Planning Policy Approach to Holiday Accommodation  
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) -  
July 2013

During our Core Strategy consultation last summer, we realised there are some misunderstandings about Planning and the holiday accommodation policy. We have prepared this FAQ sheet to answer some of the most common causes of confusion. We have also produced a short leaflet which provides some useful background information. This can be found at: www.blackpool.gov.uk/holidayaccommodation

“I’m not in a holiday zone”

The Holiday Accommodation Areas are often incorrectly referred to as Holiday Areas or Holiday Zones and some people think that if their property is not within one of the defined areas they are no longer part of the holiday offer of the resort. This is not the case!

Blackpool is a holiday resort and the Council continues to champion the tourism economy, recognising the contribution good quality holiday accommodation makes wherever it is located. This approach ties in with VisitBlackpool’s policy to market all accredited properties regardless of where they are.

Our holiday accommodation areas ONLY define where guest houses cannot normally change to residential use. There are no “holiday zones”.

A guest house that is not within one of these areas is still part of the resort, but owners have the option to change to residential use should they no longer want to carry on as a guest house.

When it comes to new holiday accommodation, this is permitted anywhere within the Town Centre, Resort Core or Holiday Accommodation Areas (and not just limited to Holiday Accommodation Areas).

“I can’t get a bank loan because I’m not in a Holiday Accommodation Area”

Whether you are within a Holiday Accommodation Area or not should not affect lending, as quality holiday accommodation is supported by the policy wherever it is located. We will make sure that banks and commercial agents are not misinterpreting the policy.

Lack of lending from banks reflects the difficult economic situation and the unwillingness of banks to lend money. People are having problems getting mortgages for homes or loans for their business across the whole country, not just in Blackpool. The leisure sector is no exception to this, particularly in a seaside resort like ours with too many bed spaces. This has meant the business values of holiday accommodation have struggled to be maintained.

“Why do we have defined holiday accommodation areas - can’t we all be on a level playing field with respect to change of use?”

Blackpool’s planning policy manages the supply of holiday accommodation by defining areas where guest houses cannot change to residential use. However, with too many holiday bed spaces, the previously defined areas are drawn too wide and retain too many guest houses that are no longer fit for purpose. To allow the reduction of holiday bed spaces, we have made these
areas smaller enabling more guest houses to change to residential use, encouraging a better balance of quality homes and guest houses.

Retaining holiday accommodation areas allows us to successfully manage this reduction through a gradual transition to residential use. Whilst the policy allows more guest houses to change to residential use, the number of additional properties which could come forward is more manageable with the resources available to the Council, compared to a policy allowing all guest houses to change to residential use that could be seen as a ‘free for all’. Robust monitoring and enforcement is vital to successfully manage changes to the use of properties to achieve quality neighbourhoods.

The new smaller areas were chosen using data collected over a period of time and assessed against a number of criteria based on land use, location and quality characteristics and include the strongest clusters of holiday accommodation. Having these areas ensures that clusters of holiday accommodation are retained in locations with easy access to the resort facilities and key transport routes. If we allow residential uses into these areas, the clusters could eventually disappear and Blackpool will have lost its most sustainable locations of holiday accommodation. Further detail of the criteria used to define these new areas is set out in the Holiday Accommodation Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), which can be viewed at: www.blackpool.gov.uk/holidayaccommodation

We need to allow enough time to see if this approach is working and if the current areas, defined in the SPD, are suitable. These areas are not fixed and can be revised through a formal review of the SPD. This allows us flexibility in response to changes in the leisure sector market in Blackpool. When we come to review the SPD, if the evidence shows some areas are not working, there is an opportunity to change the boundaries or remove an area completely. For example, this evidence could be pressure for change of use through planning applications and pre-application discussions, or significantly high levels of empty properties or properties on the market within any of these areas. This review will not happen before next year, and you will be consulted on any proposed changes.

“Planning isn’t helping”

People have raised many issues around guest houses and are concerned that Planning is not addressing them. However, many of the issues are outside the remit of planning and fall to other teams and outside agencies:

- **Poor quality accommodation**

  The Housing Enforcement Team ensures existing accommodation is fit for purpose and can prosecute if necessary. The Selective Licensing scheme being rolled out across the inner area will help to improve the standards of existing accommodation. Further details of this scheme can be found at: http://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Services/S-Z/SelectiveLicensingScheme/

  The Housing Strategy Team identify opportunities to improve the housing stock by creating new homes from conversion or new build, and by refurbishing facades.

