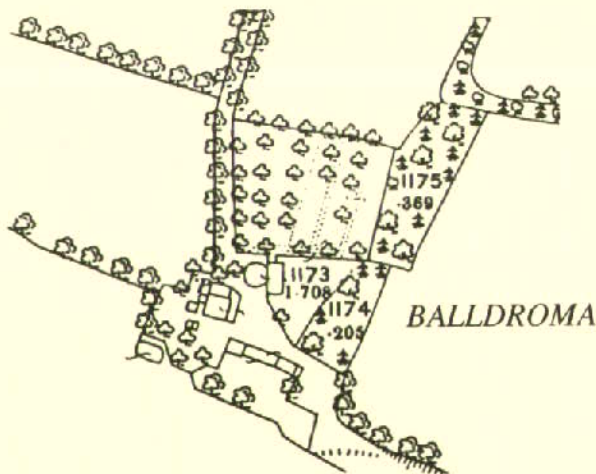
An important factor in siting of buildings is the relationship with tree cover and hedgerows. The traditional farmstead has a natural and close functional relationship with field boundaries and often includes a tree group. This relationship should be maintained. New buildings should form a unity with any landscape features or existing buildings within the vicinity. Where no trees exist, new tree planting will be required to blend the building into the landscape.



*Group of rural buildings sited below the skyline.*



*Single traditional rural building whose prominent location has been softened by tree and hedgerows.*



*Informal relationship between farm buildings together with tree planting achieves integration with the environment.*

## POLICY 2

New buildings are to be integrated with the landscape and where in groups, with each other. Single buildings in prominent locations can only be considered if they are satisfactory in all respects and include landscape proposals.

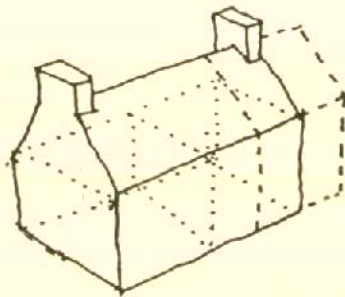
## PROPORTION AND FORM

The proportion and form of country houses follow common patterns. The typical dwelling takes the form of a double cube volume topped by a steep pitch roof with gable ends.

With these proportions and using the normal present day ceiling height of 2.5m, a two storey building gives an external plan dimension of 11.0m x 5.5m and will accommodate some 100 square metres of floor space.

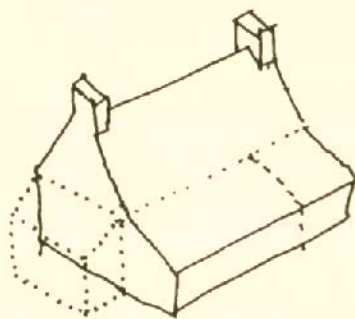
Variations on this floor area are achieved traditionally by lengthening or shortening the length of the block within the constraints of achieving a regular fenestration with a central entrance, or by rear extensions. The rear extensions are invariably single storey under a cat slide roof.

*Basic double cube volume plus approximate 45° roof form with typical dimensions 11.0m x 5.5m*



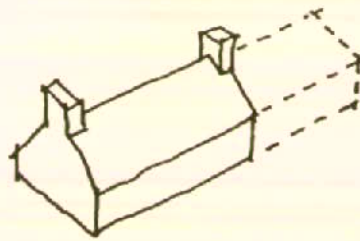
*Length variation respecting regular fenestration and central entrance.*

*Minimum length not less than 1½ volume.*



*Single storey extensions under cat slide roof of full or part width with approximately 30° roof pitch or with roof pitched away from gable end.*

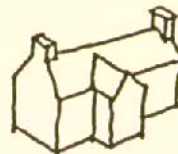
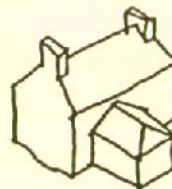
Smaller volumes can be also accommodated by the use of single storey forms. The width should be similar to the two storey basic double cube while the length can be much more variable.



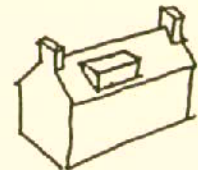
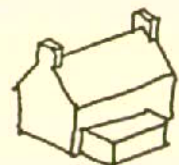
Roof forms are simple and generally unbroken by dormers, the only feature being robust chimneys located at the gable walls.

