

19/1775/ful.

Proposed Conversion of
The Former Drill Hall, Sidmouth, Devon

for

Rockfish

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL ECONOMY			
21 AUG 2019			
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Design and Access Statement - 19/1775/FUL



Revised - 22/08/2019

Design, Access & Heritage Statement

To Support Full Planning Application
August 2019

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1.0 - Introduction

This Design & Access Statement seeks to support the detailed planning application for the conversion of the Former Sidmouth Drill Hall to create a new restaurant for popular seafood chain Rockfish

1.1 Existing Planning Context

In 2012 East Devon County Council submitted a planning application (ref 12/2254/COU) for “Demolition of former drill hall building and levelling/re-grading of base of site to form open air storage compound for boats and vehicles”. The demolition would form part of a broader improvement scheme planned for the Port Royal area, described in Strategy 26 of the East Devon Local Plan 2013-2031:

“c) Land at Port Royal Site – Land for residential use is allocated for 30 homes (site ED03) this site will incorporate mixed use redevelopment to include housing and community, commercial, recreation and other uses”.

EDDC Local Plan 2013-2031

The application was met with strong opposition from the local community, who were keen to preserve the historic building and had concerns about how the council’s development plans might affect the character of the Sea Front Conservation Area, described in EDDC’s Local Plan as being an important feature in warranting the conservation area status:

“The Esplanade and sea front areas are amongst the most attractive parts of the town and help to define its special charm and character”.

EDDC Local Plan 2013-2031

The application to demolish the Drill Hall was withdrawn in March 2013, and in 2017 Keep Architects were appointed to conduct a scoping exercise on the Port Royal area, which set out to find the most suitable option for its future development. Following the exercise it was concluded that the mixed use development should not be pursued, and that the Drill Hall building should be retained and marketed for redevelopment as a bar or restaurant.

1.2 The Proposal

The proposal is to rejuvenate the existing historic building to create a new Rockfish Restaurant, illustrated in the following drawings:

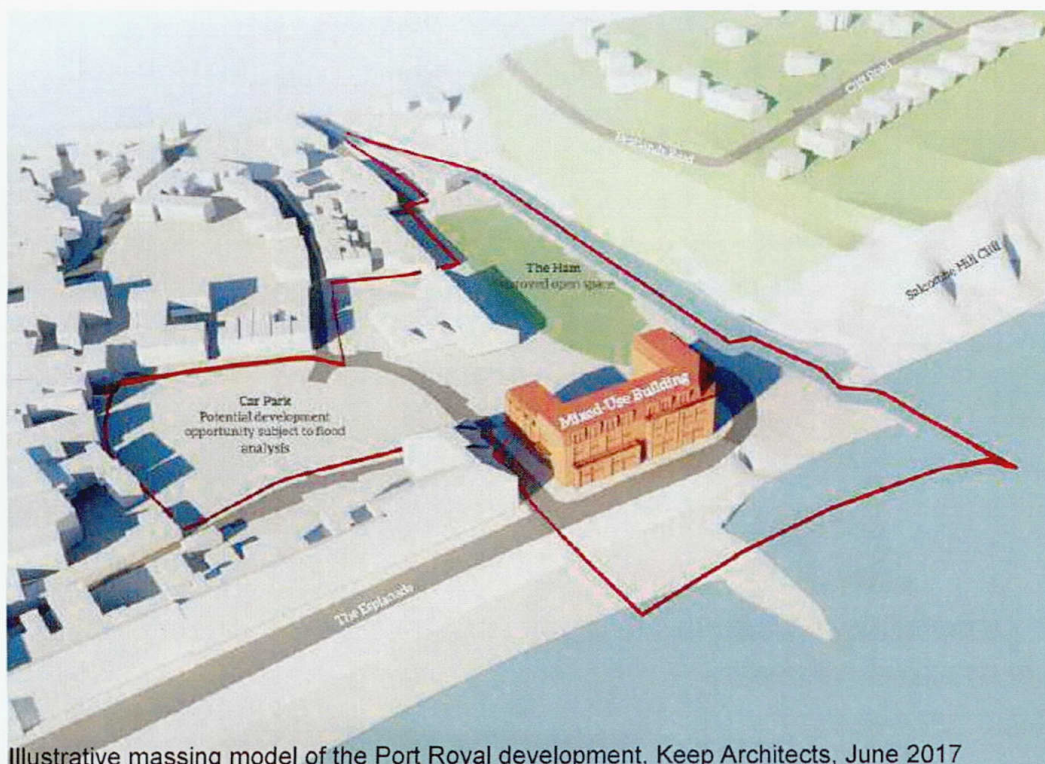
- PL01_Location & Block Plan
- PL02_Existing Basement Plan
- PL03_Existing Ground Floor Plan
- PL04_Existing First Floor Plan
- PL06_Proposed Ground Floor Plan
- PL07_Proposed First Floor Plan
- PL08_Proposed Elevations
- PL09_View of Proposed Scheme

