The Planning Inspectorate

# Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 18 January 2012

**by Bill Munday BTP MRTPI MRICS**

**an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government**

**Decision date: 10 February 2012**

**Appeal Ref: APP/W1715/A/11/2163352**
**Hamble Cliff Lodge, Westfield Common, Hamble, Southampton SO31 4LB**

- 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 J Quinn against the decision of Eastleigh Borough Council.
- The application Ref. F/11/68952, dated 20 April 2011, was refused by notice dated 21 September 2011.
- The development proposed is construction of new dwelling with integral garage and provision of passing point on highway following demolition of existing dwelling.

## Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

## Preliminary Matter

2. During the course of consideration of the appeal application, amended plans were submitted to address concerns expressed by the Council's DC Engineer in relation to the siting of part of the proposed building adjacent to the access road. I have considered the appeal on the basis of the amended plans.

## Main Issue

3. I consider the main issue to be the impact of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

## Reasons

*Character and Appearance*

4. The appeal site forms part of a relatively narrow wedge of otherwise largely undeveloped land, referred to as Westfield Common, between the foreshore to Southampton Water and the large industrial site to the north. A single track road with passing places runs along the northern side of this area, providing access to the appeal site, other residential properties at Hamble Cliff House and its former stables, an adjacent slipway, and a rear access to the industrial site. Paths run through the area and connect to other open land to the north-west and the village of Hamble-Le-Rice to the south-east. Mature trees within the appeal site blend with the wooded character of the adjacent common.

5. Policy 8.CO of the Eastleigh Borough Local Plan Review (2001-2011) (LPR) indicates that the replacement of existing dwellings in the countryside will be

permitted, provided that certain criteria are met. Pertinent to the appeal proposal, the proposed dwelling should be of an appropriate design which reflects its countryside location; it should not be disproportionate in size in relation to neighbouring properties or its plot; and should not have a greater impact, physically or visually, than the existing dwelling, on the character and appearance of its immediate surroundings or the countryside in general. LPR Policy 59.BE also indicates that development proposals will be permitted, where they accord with other policies in the LPR, and meet listed criteria. Of particular relevance to the appeal proposal, these criteria require that proposals should take full and proper account of the context of the site, and provide a high standard of landscape design; and where adjacent to the urban edge, they must not have an adverse impact on the setting of the settlement in the surrounding countryside.

6. In relation to the criteria in Policy 8.CO, the Council's report on the application indicates the view that the design of the proposal, in isolation, is sympathetic to the character of the area. Reference has been made to the historic connections of the appeal property with Hamble Cliff House and its former stables. I note that the proposed design reproduces some characteristics of the existing dwelling and these other buildings. As such, in purely design terms, I consider the proposal appropriately reflects its location. However, the Council considers that the scale of the proposed dwelling would no longer relate to its original lodge function, but would rival Hamble Cliff House as the principal building in this historic grouping. It appears to me that the connections between these previously related buildings are now less than evident, being separated by the intervening slipway. In this context, and having regard to the imposing presence of buildings within the adjacent industrial complex, I consider the proposal would not be disproportionate in size in relation to other buildings in the vicinity. The existing dwelling occupies a substantial curtilage, and I note that the Council accepts that the proposed replacement dwelling would not be disproportionately large in relation to the size of this plot.

7. The existing property is located close to the access road but is not widely visible from the road because of the dense tree belt which lines the road. In my assessment it appears as an attractive, secluded property, nestling within mature trees. In contrast, the appeal property would appear as a substantially larger, more complex and more imposing building. This impact would be accentuated by the courtyard and its enclosing walls in its foreground. The formation of the proposed passing place would necessitate the removal of existing roadside vegetation, including a line of leylandii and an adjacent eucalyptus. I note that the Council accepts that the leylandii are not worthy of protection and the eucalyptus should be removed on arboricultural grounds. The appellant's statement indicates that it is proposed to replace planting to the front of the site, but there would be limited space available between the proposed passing place and the adjacent garage wing and front wall, for significant trees to become established. In these circumstances I consider the proposed house would be more conspicuous and dominating than the existing property because of its size and because it would be exposed to view over a considerably wider section of the access road.

8. The site forms part of a relatively narrow strip of countryside which in my judgement has a valuable visual and environmental function in separating the

foreshore from the adjacent industrial complex. The Council states that the industrial site is identified as an employment site in the LPR. I note that the appellant considers that it dilutes the character of the local countryside, but in my view the adjacent boundaries of the complex are well defined. Any significant erosion of the separating countryside gap would be likely to reduce its value and effectiveness in this context. The proposal would extend the built form considerably further into the site than the existing buildings. These considerations lead me to the view that the proposal would seriously diminish the character and appearance of this significant and vulnerable section of countryside.

9. In summary on the main issue, I consider the appeal proposal would result in a significantly larger and more prominent building than the existing dwelling. As such it would have a significantly greater visual impact on its surroundings. This places it in conflict with Policy 8.CO. The appeal site is adjacent to the edge of urban development, and with regard to Policy 59.BE, I consider it would have a seriously erosive effect on the narrow countryside strip within which it falls, which would detract from the setting of the settlement in the surrounding countryside. I conclude on the main issue that the proposal would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area.

10. The Council's officer report on the application refers to an extant planning permission for "single storey front, two storey side and two storey rear extension with balconies, following demolition of existing extension and garage and felling of trees". In its statement the Council indicates that the approved scheme would result in a total footprint of approximately 260 sq.m. and that the extension would be built "largely over the footprint of the 1996 rear extension". In comparison, the Council and the appellant have calculated, respectively, the footprint of the proposed replacement dwelling to be 373 sq.m. and 381 sq.m. I have not been provided with the approved plans for the extension, and apart from the above measurements it has not been possible for me to compare the relative impacts of the two proposals in a meaningful way. I take note that the appellant's rebuttal statement indicates that the extant permission involves the loss of the leylandii trees at the front of the site. However, whilst the extant permission may be a realistic option for the appellant to implement in the event that this appeal is not allowed, I am not in a position to conclude that the apparently larger appeal proposal would not have a more adverse impact on the character and appearance of the area. From the information available to me therefore, the extant permission does not cause me to alter my views on the merits of the appeal proposal as set out above.

*Other Considerations*

11. The access road leading to the site has only sufficient width for a single vehicle, although there are some passing places. Local residents have expressed concerns with regard to increased traffic, including construction traffic, using this road. Although clearly larger, in my view the proposed replacement dwelling would not be likely to give rise to a significant increase in traffic movements. I consider use of the access road by construction traffic for the duration of works would not unacceptably detract from the amenities of neighbours or the convenience of other road users. On the other hand, the proposal would provide a further passing place at a point where the road bends,

which in my judgement would be a useful convenience for drivers passing the site. However, I do not consider this benefit outweighs the disadvantages of the proposal in relation to the main issue. With a considerable separating distance between the respective buildings, I consider there would be no serious risk to the privacy of occupiers of Hamble Cliff House.

12. I have taken account of all other matters which have been raised. For the reasons given above in relation to the main issue, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

*W D Munday*

INSPECTOR