Two storey L shaped plans and the use of flat roofs should be avoided.

*Additions to basic form acceptable in certain circumstances.*



*Additions to basic form not acceptable.*



### POLICY 3

The shape of small and medium sized new dwellings should follow the size and pattern of traditional farmhouses. They should be rectangular in plan and simple in form. Extensions to existing buildings should maintain the character of the original form.

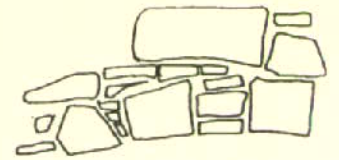
## WALLS AND ROOFS: MATERIALS AND COLOUR

The materials employed in traditional rural buildings were few and simple. The majority were built with local stone or slate walls and thatch roofs. Thatch was later replaced with imported roofing slate when this became readily available and some local brick was used notably for chimney stacks.



The walls were sometimes left as stone but more often rough pointed and white washed for greater weather protection. This white finish is very characteristic of the rural parts of the Island and should remain a standard requirement for new building in the countryside. Modern construction and materials may be used to achieve a similar external appearance. The proportion and form of earlier loadbearing walls should be followed and include such details as deep window reveals. The external finish to walls should be either stone, white painted render, or occasionally natural stone chip faced render.

*rough pointed  
stonework*



*dry stone walling  
on barn*

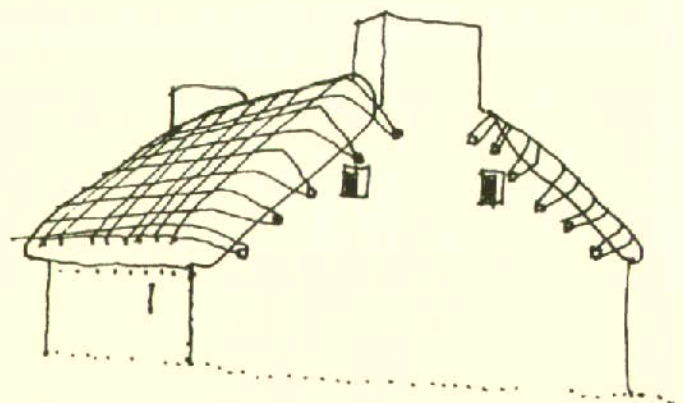


Thatch, the first material for roofs, is still a valid material and can be used in isolated buildings where there is no risk of fire spread. The traditional form of securing with a rope mesh attached at the eaves and verge to wall projections, is necessary in view of the climatic conditions.

Natural slate is recommended as the normal roofing material for buildings in the countryside. New substitutes from man made or processed natural ingredients are second best in terms of weathering and maintaining their appearance. Where existing roofs are covered in material other than thatch or slate, additions may be carried out in a matching finish.

### POLICY 4

External finishes are expected to be selected from a limited range of traditional materials.





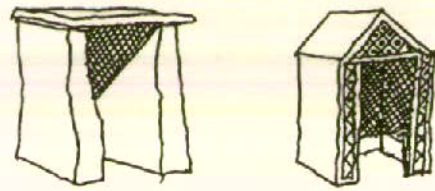
## WINDOWS AND DOORS

The fenestration of vernacular dwellings is typically symmetrical with three upper front windows over a central doorway which is flanked by single windows. The upper windows may be smaller than those on the ground floor in some instances.

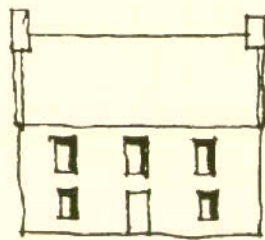
The windows are normally timber double hung sashes in comparatively small openings relative to a dominant area of solid wall surface. Window reveals are usually deep and often have a render finish where in stonework.

Different sized sash windows often occur in the end gable walls and are characteristically set with different cill heights to those on the front. The location of these windows relates to the chimney stack invariably found on the gable wall. Usually the side of the window lines with the outside of the stack but in the case of very wide stacks, windows on the centre of the stack are sometimes found.

Main doorways can be surmounted by a flat arch or emphasised with small porches.