1.3 Site Location

The Drill Hall is located at the Eastern end of Sidmouth’s Sea Front Esplanade, with the East elevation facing the mouth of the river Sid and the South looking out to sea. The site footprint is 503m², with the existing building occupying 277m² and the remainder being taken up by the strip of land running around the South, East and Northern sides of the building at basement level.

1.4 Site Boundaries

The Esplanade runs in front of the former Drill Hall and rounds the corner of the seawall to finish at a turning circle on the Eastern side of the site. A public toilet block is sandwiched between this turning circle and a brick wall defining the South and Eastern boundaries of the site. The Northern boundary is marked by a timber palisade fence and fronts onto a yard currently in use by Sidmouth Trawlers. The Western wall of the Drill Hall backs onto the Sailing and Angling club building.



Illustrative massing model of the Port Royal development, Keep Architects, June 2017

2.0 - History

2.1 Historic Context

Like many towns along the South coast, Sidmouth had been an isolated fishing village up until the growing national taste for seaside holiday resorts enabled it to become a popular tourist destination in the early 18th century. Many of the hotels constructed to host the influx of tourists were built along the sea front, which now plays a significant role in giving Sidmouth its conservation area status. The EDDC 1999 Sidmouth Conservation Area Appraisal describes the Esplanade as having “most of the important three to four storey well-preserved hotel frontages which provide Sidmouth with much of its unique resort character”.

EDDC Sidmouth Conservation Area Appraisal 1999

2.2 Site History

Despite being located within Sidmouth's Sea Front Conservation Area, there are no listed buildings in the immediate proximity of the former Drill Hall. The Eastern end of the Esplanade has historically played an industrial role within the town, and the site served as auxiliary space for a gas works operating in the adjacent plot (currently occupied by the swimming pool) from 1863 until the Drill Hall's construction in 1895. Today, Sidmouth Trawlers use the fisherman's hut style building at the rear of the Drill hall, whilst the Port Royal Sailing and Angling Club occupy the building next door, designed in 1969 with a flat roof and in a more contemporary, utilitarian style than those around it.

2.3 Site Heritage

The Drill Hall was built in 1895 to accommodate the 3rd Sidmouth Volunteer Battalion Devonshire Regiment after they were forced to leave their original drilling place in the Town Hall. The land for the new hall was donated by Sidmouth resident Mr J G G Radford and designed in an Italian Renaissance style by honorary architect Mr James Jerman of Exeter, though little remains of the original frontage.

The building had been used consistently as a Drill Hall from the time of construction in 1895 until the Sidmouth branch of the Territorial Army adopted it as their headquarters in 1959. It also served as a cinema from its opening, and had a theatrical licence, and in the early C20 it was used for film shows before the opening of Sidmouth's cinema; in 1923 it was home to Sidmouth's 'Summer Pavilion', hosting a variety of entertainments. Following the Second World War, was used by the local community for a number of sports and events.

The Drill Hall has been of great use to the Sidmouth community over the last 120 years, and as discussions over its fate have advanced in recent times it has become apparent how many people from near and far have fond memories of the building. As such, the proposal will retain as much of the original Drill Hall as possible, making the interior structure and roof space focal points of the restaurant whilst protecting what is left of the original masonry from further decay with a layer of weather resistant cladding boards wrapping the external walls of the building.

