



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 1 June 2021

by Luke Simpson BSc MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 14 June 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/F3545/W/21/3266328

Walnut Tree Cottage Workshop, 4 Thetford Road, Barnham, Thetford, IP24 2PA

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Allan Wedderburn against the decision of West Suffolk Council.
 - The application Ref DC/20/1129/FUL, dated 08 July 2020, was refused by notice dated 14 September 2020.
 - The development proposed is for a change of use from joinery workshop to holiday cottage.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for change of use from joinery workshop to holiday cottage at Walnut Tree Cottage Workshop, 4 Thetford Road, Barnham, Thetford, IP24 2PA in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref DC/20/1129/FUL, dated 08 July 2020, and the plans submitted with it, subject to the following conditions:
 - 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than 3 years from the date of this decision.
 - 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: Location Plan (Received 27.07.2020); Existing Floor Plan (Received 21.07.2020); Proposed Block Plan (Received 22.07.20); and Proposed Floor Plans (Received 21.07.20).
 - 3) The premises, identified as Walnut Tree Barn on the approved block plan (received 22.07.20), shall be used as holiday accommodation only and no single holiday tenancy shall exceed a continuous period of 28 days. An up-to-date register shall be maintained, which shall include the names of all occupiers of the holiday let, including details of tenancy durations. The register shall be made available to the Local Planning Authority upon request, within two weeks of any such request.

Preliminary Matters

2. I have taken the description of development from the decision notice as this more accurately reflects the proposed development than the description on the submitted application forms. The Appellant has confirmed his agreement to the revised description.
3. The Appellant has sought to amend the site location plan as the original did not include two road names. The Council has confirmed that they do not object to the replacement of the location plan. However, the revised location plan includes a red line site boundary which differs very slightly from that submitted

with the application. I consider that the originally submitted location plan and block plan are sufficient to identify the land and building to which the application relates. On this basis, I have not accepted the amended plan and I proceed on the basis of the plans as originally submitted to the Council.

4. On 1 April 2019, St Edmundsbury Borough Council was dissolved and merged with Forest Heath District Council, to form West Suffolk Council. The development plan for St Edmundsbury Borough Council remains in place until such a time as it is revoked or replaced. It is therefore necessary for me to determine this appeal with reference to policies set out in the plans produced by the now dissolved St Edmundsbury Borough Council.
5. The Council retrospectively granted permission on 29 October 2015 for the continued use of the workshop for joinery manufacturing under application reference DC/15/1778/FUL. This decision notice includes a planning condition which the Council suggests has the effect of tying the workshop use to the residential use. The Council also suggests, within the reason for refusal, that the whole site comprises a single planning unit and that the workshop cannot therefore be considered as redundant. However, none of the policies referred to in the reason for refusal include criteria which turn on the matter of whether or not the existing use is redundant. Whilst I have noted the history of the units, this appeal relates to a separate planning application and any grant of planning permission and subsequent implementation of that permission would, in effect, supersede the previous consent. On this basis, these considerations do not outweigh my findings in relation to the main issue.

Main Issue

6. The main issue is whether the appeal site is a suitable location for the proposed development having regard to its accessibility to services and facilities and sustainable modes of transport.

Reasons

7. The appeal site currently comprises of a detached dwelling and detached single-storey building used as a joinery workshop. The appeal site is located outside of the settlement of Barnham, in the countryside. However, the appeal site is linked to the village by a footway. The two buildings are served by different access points, albeit they share a large gravel drive and parking area. The workshop building was originally granted planning permission in 2012 and the appellant states that the building was erected later that year. The most recent planning permission for the use was granted in 2015, as is discussed in relation to 'preliminary matters'.
8. Policy DM33 of the Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury Local Plan Joint Development Management Policies Document 2015 (DMPD) allows for reuse and conversion of buildings in the countryside for tourist accommodation, where proposals comply with other Local Plan policies. DMPD Policy DM34, which relates specifically to tourism development, states that planning applications for new tourist facilities, including overnight accommodation, will be permitted subject to certain criteria. I consider that the Council's reason for refusal and appeal submissions suggest that the proposed development would not meet the requirements of criterion 'a'. This criterion outlines that proposals should be connected to and associated with existing facilities or located at a site that relates well to the main urban areas and defined settlements in the

- area, with access to sustainable modes of transport. The Council's reason for refusal does not imply any conflict with any other criteria within these policies.
9. The site is located off the A134 which links the towns of Bury St Edmunds and Thetford. The nearest settlement is the village of Barnham. During my site visit, I noted that there are existing footways which provide good quality and safe pedestrian links to Barnham. Indeed, it is a very short walk to the settlement from the appeal site. I therefore conclude that the site relates well to the settlement of Barnham and is therefore not isolated in these terms.
 10. Whilst I have found that the site is not isolated, there are few, if any, services and facilities within Barnham itself. However, during my site visit I noted that there is at least one bus stop within a short walking distance from the site. The number 84 and 86 bus services provide regular links from this bus stop to Brandon, Thetford and Bury St Edmunds. These larger settlements would provide a suitable range of services and facilities for future visitors of the proposed development. By bus, the journey time to Thetford is approximately 15 minutes, which I consider to be a relatively short journey.
 11. For these reasons, I conclude that the appeal site has good access to sustainable modes of transport, which would mean that there would not be any harm in terms of an over-reliance on motor vehicles. In turn, there would be good access to a wide range of services and facilities to meet the needs of visitors. I accept that the bus services do not run on Sunday, but this is not unusual and does not alter my conclusions given that the services would run for the vast majority of the week.
 12. Both parties refer to the proximity and accessibility of tourist destinations within the local area, such as Thetford Forest, but the majority of the attractions referred to are located outside of any defined settlements. DMPD Policy DM34 allows for tourist accommodation that is well related to existing settlements and accessible to sustainable modes of transport. It does not require that all tourist accommodation is in close proximity to key tourist facilities.
 13. For the reasons outlined above, I conclude that the proposed development would comply with DMPD Policy DM34, which seeks in part to ensure that new visitor accommodation is suitably located. Given that the development would comply with this policy, it would also comply with DMPD Policy DM33, which states that the reuse or conversion of buildings in the countryside for tourist accommodation will be permitted where proposals accord with other Local Plan Policies. The proposed development would also comply with National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 83(a), which states that decisions should enable sustainable growth and expansion of all types of businesses in rural areas, including through the conversion of existing buildings.

Other Matters

14. Reference is made by both parties to a previous appeal at the appeal site (Reference: APP/F3545/W/19/3241186). I note the findings of the inspector in relation to this appeal. However, this appeal related to a change of use to a dwelling, with the principle of development falling to be considered under a different development plan policy. Furthermore, the evidence before the Inspector in relation to that appeal is different to that before me in considering this current appeal. For these reasons, the conclusions reached by the

Inspector are not necessarily directly transposable to this proposed development, which has been considered on its own merits.

Conditions

15. In the interests of certainty, I have imposed a condition detailing the approved plans. The Council requested a condition restricting the use to holiday accommodation, such that it could not be used for any other purposes, including as permanent residential accommodation. I consider that it is necessary to impose such a condition, particularly given that a previous appeal for a proposed change of use to a dwelling has recently been dismissed. However, I consider it necessary to impose a 28 day maximum restriction on tenancy periods and a requirement to keep a register of occupiers. This is necessary to ensure that the property is operated as a holiday let and to prevent full-time occupation which might otherwise result in continuous residential use. These conditions meet the tests set out in the National Planning Practice Guidance.

Conclusion

16. For the reasons given above and taking into account all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be allowed.

Luke Simpson

INSPECTOR