*Regular fenestration with small openings and central entrance*



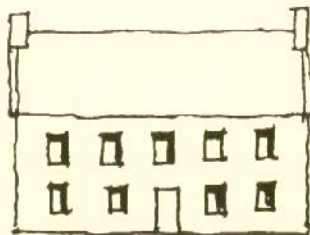
*Normal size*

*One or two side windows smaller than main windows and set at different level*

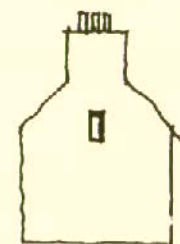


*Side window lines with side of stack*

*Rarer extended version*

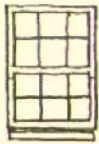


*Central window on wide stack*

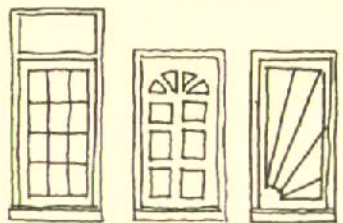
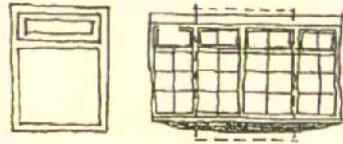


Doors and the normal double hung sash windows are an important element in the appearance and quality of the house facades. In existing buildings, these original elements should be retained or restored. If replacement is unavoidable, this should match the original. In new work, windows generally should be timber double hung sashes. Doors should be solid, timber framed or panelled and may have fanlights over.

*Original*



*Unacceptable*



Glazed doors, picture windows, ventilator lights and asymmetrical frames are all features which are out of character with the Island's vernacular buildings.

Some forms of so called traditional replacement windows should also be avoided. These contain either clumsy wooden or false glazing bars which bear no relationship to the elegant and subtle traditional forms they seek to reproduce.

In traditional rural buildings on the Isle of Man, dormer windows are rare except on the lower parts of cat slide rear roof extensions. Lighting of upper roof spaces is traditionally by way of high gable windows and this method should be followed. Where this does not provide sufficient light, glazing in line with the roof slope may be used.



## **POLICY 5**

Doors and windows together with their size and relationship with each other and the wall face should follow traditional rural forms.

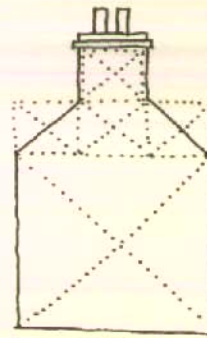
# CHIMNEYS, VERGES AND EAVES

Chimneys are a familiar feature of the Island and make a particular visual impact in the rural areas. Their provision in modern housing is justified both for functional reasons and for their visual contribution to the skyline.

Chimneys are invariably located flush with the external wall face at manageable ends and sometimes to the rear rising from catslide ground floor extensions. A notable characteristic is their broad width on the gable end. This width is unusual and seems not to be justified by the chimney pots projecting from the top. Stacks are sometimes of brick and have a top weather corbel course, clay pots, and to shed water, a projection normally in slate, above the junction of the stack and roof.

Gable verges take a parapet form or a simple cement band. They are often retained at eaves level with a kneeler stone. The roof ridge is covered with standard ridge tiles.

Eaves usually have a minimum overhang sometimes emphasised with a projecting brick course. Roof drainage is traditionally by iron gutters and downpipes except on outbuildings where these are often omitted.