2.4 Listed Buildings

A heritage statement was produced in March 2013 in response to the application to demolish the building (ref 12/2254/COU), though English Heritage concluded that the Drill Hall could not be listed:

“The local interest of the drill hall, which has played an important role in Sidmouth's history for over a century, is beyond question; interest of this kind is appropriately recognised by the conservation area designation. However, the building has been significantly altered during that time, and cannot be said to possess special architectural or historical interest in the national context; it therefore does not meet the criteria for listing”.

English Heritage, Sidmouth Drill Hall Heritage Statement of Significance, March 2013

2.5 Planning Guidance

The proposal has been designed in line with the East Devon Local Plan 2013-2031 and the Sidmouth Conservation Area Appraisal 1999, and has been informed by pre-application advice from the EDDC planning department.

The external appearance of the proposal has been developed to compliment the utilitarian aesthetic adopted by the adjacent buildings used by Port Royal Sailing and Angling Club and Sidmouth Trawlers, with a core aim of the scheme being to help preserve the historic working character of the Port Royal area.

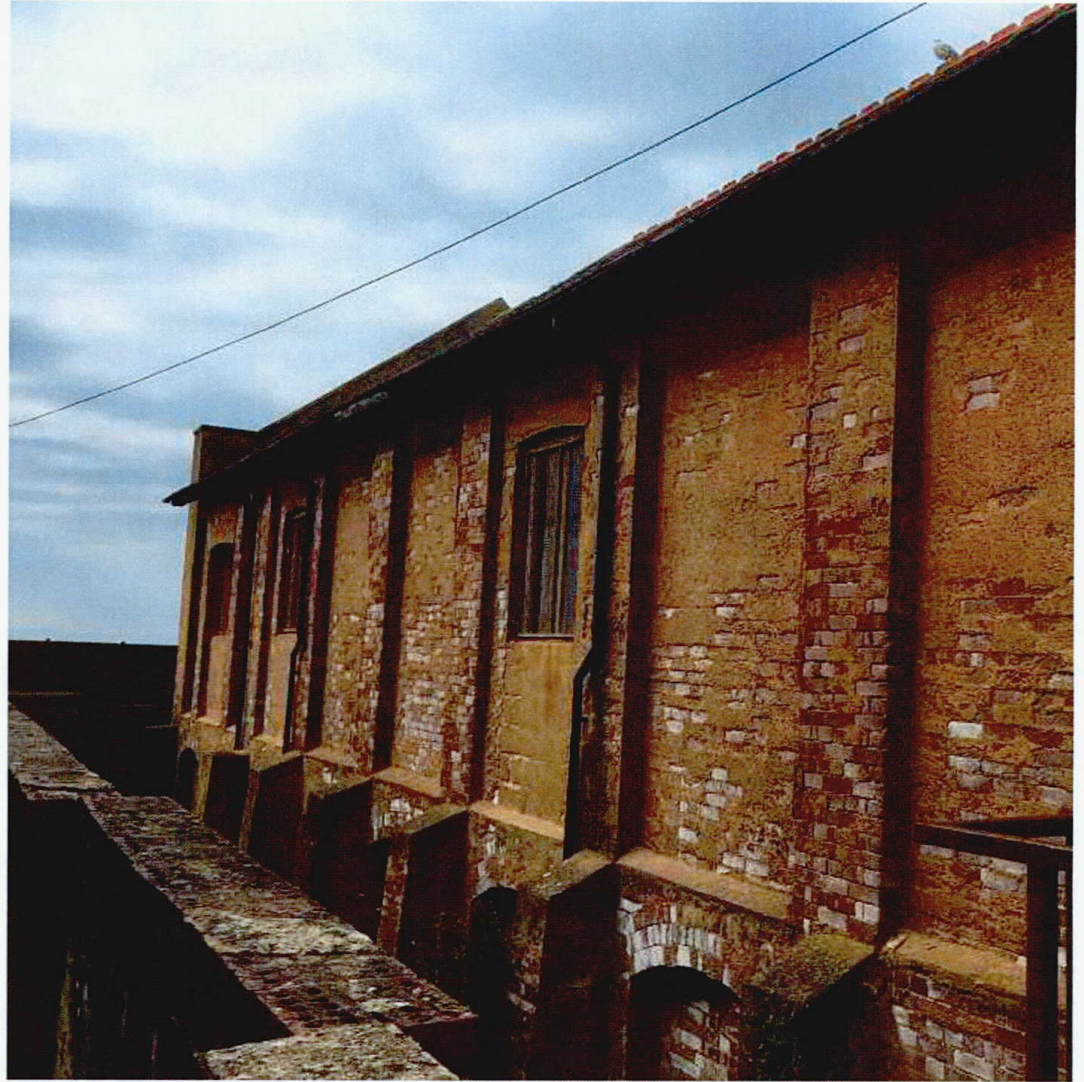
3.0 - Existing Site

3.1 Key Views Into The Site

The site is visible from The Ham recreation area and LED Sidmouth Swimming Pool on the North, the Esplanade and beach on the East and South, and can be partially seen from The Ham West Car Park on the West. Narrow angles of the front facade will be visible to those on the East end of the Sea Front Conservation Area though (aside from a minimal balcony in line with the one next door) the proposed scheme will retain the form of this side of the building, meaning views along the coastline will not be affected.

3.2 Flood Zones

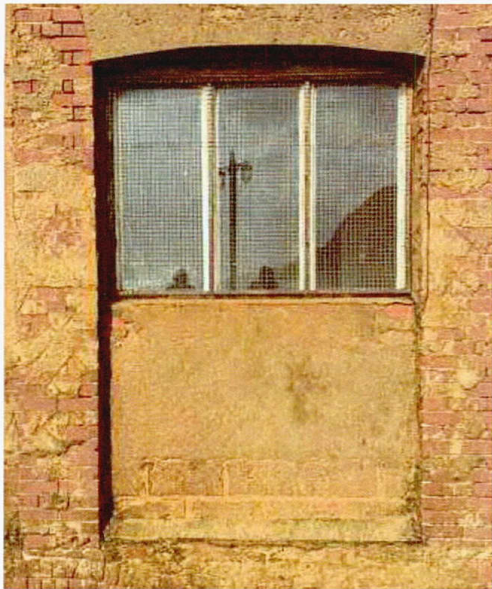
The whole site sits within flood zone 3a and a flood risk assessment is currently being produced by AWP Civil Engineers.