  Planning cannot influence the standards of existing accommodation unless this has been created unlawfully, in which case Planning Enforcement will investigate and take appropriate action. The Team can also investigate and take appropriate action where a property has a rundown appearance.
Planning ensures that new accommodation requiring planning permission meets the quality standards set out in design guidance for residential conversions and sub-divisions established in March 2011 (the ‘New Homes from Old Places SPD’). This includes the internal space and external appearance of a property. Planning also ensures the right mix of house types and sizes in new developments, for example by controlling the number of additional flat developments and small units, to provide a better choice of housing.

- **Landlords**

  Selective Licensing has been introduced to ensure we have responsible landlords providing good quality, well-managed properties that meet an agreed set of minimum standards.

- **HMOs**

  Planning policy does not allow the creation of new HMOs, but in some instances planning permission is not needed and Planning has no control. Planning has applied for a new Article 4 Direction in the inner wards of Blackpool (October 2012), which means that change of use from a house to a HMO will need planning permission; an application would then be considered against planning policy, and will generally be resisted.

- **Unlawful Change of Use**

  Planning Enforcement tackles change of use without permission, such as a guest house taking in permanent residents. They investigate and take appropriate action where necessary, including court action to stop unlawful use.

- **Anti-social behaviour**

  The Council’s Neighbourhood Services Team and agencies including the Police, Fire Service and Social Services, are responsible for dealing with anti-social behaviour and they can and do take court action and close problematic properties.

  Planning cannot control who lives in a property or how they behave. It can support new development and investment making neighbourhoods more attractive places to live, creating balanced communities and improving social cohesion. Early evidence suggests an increase in the number of economically active households occupying newly converted residential properties, which indicates that our policies may be having a positive impact.

  The Council is aware of the scale of these problems and the impact they are having on certain communities in Blackpool. We are working hard to address these issues with the resources available to us.

“Being outside a Holiday Accommodation Area is devaluing my business and making it harder to sell”

It has been suggested that the policy has affected property values, and that properties within a Holiday Accommodation Area have a higher value than those properties outside. We have heard this is being stoked by some commercial agents. However, publically accessible data collected on sales prices from commercial agents over the last 12 months suggests this is not the case and that property values are reflecting wider trends in the local and national markets.

As we’ve explained, there are no “holiday zones” so prospective purchasers wanting to buy a guest house and run it as a business will receive the same support wherever the property is located in Blackpool. Outside an area, because the policy allows change of use to residential,
owners have the opportunity to sell their property to someone wanting to turn it into a quality residential use.

We will make sure that banks and commercial agents are not misinterpreting the policy.

“Will change of use be considered inside a Holiday Accommodation Area?”

Within the defined Holiday Accommodation Areas the focus is to safeguard existing holiday accommodation. However, change of use will be considered where very exceptional circumstances around character and economic viability are demonstrated:

- You would need to demonstrate that the property fundamentally differs in character from neighbouring holiday accommodation properties and that change of use would be without detriment to the holiday character of the street and the Holiday Accommodation Area; and

- You would need to submit a robust viability assessment indicating that the building is not viable for future holiday use (and would be viable for an alternative use i.e. residential) along with evidence of viability issues in the area, for example details of nearby holiday accommodation not trading or on the market.

Details of exceptional circumstances will be considered as part of a planning application alongside other issues, which may include (but are not exclusive to): impact on neighbouring properties, parking, external alterations, quality and type of proposed accommodation. In particular, the proposed accommodation must meet the quality standards set out in design guidance for residential conversions and sub-divisions established in March 2011 (the ‘New Homes from Old Places SPD’). This document can be viewed at: [www.blackpool.gov.uk/residentialconversions](http://www.blackpool.gov.uk/residentialconversions)

If you are considering making a planning application then you are advised to speak to the Council’s Development Management Team: 01253 476193.

Further Information

If you can’t find an answer to what you’re looking for in this FAQ sheet, then you can contact the Council’s Planning Policy Team: 01253 477477 or [development.plans@blackpool.gov.uk](mailto:development.plans@blackpool.gov.uk)