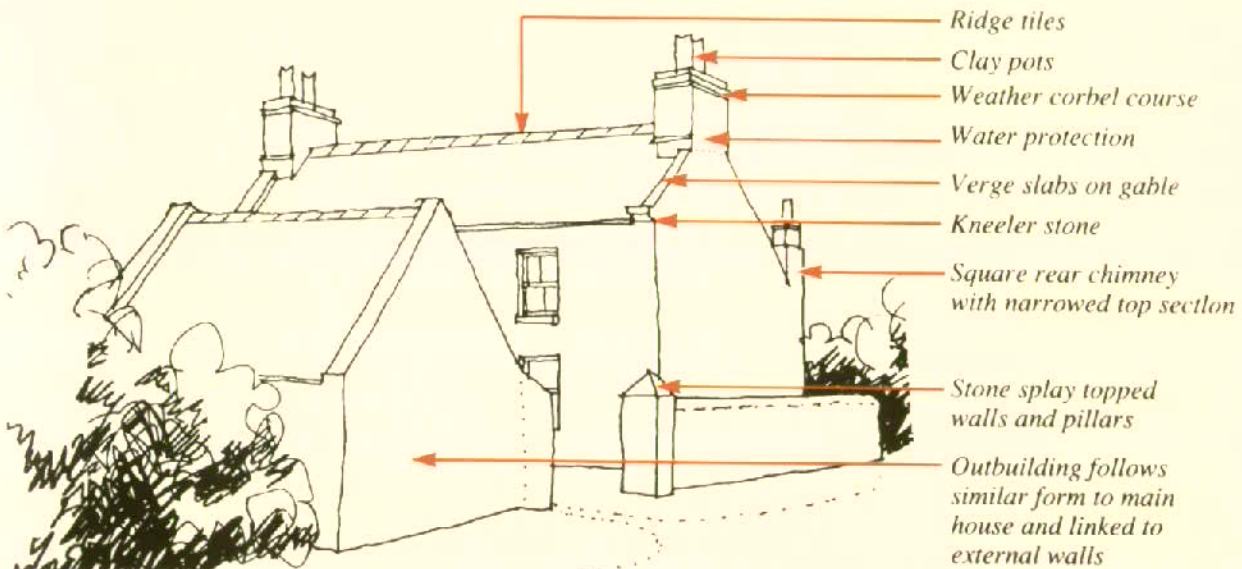


*Proportion of chimney stack based on square grid.*



## POLICY 6

Chimneys are considered important features and their provision following past patterns is recommended.



## EXTERNAL FEATURES

External walls and gate pillars are usually constructed in stone or rough slate and are often whitewashed in the vicinity of the dwelling to match the house finish. These masonry walls have a weathered top splay and the gate pillars are characteristically square in plan and sturdy in proportion with a simple pyramid top without overhang. A circular variation of thin coursed slates is also found in field boundary walls. It is important to retain these existing masonry walls especially so at entrances. Gates, fences and hedges should be retained where of visual merit or important to the character of the area.

Outbuildings and detached garages should be given as much consideration in their appearance as main buildings. They should match the main structure by the use of similar external materials and building forms and be directly linked if possible to any external boundary walls.

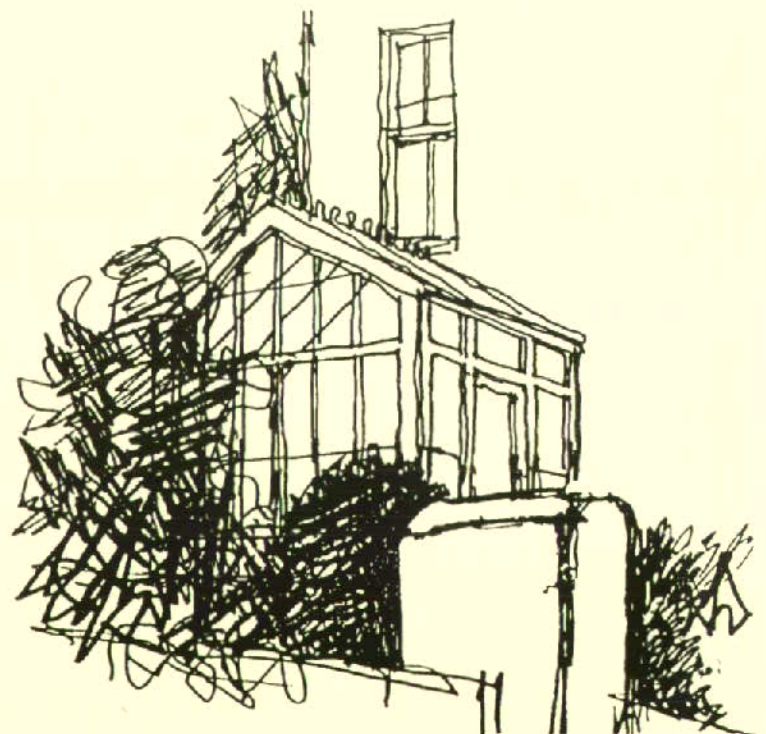
Porches and conservatories are not a common feature in traditional rural housing. Where these are required, their construction and form should be compatible with the vernacular style of rural buildings. This may be achieved by using traditional walling materials in the case of solid porches or sensitively designed and detailed timber framed forms in the case of conservatories and glazed porches.



Paths, drives and hardstandings are best kept informal and surfaced with stone chippings to blend with the countryside.