View along East elevation and out to sea



View looking East along the coastline past the Sailing Club and Drill Hall



Weathering on render around windows



View looking West along the coastline past the Sailing Club and Drill Hall



Levels at front of building



Rear elevation from Sidmouth Trawlers yard



Port Royal Public Conveniences



Boat store adjacent to rear of building



View through the Main Hall, looking towards the rear of the building

4.0 - The Proposals

4.1 Use & Amount

The building will serve as a restaurant for popular seafood chain, Rockfish, with a view to help rejuvenate the East end of Sidmouth's historic Sea Front Esplanade which has been neglected in recent years. The proposal will be the first restaurant in the Eastern end of the town and as such will help to draw more people to the Port Royal area, improving the commercial viability of nearby businesses such as Sidmouth Trawlers and the Lifeboat Shop.

The proposal will operate largely within the form of the existing building, with the only additions being a balcony on the front elevation and a single storey extension at the rear to contain the service rooms. To make the building compliant with building regulations, the external envelope will be wrapped in a layer of thermal insulation, with a weather resistant cladding board over the top to protect the historic fabric of the building from further erosion and decay.

4.2 Layout & Scale

The primary dining space will be located in the Main Hall on the ground floor level, with a more suitable quantity of natural daylight being introduced to the restaurant through the creation of four new window openings in the bays along the Eastern wall. The original interior will be preserved as much as possible, with the hammer-beamed roof structure and brick arches retained to act as focal points of the space.

The kitchen and toilets will be positioned at the rear of the existing building but their ceilings will stop at first floor level to preserve the view through the full length of the hall.

