

Open letter to East Devon District and Sidmouth Town Councillors
concerning planning application Ref 19/1775/FUL for Sidmouth Drill Hall

Dear Councillors,

Like many, I am extremely pleased that Rockfish are going to set up in the Drill Hall and I hope that them doing so will bring benefit to the Sidmouth economy. However, I am concerned that the plans submitted will actually work against the town by having an adverse effect on the Conservation Area.

Sidmouth Esplanade is a much photographed piece of heritage. It is used in promotional material for both the town and for south Devon, in publications about the history of seaside resorts and about architectural styles, as well as attracting film makers. Many of these views are taken from positions where either the whole or a large portion of the Esplanade can be seen. Therefore any new design should be assessed within the context of the Esplanade as a whole.

The buildings along the Esplanade and most of the buildings within the immediate town have facades of stucco painted in pale tones with darker detailing (usually blue or black). This is a style which is an identifying characteristic of the whole of the Town Conservation Area; research which has culminated in the emerging Sid Valley Neighbourhood Plan (going to referendum on 19th Sept 2019) has shown widespread support in the town for retaining such historical character.

The Neighbourhood Plan has been found to be sound by an Independent Inspector and thus is a material consideration in planning decisions.

Conservation Area legislation indicates that new elements should either improve the character of a Conservation Area or do it no harm. A Conservation Area is a Designated Heritage Asset.

The proposed design for Rockfish at the Drill Hall is out of keeping with the Conservation Area mainly due to the colour chosen, which is variously described in the documents as grey, dark grey, and charcoal grey. It is stated that the design takes inspiration from the neighbouring Lifeboat Station, Sailing Club and Sidmouth Trawlers buildings, yet the first two buildings have pale cream walls with blue detailing and the latter is white. The 'fish wall' which borders the fishermen's yard is also blue and white, and the toilet block/shelter which stands to the immediate east of the Drill Hall (also being the last building on the Esplanade) is again predominantly pale with darker detailing; which continues the identifying characteristic of the Conservation Area.

It would be possible for the proposed Rockfish design to be amended, without increasing costs, to match what is there already either on the Esplanade as a whole or in the neighbouring buildings.

If the aesthetic of an old fishing shed is of importance to their design and bright colour is a stumbling block then perhaps the aesthetic could be enhanced by using faded colours, or one which resembles bleached wood, in place of the dark grey?

I urge you to ensure that the approved colours are appropriate to the setting, i.e. much lighter walls than proposed.

Yours sincerely, Mary Walden-Till