



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 18 April 2023

by L Fleming BSc (Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 9 May 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/W3520/W/22/3304149

Verandah House, 29 Ipswich Road, Stowmarket, IP14 1BD

- 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 & Mrs G Neroni against the decision of Mid Suffolk District Council.
 - The application Ref DC/22/00700, dated 9 February 2022, was refused by notice dated 6 April 2022.
 - The development proposed is change of use of premises from guest house and dwelling (sui generis) to a dwelling (Class C3)
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for change of use of premises from guest house and dwelling (sui generis) to a dwelling (Class C3) at Verandah House, Stowmarket, IP14 1BD in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref DC/22/00700, dated 9 February 2022, 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: Red Line Site Location Plan - Received 09/02/2022 and Existing Floor Plan - Received 09/02/2022.

Preliminary Matters

2. The appeal is concerned only with the change of use of the appeal property. There is no operational development proposed. For the avoidance of any doubt, I have considered only the change of use.

Main Issue

3. The effect of the proposal on the local economy, having particular regard to tourism.

Reasons

4. Policy 7.3 of the Mid Suffolk District Stowmarket Action Plan (2013) (AP) states the Council will support and promote development proposals that will increase the attractiveness of the area for tourism, such as those that, among other things, extend existing and/or provide new short-stay accommodation, particularly in locations accessible to the town centre by pedestrians, cyclists or public transport. Furthermore, paragraph 7.21 of the justification text says

Stowmarket is currently lacking in the good quality, short-stay accommodation necessary for a tourist destination, both at the hotel and B&B ends of the spectrum. It says the Council will support appropriate extensions to existing short stay facilities that will benefit the town's economy and will encourage and support the provision of new serviced accommodation near the town centre, particularly in sustainable locations close to rail and other public transport.

5. Moreover, saved Policy RT16 of the Mid Suffolk Local Plan (1996) (LP) states within settlements, the provision of holiday accommodation through new development or the conversion of existing buildings will be permitted, subject to no adverse effects on the character or appearance of their surroundings, residential amenity or highway safety.
6. I accept the appeal site is close to Stowmarket Town Centre. I also accept Stowmarket Town Centre can be easily accessed from the appeal site using a range of sustainable transport modes. I acknowledge the comments of Stowmarket Town Council which say there is limited hotel availability in Stowmarket. I have also considered the Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council's Recovery Plan (2022) which notes the tourism opportunities in and around Stowmarket and I accept the need to encourage such in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. I also note the Council's Economic Strategy identifies the tourism and visitor economy as one of the key sectors for growth, identifying the need to support a thriving visitor economy sector, including events, activities and attractions.
7. However, the proposal before me, is not seeking to extend and or/provide new short stay accommodation, it is seeking to change the use of existing short stay accommodation to a single dwelling. Even though the proposal would result in the loss of short stay accommodation, no part of saved Policy RT16 of the LP or Policy 7.3 of the AP or its justification mentions resisting proposals resulting in the loss of existing short stay accommodation.
8. There is also no substantive evidence which demonstrates that because the appeal property is a grade II listed building and within the Stowmarket Conservation Area it is any more attractive to tourists than other hotels in Stowmarket noted in the evidence. There is also no substantive evidence before me to demonstrate the loss of this specific relatively modest short stay accommodation would have any effect on the attractiveness of the area to tourism or whether it would have any effect on enhancing tourist and visitor accommodation in Stowmarket. Indeed, I am told the appeal premises ceased trading in March 2022.
9. On the basis of the evidence before me, I am led to the conclusion that the proposal would not have any harmful effect on the local economy, having particular regard to tourism. There would also be no conflict with either Policy 7.3 of the AP or saved Policy RT16 of the LP both of which, insofar as is relevant, seek to encourage the development of tourist accommodation in appropriate locations.

Other Matters

10. I note the comments from the Council that if the proposal is permitted, developers would be interested in converting the single dwelling into flats. However, any such proposal would require planning permission and in any event there is no substantive evidence to substantiate these claims or that

such a proposal would be harmful. I have also considered the comments made by the Council concerning its five-year land supply. However, the property is already in use as a dwelling and a guest house. I have not considered this matter any further.

11. I have also had regard to my statutory duties in terms of considering the effect of the proposal on the grade II listed Verandah Cottage and the Stowmarket Conservation Area. However, the proposal would revert the appeal property back to its original use as a single dwelling. The proposal before me relates only to the change in use consequently, the effect of the proposal on both of these designated heritage assets would be neutral.

Conditions

12. As suggested by the Council I have imposed a condition specifying the relevant drawings as this provides certainty. However, I have amended the suggested wording to specify the drawings and remove the unnecessary requirement for a phasing plan.

Conclusion

13. For the reasons set out above, having had regard to all other matters raised, the appeal should be allowed.

L Fleming

INSPECTOR