The existing toilets and staircase beyond the rear wall of the building will be replaced by a single storey extension raised to ground floor level to house the service and plant rooms. These rooms will be accessed from an external deck and staircase at the rear of the site.

The existing first floor will be converted to a small bar area, with an internal opening created between the chimney breast piers to allow views out over the main restaurant. The external window openings in this space will be taken down to floor level to provide access to a new balcony in line with that of the Port Royal Sailing and Angling Club, which will provide a small number of outdoor seats.

4.3 Preservation Strategy & Appearance

Because of the heavily altered and poorly maintained condition of the external walls and the comparatively well preserved state of the interior, it was decided that the layer of insulation and protective cladding required to provide the building's

thermal envelope should be placed on the outside of the original walls.

A charcoal-coloured weather resistant cladding board will cover the new insulation and existing masonry, safeguarding against further erosion, while timber storm shutters will be fitted to protect the interior of the building from the harsh weather of the exposed sea-front location.

The roof will remain slated once all necessary restoration work has been completed. All metalwork will be pre-anodised to protect against corrosion. The balcony and all railings will be grey powder coated steel, and windows, roof lights and doors will be double glazed grey powder coated aluminium.

4.4 Access & Landscaping

All entrances will be level thresholds and the main part of the building will be fully accessible for disabled persons. More outdoor seating will be created through the introduction of a new deck running outside the South and East faces of the building at ground floor level, which will be accessed from the path behind the public WC block once a portion of the adjacent boundary wall has been removed.



East elevation of the proposed scheme - see drawing 1446_PL08

5.0 - Assessment of Significance

5.1 Significance of Heritage Assets Affected

The heritage asset affected is the former Sidmouth Drill Hall, the Eastern-most building on Sidmouth's Sea Front Conservation Area. Despite its current derelict condition, the Hall provides a key link to the historically working land use at the Port Royal end of the Esplanade, in contrast to the regency style terraces which occupy much of the rest of the Sea Front. The Drill Hall is not specifically referred to within Sidmouth's Conservation Area Character Appraisal, though the document does mention the desire to preserve the working character of its setting:

"Upgrading of the grade II listed Esplanade is happening piecemeal but a coherent enhancement scheme covering the entire Esplanade including the eastern end would be preferable. Development of this area will need very careful management to avoid spoiling the authentic working / fishing eastern end of the Esplanade".

Sidmouth Interim Conservation Area Review

5.2 Summary of Heritage England Appraisal

A heritage statement was produced in March 2013 in response to the application to demolish the Drill Hall (ref 12/2254/COU), though English Heritage concluded that the building could not be listed:

"The local interest of the Drill Hall, which has played an important role in Sidmouth's history for over a century, is beyond question; interest of this kind is appropriately recognised by the conservation area designation. However, the building has been significantly altered during that time, and cannot be said to possess special architectural or historical interest in the national context; it therefore does not meet the criteria for listing"
English Heritage, Sidmouth Drill Hall Heritage Statement of Significance

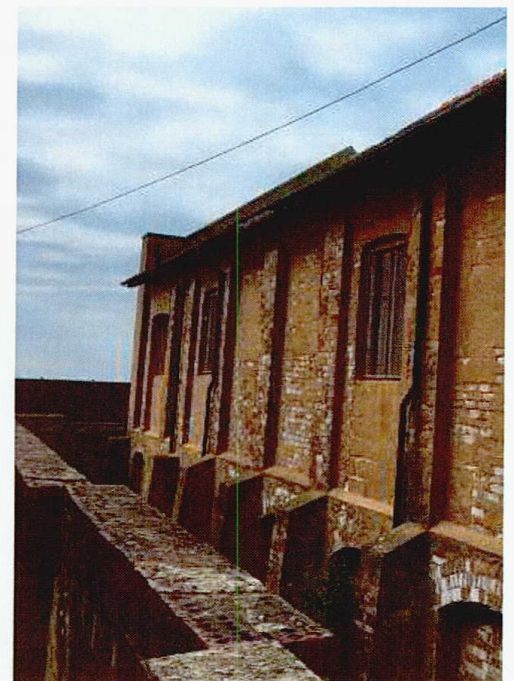
5.3 Justification of Works

The appearance of the Drill Hall has been significantly altered since its construction in 1895, and few of the original exterior details remain. As it stands today, the building will need

extensive works to repair, restore and protect against further decay. The change in external appearance brought about by the addition of weather resistant cladding boards to the outside of the Drill Hall has been carefully considered, and aims to address the concerns set out in the Conservation Area Review. The dark timber boards will give the building the aesthetic of a working fisherman's shed whilst providing the weatherproofing necessary to ensure the preservation of the historic masonry walls beneath.

