



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 24 January 2022

by S Harley BSc(Hons) M.Phil MRTPI ARICS

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 31st January 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/Y9507/W/21/3272210

34a Lavant Street, Petersfield, Hampshire GU32 3EF

- 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 Andrew Oscar Brown BSc against the decision of South Downs National Park Authority.
 - The application Ref SDNP/20/02824/FUL, dated 8 July 2020, was refused by notice dated 26 November 2020.
 - The development proposed is change of use from retail Class A1 to hotel temporary accommodations C1.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The appeal site adjoins a large vacant factory/warehouse and yard formerly occupied by Tews Engineering. Some documents refer to the appeal site as "The Tews Site (front)", and the signage suggests last occupiers was the Petersfield Tools and Fixings Company. The evidence indicates that the Tews Yard and the appeal building are in the same ownership and control. I carried out an unaccompanied site visit, viewing only from the street, as access into the building was not available.
3. The description of development set out above is taken from the planning application form. As part of the appeal the appellant has explained that the word "temporary" was meant to distinguish the proposed hotel use from permanent residential accommodation. I have taken this into account.
4. The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2020 introduced the Commercial, Business and Service Use Class E. This includes offices, some retail uses and some industrial uses. Hotels, boarding houses and guest houses are in the separate Use Class C1. Planning permission is required for a change of use from Class E to Class C1.

Main Issue

5. The main issue is whether the appeal building alone is suitable for hotel use taking into account local and national planning policies.

Reasons

6. The appeal site is in Petersfield town centre close to the train station and its car park. It is a two storey flat roof building in a prominent location near the station entrance. It comprises a vacant ground floor retail unit, with vacant

office accommodation above, and a basement garage. The appeal building fronts onto Lavant Street; its side elevation adjoins the access into the Tews yard. The site is in an accessible location and appropriate development would be acceptable in principle provided other planning policies and material considerations were satisfied.

7. Petersfield Neighbourhood Development Plan 2018 (the NP) sets out a vision for the town in terms of housing, schooling, employment, hotels, community, leisure and tourism facilities and better streets and transport. The NP; the South Downs Local Plan 2019 (the LP); and the South Downs Partnership Management Plan 2020 to 2025 (the SDMP) seek to support towns and villages and encourage small businesses, employment and tourism in appropriate locations.
8. Business Policies 1 and 2 of the NP specifically allocate/protect the Tews Engineering site, amongst other sites, for employment uses. The supporting text advises that, to protect the town as a place to live and work, existing employment sites cannot be used for anything else unless unsuitable for business use and unless active marketing for at least six months on realistic market terms has demonstrated there is no prospect of new business occupiers being found. The NP advises there is a particular demand for premises from micro to medium firms. A shortage of light industrial and small office units (Class E) in particular has been identified.
9. Policy SD35 of the LP references employment land as for offices, industrial and small scale warehousing and safeguards such commercial uses unless a robust marketing campaign of at least 12 months (18 months in respect of the Tews site allocation) demonstrates no demand for such business premises. I have seen no evidence of any such marketing campaign.
10. The NP and LP both identify a need for all types of visitor accommodation but with a particular demand for high quality accommodation. Appropriate, properly scaled, accommodation is supported and the preparation of the NP identified a lack of visitor accommodation in general and, in particular, the lack of an up-market hotel within walking distance of the town centre.
11. Hotels offer some employment opportunities but these do not fall within the thrust of Policies BP1 and BP2 of the NP and Policy SD35 of the LP. Nor is the site allocated as suitable for a town centre hotel as is the Festival Hall site.
12. The location next to the railway station would be advantageous to visitors arriving by train, and would therefore reduce the need for reliance on the private vehicle. Nevertheless the proposal includes basement parking at the rear of the building and a night door entrance for guests both utilising the Tews yard access. The red line on the site plan does not include the shared access, and, had my conclusions been otherwise, I would have sought more information about this.
13. Overall I consider that the position of the appeal building at the front of the Tews yard, where industrial/warehouse use could re-commence, sharing the yard access, would not provide a suitable environment for a hotel. Moreover, I have seen no details of how the accommodation would be satisfactorily laid out and it seems unlikely that good quality accommodation could easily and viably be provided. I consider that the proposal would not accord with the vision for hotel accommodation and associated Policies set out in the NP and LP.

14. I conclude that the proposal would conflict with those parts of Policies BP1 and BP2 of the NP; Policy SD35 of the LP and the National Planning Policy Framework that seek to retain premises in employment use to meet local business need. Moreover, the piecemeal change of use of the appeal building on the front corner of the access to the Tews yard, may well prejudice the development of the wider Tews site which would further conflict with the objectives of Policies BP1 and BP2. Nor would the proposal accord with the vision for hotel accommodation and associated Policies set out in the NP and LP. Balancing all the above I conclude that the appeal building alone is not suitable for hotel use taking into account local and national planning policies.

Other Matters

15. The site is in the Petersfield Conservation Area (the CA). This covers a large part of Petersfield, an historic market town and important settlement within the South Downs National Park. The railway station is a principal focal point due to its architectural quality and visual prominence within the CA. Lavant Street is a secondary shopping area following on from its development around the 1880s as a link between the station and the historic town centre.
16. The appeal building adds little positive contribution to the character and appearance of the CA. Bringing it back into productive use would be a positive benefit. I have seen detailed information about elevational and signage changes that would be likely to be needed for hotel use. In the absence of such information I conclude that the proposal would have a neutral effect on the character and appearance of the CA which would amount to its preservation.
17. The appellant has estimated that the tourism economy could bring in some £65m spend in Year 10 and associated continuing employment. I cannot confidently conclude that the piecemeal use of the appeal building would be likely to generate enough cash flow to initiate an international gateway hotel for the South Downs National Park on the wider Tews site, notwithstanding the registration trademark "The Petersfield Hotel". Accordingly this does not lead me to any different conclusion.

Conclusion

18. I find no conflict in principle with Policy SD34, which seeks to promote tourism and support local business, or Policy 48 of the SDMP or other development plan Policies that seek to support sustainable economic growth in appropriate locations and to make sustainable efficient use of an existing building. However, I have found that the appeal building alone is not suitable for hotel use and the proposal would not accord with the planning vision for hotel accommodation. Moreover, in failing to comply with Policies BP1 and BP2 of the NP and Policy SD35 of the LP the proposal cannot be said to comply with the development plan taken as a whole. I find insufficient material considerations to justify a decision other than in accordance with the development plan. The appeal should be dismissed.

S Harley

INSPECTOR