
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 14 March 2017

by David Troy BSc (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 10 April 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/V2825/W/16/3162068

Plough Hotel, Bridge Street, Northampton, Northamptonshire NN1 1PF

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant consent, agreement or approval to details required by a condition of a planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by NewLife Hotels Limited against the decision of Northampton Borough Council.
 - The application Ref N/2016/0050, dated 14 January 2016, sought approval of details pursuant to condition No 1 of an outline planning permission, Ref N/2013/0442, granted on 24 June 2013.
 - The application was refused by notice dated 5 September 2016.
 - The reserved matters application in relation to outline planning permission N/2013/0442 (Outline Application for a new 89 bed hotel) for appearance landscaping and scale for 56 serviced apartments.
 - The details for which approval is sought are: scale, appearance and landscaping.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The original application for Outline Planning Permission (OPP) for a hotel¹ included means of access and layout and sought to reserve the matters relating to scale, appearance and landscaping for future approval. This reserved matters application has indicated that approval is sought for the scale, appearance and the landscaping for 56 serviced apartments. The Council agreed that serviced apartments fall within the same Use Class C1 as a hotel during the determination of a previous application granted to vary a condition² on the original OPP to approve changes to floor layout and building footprint. I have considered the appeal on this basis accordingly.

Main Issue

3. The effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

4. The appeal site comprises a car parking area and ancillary buildings at the side of the Plough Hotel, a traditional three storey property located to the south of Northampton town centre and within an area covered by the Northampton

¹ N/2013/0442

² N/2016/0269

Central Area Action Plan 2013 (CAAP). The appeal site is located on an island of land bounded by the busy A5123 inner ring road, with a mixture of commercial/retail uses of varied designs and styles to the north and south and a mature well-established residential area of high density terraced properties on Victoria Promenade and Victoria Gardens to the east. The Plough Hotel along with commercial/retail uses to the south and the residential properties in the surrounding streets, are predominantly built in brick with pitched roofs. These features give the area a strong unifying character and appearance.

5. The proposal would involve the demolition of the stone and red brick ancillary buildings and construction of a four storey contemporary style apartment building with a flat roof, associated parking, hard and soft landscaping areas. The apartments would be located close to the back edge of the footpath at the junction of Victoria Promenade and Victoria Gardens with a series of step backs to the top floor of the building. The appellant's design and access statement outlines that the external finish of the building would predominantly comprise of render, steel cladding, glass and pressed steel, with some use of reclaimed stone on the front facade.
6. I have considered the appellant's arguments regarding the influence of the unlisted Plough Hotel on the proposal and that the proposed development is intended to bring a modern contemporary and high quality design into this part of the CAAP. However, I have viewed the appeal site and I am not persuaded by the appellant's arguments. Whilst I recognise that the stepped back design together with the landscaping scheme and boundary treatment would assist in integrating the proposal with the area, I consider that the flat roofed design and the bulky contemporary appearance of the proposed apartment building would be very much at odds with the older more traditional character and appearance of many of the properties in the area.
7. The significant proportions and the contrasting design of the building in such close proximity to the adjacent Plough Hotel together with the palette of the materials used would further increase the incongruous appearance of the proposed building within the streetscene. These shortcomings are exacerbated by the development's prominent position, which would be visible from a number of public vantage points along the surrounding inner ring road.
8. I note the appellant's comments about the context provided in the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) for good design and that planning decisions should not attempt to impose architectural styling and should not stifle innovation, originality or initiative in design, but I find that the proposal does not achieve the standards the Framework seeks. Paragraph 60 of the Framework states that it is proper to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness. In this case, the proposed development would fail to promote or reinforce the distinctive characteristics of the area.
9. I have considered the appellant's comments regarding the unsympathetic design of the existing commercial/retail uses and the inner ring road. Whilst I recognise the impact of the varied design and styles of the surrounding commercial/retail uses and the inner ring road on the character of the area, this does not set a precedent for such an inappropriate development in this location for the reasons set out above and these uses are generally of a lower height and smaller scale as compared to the appeal scheme. I therefore accord these matters limited weight.

10. Consequently, I conclude that the development, by virtue of its scale, design and the materials used, would result in an incongruous and out-of-keeping addition that would adversely harm the character and appearance of the area. It conflicts with Policy S10 of the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy 2014 and Policy 1 of the CAAP. These policies, amongst other things, seek to ensure that all new development within the Central Area achieves the highest standard of sustainable design and makes a positive contribution to the character of the area having regard to the existing scale, massing materials and architectural style of the surrounding buildings.
11. In addition, it would not accord with the aims of the Framework that development should seek to secure a high quality of design (paragraph 17); to respect the local character (paragraph 58); and to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness (paragraph 60).

Other matters

12. The appeal site is located to the south of the Grade I Listed St John's Roman Catholic Church and St John's Hall, and outside of the All Saints Conservation Area (CA) further north of the proposal. Given the separation distance and the limited inter-visibility between the appeal site and the existing listed buildings and CA, I consider that the appeal scheme would have a neutral material impact. The settings of the listed buildings and the character and appearance of the CA would therefore be preserved.
13. I note that the appellant considers that the proposal would constitute a sustainable form of development. Sustainable development is identified as having social, economic and environmental roles in the Framework. It is accepted that the proposal would be well connected to existing services and facilities. It would provide some social and economic benefits through contributing to local services, employment, boosting the supply of serviced apartment accommodation and supporting the broader objectives of the CAAP to promote economic growth and inward investment into the area.
14. However, whilst I note the appellant's views that the appeal site has had little investment over a number of years and the proposed redevelopment would provide an opportunity to improve the local environment that would amount to environmental benefits, I have found above that taken overall the development would harm the area's character and appearance. This harm would conflict with the environmental dimension of sustainable development and, in my view, would be sufficient to outweigh the scheme's benefits. The proposal would not therefore amount to sustainable development in the terms of the Framework.

Conclusion

15. For the reasons given above, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

David Troy

INSPECTOR