
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 28 November 2017

by H Porter BA(Hons) PGDip IHBC

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

Decision date: 05 December 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/B1225/W/17/3181990

Harmans Cross, Valley Road, Harmans Cross BH19 3DZ

- 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 W Burnett (Coy Pond Developments) against the decision of Purbeck District Council.
 - The application Ref 6/2017/0349, dated 15 June 2017, was refused by notice dated 4 August 2017.
 - The development proposed is erection of new 2m high fence.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the fence on the street scene and character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

3. At the time of my visit, the appeal fence had been erected on the south side of Valley Road, bounding 'Swanbourne', a small enclave of recently constructed detached dwellings. Valley Road is a busy east/west route that runs centrally through the village of Harmans Cross, within the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (the AONB). Development locally tends to be accessed directly off Valley Road, set back by driveways and front gardens. The route itself is characterised by high hedges and mature planting on either side, which, together with grassed verges and views to the wider rural landscape, softens the built form. Overall, the high degree of greenery and private planting makes a positive contribution to the local street scene and defines the character and appearance of Harmans Cross as an attractive village in the AONB countryside.
4. The appeal fence has been erected close to the back edge of a grassed verge and runs from the access to 'Swanbourne' up to the slightly lower fence boundary associated with the neighbouring 'Upper Downs'. While there is a step down in height towards the western end, the block between the two residential accesses is essentially entirely fenced. Given its wide expanse, in combination with its 2 metres height, the appeal fence is highly prominent in the general street scene.
5. The close-board timber panels present a hard edge along Valley Road, diminishing the potential for the mature planting behind it to soften and blend

into the generally verdant surroundings. The timber panels are currently unstained; their light colour accentuating the stark contrast with the greenery of the typically planted roadside boundaries. Fundamentally, however, it is the combination of the height and length of the fence that has a harmful impact rather than the colour per se. Even if the fence was stained a green or brown, and weathered over time, it would not mitigate its hard appearance and the erosion of the softer vegetal boundaries that typify the surroundings.

6. I note that there are other examples of timber fences and hard front boundary treatments in the vicinity. However, none that I saw are comparable with the appeal fence in terms of the combined length and height. Moreover, where harder front boundaries do exist, these are relatively low or extend the width of just one plot, allowing mature private planting to grow over or around them thereby softening the overall impact. In other cases where fences have been erected, therefore, they are more inconspicuous and they do not represent a useful parallel to, nor justification for, the appeal fence.
7. In these circumstances, I consider that the appeal fence has an unacceptably harmful impact on the character and appearance of the Valley Road street scene and on the wider area. The fence is therefore contrary to Policies D and LHH of the Purbeck Local Plan Part 1, 2012, insofar as these expect all development and other works to positively integrate with their surroundings; and to conserve, amongst other things, the character of designated landscapes. There would also be conflict with the core principles and policies within the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), notably those that seek to secure high quality design and take account of the character of different areas, and seeks to conserve the landscape and scenic beauty of AONBs.

Planning balance

8. I have taken into account that the fence would provide a degree of privacy and security for future residents of the 'Swanbourne' houses. Whilst it may be understandable, I am not satisfied that if additional privacy and security would be required this could not be achieved by other, less harmful means. On the other hand, the fence causes material harm to the character and appearance of the area, which also fails to conserve the landscape and scenic beauty of the wider AONB. This is a factor to which I attribute great weight. On balance, the minor benefits are not sufficient to outweigh the environmental harm; the fence therefore does not constitute sustainable development for the purposes of the Framework.
9. The Appellant's contends that a fence could be erected without the need for planning permission. Be that as it may, in my view any fence erected under permitted development would not be as substantial as the fence now before me. In any event, I have considered the appeal on the basis that planning permission is required.

Conclusion

10. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

H Porter

INSPECTOR