### POLICY 7

Existing features are an essential part of the rural scene. New work should follow and respect successful past patterns.



*Traditional timber  
and glass conservatory*

## THE LARGER HOUSE STANDING IN ITS OWN GROUNDS

In addition to the simple country dwelling on farms and settlements described above, there are also occasional grander houses which were built for the more affluent.

Many characteristics of these larger houses are similar to those already described, having white rendered simple forms topped by gable ended slate roofs, end chimneys and symmetrical main facades. Plans later became double room depth and more square in proportion.

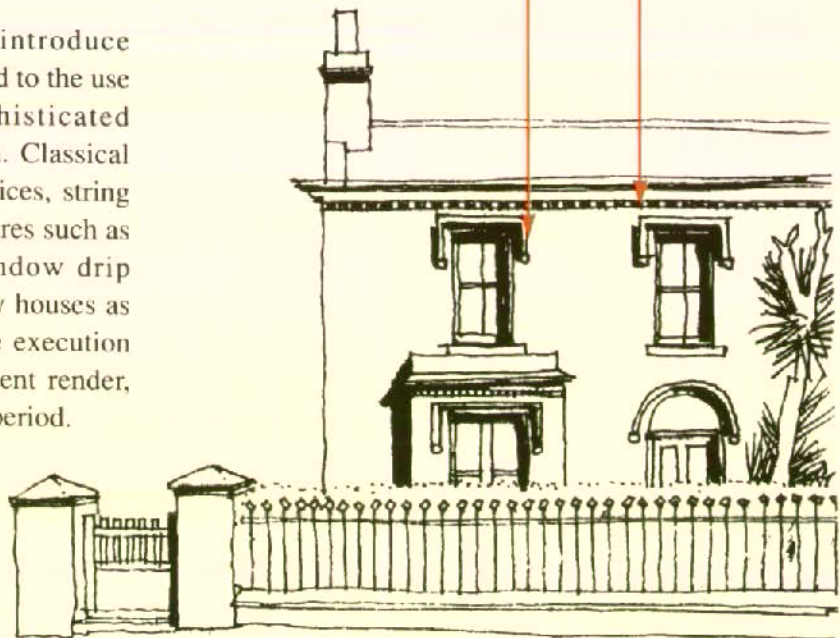
The larger house did however introduce additional features. These were related to the use of more fashionable and sophisticated architectural motives and decoration. Classical elements such as roof parapets, cornices, string courses and later more romantic features such as mediaeval style battlements. Window drip mouldings are found in some country houses as well as their town counterparts. The execution of these details is invariably in cement render, the common external material of the period.

*Simple form continued with addition of full height splayed bay windows, parapet and string course.*



*Decorative details of cornice and window drip mouldings.*

*Boundary treatment using iron railings and more detailed pillars and gates.*



Other more functional elements such as bay windows became common to take advantage of the view – a factor not considered important by the traditional agricultural worker – as did more elaborate entrance gates and boundaries.

### POLICY 8

The more fashionable features of the 19th Century found in the isolated larger house, form a visual image which is established and familiar in the Manx countryside. These features, given sensitive and restrained application, could, with advantage, be used in certain circumstances today. They should, however, be limited to the larger house standing in its own grounds.

## APPENDIX ONE

### Permitted development and work requiring planning permission

The Town and Country (Permitted Development) Order 1983 defines work related to dwellings which can be carried out without the need for planning permission.

Subject to conditions on size, location, design and maintenance, the order allows the erection of:

- (a) a single domestic greenhouse
- (b) a traditional wall, fence or gate where the latter does not create a new access
- (c) a single garden shed
- (d) a private garage
- (e) a single domestic oil storage tank
- (f) satellite dishes

Note: Permitted Development Orders do not apply in Conservation Areas nor to Registered Buildings.

Details of the conditions and advice on their application should be obtained from the Department of Architecture and Planning.

Other work requires planning permission. This includes:

1. Extension or reduction of the volume of the building including non habitable elements, such as chimney stacks and open porches.
2. Formation, removal or change to the size of external openings.
3. Replacement of existing windows and doors with those of different appearance.
4. Change to external materials.
5. Demolition or removal of external features.
6. The addition of fixtures, such as solar panels and rooflights.

The above should be taken as a guide only.

It is strongly recommended that any proposals are discussed with the planning department who will be pleased to advise on whether planning permission is required.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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