

The Courthouse

Friars Walk, Lewes, South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA)



Planning Potential secured consent for a building which was designed specifically to reflect the historic design of Lewes, for a site within the South Downs National Park and Lewes Conservation Area. The scheme incorporates flexible retail and leisure uses at ground floor and hotel accommodation at first and second floors.

The proposals sought to redevelop and regenerate the vacant former Magistrates' Court site in Lewes Town Centre, in order to improve both the site's image and town centre offer.

The replacement building was designed to enhance Lewes Conservation Area, providing new retail and leisure facilities on the ground floor, with a Premier Inn hotel on the upper floors. The modern retail and leisure facilities sought to increase choice and add to the vitality and vibrancy of the town centre. The hotel would provide a budget offer, to encourage visitors to stay in Lewes overnight, and shop and eat within the town centre.

Importantly, we were able to demonstrate that the proposed demolition of the existing courthouse building within the Conservation Area was acceptable, and in doing so, we obtained full support from Historic England. We were also able to demonstrate that the scheme would assist in meeting the South Downs National Park-wide shortfall in tourist accommodation (as there was a pressing need for hotel accommodation within Lewes). Considering the location of the site, within the South Downs National Park, it was also important to demonstrate that the proposals would not create a visual impact on the landscape setting, and this was done successfully.

The application was subject to opposition from local residents, who were concerned that a chain hotel and modern design was not suitable for Lewes. However, through an ongoing consultation programme, we developed a viable scheme that addressed local concerns, secured a positive recommendation from officers, and was approved at Planning Committee.



Benefits of the scheme

- Making the most efficient use of a brownfield site
- Providing a well-designed new building to enhance the townscape and conservation area
- Directing new investment into Lewes Town Centre
- Providing in excess of 60 jobs through the mix of uses
- Providing a full policy-compliant scheme that addressed the need for more visitor accommodation in the South Downs

Summary of achievements

- Initial advice on the potential for the site to accommodate a mixed-use scheme inclusive of a hotel
- Management of the pre-application advice process and liaison with officers throughout the pre and post application process
- Overall project management of the scheme and liaison with other consultants
- Preparation of the Planning and Retail Statement for submission to support the planning application
- Organisation and management of several public exhibitions and meetings with key stakeholders
- Collation and submission of planning application to the SDNPA
- Liaison with Historic England
- Communication and liaison with officers, local residents and council members throughout the process
- Preparation, attendance and participation at the planning committee
- Discharge of planning conditions in a timely manner
- Advice regarding S106 matters

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