5.4 Impact on the Conservation Area

The architecture of the proposed development will adhere to the working aesthetic of the Port Royal end of the Sea Front, and does not involve any significant alterations to the massing of the existing building. It will transform what is currently a derelict eyesore into a thriving community restaurant, encouraging locals and tourists alike to visit the Eastern end of town and will thus have a positive impact on both the Sea Front Conservation Area and the town of Sidmouth as a whole.



6.0 - Client Statement

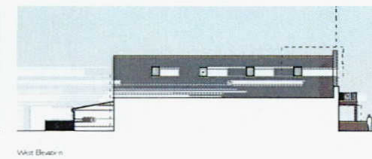
ROCKFISH - THE DRILL HALL - SIDMOUTH

Long, 30° W

40°

50°

60°



Rockfish is a highly successful group of family seafood restaurants based on the South Coast of England.

The group is run by Mitch Tonks, a successful seafood chef, restaurateur and author well known for the success of his London chain of seafood restaurants FishWorks as well as his TV show with Matt Dawson and the work he does promoting the qualities of UK seafood and life in our coastal towns and in particular the South West.

In 2007 Mitch established the Seahorse restaurant in Dartmouth. The Seahorse is a high end seafood restaurant which quickly established itself as one of the best in the UK, winning best seafood restaurant in the UK in the good food guide and also the Observer food monthly's restaurant of the year and it remains in the UK top 100 at number 22.

Being a total enthusiast for seafood and a father of five Mitch wanted to set up a seafood restaurant that would appeal to everyone, not a fish and chip shop but somewhere that traditional cod and haddock could sit amongst other species and the local seafood for which the South West is Famed. With inspiration drawn from New England and Australia the first Rockfish was opened in Dartmouth in 2009. It became an instant hit due to the offer of great fish with great wines in a cool beach shack style environment complete with log burner for the colder months. In its first year it won best newcomer in the national fish and chip awards, the following year winning best fish and chip restaurant and finally the group won best multiple operator the year after. In 2011 a venue was opened in Plymouth adjacent to the city's fish market, this site, the biggest to date has 200 covers inside, a take away and out side area for another 150, again it was an instant hit and showcased the fish landed at the market each day.

In 2012 Rockfish opened on Torquay harbour, again highlighting the fish of Torbay, it also became popular very quickly and in 2015 Rockfish Brixham was opened at Brixham fish market with 100 covers plus a take away, bar and outside seating. It is undoubtedly the closest fish restaurant to the source of fish in the UK as the boats unload and auction their catch with 3-4 metres of the front door and diners can watch the days' catch being unloaded. Following on from Brixham sites were opened in Exmouth, Exeter Quay and Weymouth. All our sites have been a huge success and with locations at both of the major South West fish markets and prominent seaside locations we are well placed to grow our business further in the South West and highlight the brilliant seafood we have here. In July of 2019 we launched our first fishing boat that lands fish directly to us in Brixham where we grade and process it along along with the days catch from the Brixham auctions, we then send the fish in our own temperature controlled vans to our restaurants ensuring it reaches our kitchens at its absolute best.

With our proven track record and our focus on Quality, family and sustainability, we believe Rockfish is the right fit for Sidmouth which being by the water will provide a perfect destination for people to travel to and eat fresh seafood. As with all our other restaurants we will create 30 - 40 local full and part time jobs. The investment into Rockfish Sidmouth will be in Excess of £1m in total.

For further information please visit www.therockfish.co.uk or contact Mitch Tonks CEO on mitch@mitchtonks.co.uk

