



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 11 March 2024

by Chris Couper BA (Hons) Dip TP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 20.03.2024

Appeal Ref: APP/L5240/W/23/3322951

30 Dingwall Road, Croydon CR0 2NB

- 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 S Patel (Croydon Hotels Limited) against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Croydon.
 - The application Ref 23/00154/FUL, dated 13 January 2023, was refused by notice dated 6 April 2023.
 - The development proposed is alterations to the existing hotel to create 19 bedrooms.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for alterations to the existing hotel to create 19 bedrooms at 30 Dingwall Road, Croydon CR0 2NB in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 23/00154/FUL, dated 13 January 2023, 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: PL-00-01 Rev A, PL-00-02 Rev D, PL-00-03 Rev A, PL-00-04 Rev A, PL-00-05 Rev A, PL-00-06 Rev A and PL-00-07.

Procedural Matter and Background

2. Having regard to the explanation on the title page of the statement by 4D Planning, I have taken the name of the appellant from the appeal form, rather than from the application form as that erroneously cited the architects as the applicant.
3. Planning permission was granted in 2009 for the erection of an eleven storey building on this site, comprising a 120 bedroom hotel on the ground and third to tenth floors, with banqueting and meeting rooms on the first floor, and offices within Class B1 on the second floor (Ref: 09/03055/P) ('the original permission'). That development, which has been carried out, replaced offices. Hampton Hotel now provides visitor accommodation within most of the building.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is the effect of the proposed development on the role of Croydon town centre, having regard to development plan policies which seek to promote it as an outer London office centre.

Reasons

5. As set out in the Croydon Local Plan 2018 ('CLP'), the site falls within a part of the Croydon Opportunity Area ('COA') which is designated as an Office Retention Area ('ORA'). CLP Policy SP3.13 explains that within the ORA lower quality office floor space for which there remains a demand will be retained, and that mixed use development must include a level of office floor space proportionate to its role as an Outer London Office Centre.
6. Policy E1 of the London Plan 2021 ('LP') seeks to consolidate and – where viable – extend the diverse office market in Croydon town centre, and to retain existing viable office floorspace in this location, but also supports the release of surplus office capacity to other uses.
7. At the time of the original permission, the Greater London Authority set out its strong support for the proposed hotel accommodation, and noted that the scheme would also provide around 395sqm of more modern and flexible office space to replace the largely vacant and outdated 1,672sqm of office space in the existing building. Given its description in the original permission as 'offices within Class B1', it is clear to me that, whilst that office space was subsequently used both to run the hotel and by other businesses owned by the hotel proprietor, it was not intended to be ancillary to the hotel use.
8. Other than on an informal and ad hoc basis associated with the hotel use, the office floor space on the building's second floor was not in use at the time of my visit; and whilst sixteen businesses may be registered to this floor, that does not attest to the floorspace being actively used as offices at the current time.
9. That said, the Council maintains that there is a continuing need for office accommodation in the area. In particular, it cites the Croydon Employment Land Review Update (November 2020) ('CELR'), which sets out that the area around East Croydon Station is likely to continue to be the most attractive for businesses seeking office accommodation, including those needing more affordable, lower quality space; and that an office retention policy will therefore continue to be required.
10. Having regard to CLP Policy SP3.13b, the appellant maintains that, whilst his company previously used the offices, there is little demand for this lower quality floorspace. For my part, I agree that sharing the lift access to the office accommodation with the hotel's housekeeping, food delivery and other trade services, is far from ideal; and that users of the office space may well experience noise and disruption from the banqueting and meeting rooms on the floor beneath. Moreover, it appears to me likely that many companies in a central location such as this would desire greater prominence and presence, rather than being within a building dominated by another use.
11. In support of the appeal, the appellant has also provided a letter dated 22 May 2023 from G&P Property, who are locally-based commercial property agents. This sets out that the office space was marketed for just under a year until May 2021, at which point it was removed from the market due to lack of interest.
12. I have very few details of that marketing exercise, including the price the space was offered at. Additionally, it is now somewhat dated, and I note that the Council would normally require a minimum 18 month marketing period in

accordance with CLP paragraph 5.13. Lockdowns in response to the Covid 19 epidemic would also have meant that that period was not necessarily representative of the current market.

13. However, I have no cogent reason to doubt G&P's general conclusions that this office space is not attractive to potential occupiers due to its intertwining with the hotel use; and that the office market remains challenging in Croydon as demonstrated by the number of vacant office buildings in a similar location. In that regard, I also that the CELR identifies that there is approximately 150,000sqm of office accommodation with planning permission in the COA which has not been built, which it says could be a result of the market not moving to develop space rather than a lack of consented space.
14. Moreover, I note that whilst CLP Policies SP3.8 and SP3.10 provide support for B1 offices within the Croydon Metropolitan Centre ('CMC'), they adopt a flexible approach which also encourages visitor accommodation. At paragraph 5.6 of his statement the appellant also references a paper which informed the LP and which sets out a need for an additional 58,140 rooms to London's serviced accommodation supply by 2041. Thus, whilst I recognise that this part of the CMC is designated as an ORA, development plan policies provide support for both these alternative uses.
15. Summing up, I agree that this office space is low quality. There would appear to be little demand for it from potential occupiers, although the evidence on this matter is not entirely convincing given the absence of a detailed and up to date marketing report, and the somewhat anecdotal or conflicting information regarding the need for, and availability of, office space in this area.
16. However, I have found that parts of CLP Policy SP3 provide support for hotel accommodation in locations such as this. I have no reason to doubt that the existing hotel is trading successfully, and that the proposal would therefore make full and effective use of the space. Consequently, I conclude that the proposal would not harm the role of Croydon as a metropolitan town centre, and that it would not conflict with the development plan when considered as a whole.
17. The appeal is therefore allowed. It is subject to the standard time limit condition and, in the interests of certainty, a condition requiring that the development be carried out in accordance with the approved plans.

Chris Couper

INSPECTOR