



Bowcombe creek and New Bridge: in the heart of South Devon's Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty





Description: Erection of replacement dwelling and garage, relocation of access and associated works

Address: Appelford, Bowcombe Road, Kingsbridge TQ7 2DJ

PLANNING REF: 3943/20/FUL

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15th May 2021

LETTER OF REPRESENTATION FROM THE SOUTH HAMS SOCIETY

The South Hams Society interest

For nearly sixty years, the South Hams Society has been stimulating public interest and care for the beauty, history and character of the South Hams. We encourage high standards of planning and architecture that respect the character of the area. We aim to secure the protection and improvement of the landscape, features of historic interest and public amenity and to promote the conservation of the South Hams as a living, working environment. We take the protection of the South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) very seriously and work hard to increase people's knowledge and appreciation of our precious environment. We support the right development - in the right places - and oppose inappropriate development, as we strongly believe to be the case with this application.

Revised changes.

This letter is an update to our previous objection letter. The design revisions do not address previous objections as the changes are minimal. In fact we believe they are so minimal that all the original objections are still relevant. Indeed we are quite dismayed by the applicant's response.

Background

Beautiful Bowcombe Creek is located close to Kingsbridge, at the start of the road which leads to Torcross and Dartmouth, through some of the South Hams' most picturesque villages. It contains some stunning scenery visible from local roads, fields and Charleton Footpath no. 2. New Bridge, an ancient grade 2 listed bridge, helps to create a timeless landscape; a landscape considered important enough to feature in the current South Devon AONB Planning Guidance document.



Our reasons for opposing this application fall into five main areas:

1. Failure to identify material planning considerations
2. Evidence of pre application tree clearance
3. Adverse visual impact
4. Discrepancy in the site plans
5. Existing scenic harm at this location.

Taking the issues in turn:

1. Failure to identify material planning considerations

- (a) The application site lies within the **South Devon AONB** and the **Undeveloped Coast**, alongside the **Kingsbridge Salcombe SSSI**. The South Hams Society has researched previous planning applications and decisions for this location. Regrettably we can find no evidence of any consideration regarding the listed bridge or its setting by any applicant. It would appear that district planning officers have also repeatedly failed to identify the listed status as an important consideration in their decisions. This oversight has led to a degradation of this beautiful site.

Helpfully, the (previously secret) pre-application advice has been made public – a move which this Society very much welcomes. This reveals that the Case officer has unfortunately failed to identify the listed status of New Bridge. The Case Officer states:

‘Although the site lies within close proximity to Kingsbridge, it is beyond the built form of the town and is considered to be within the countryside.

*Policy TTV29 of the adopted Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan 2014-2034 supports the principle of replacement dwellings providing the existing dwelling has a lawful use, **the size of the replacement dwelling is ‘not significantly larger than the original house volume** and the number of new dwellings to be demolished and replaced is the same as the existing number of dwellings on the site. **The policy also requires the new dwelling to be positioned on the footprint of the existing dwelling unless there are sound planning reasons for an alternative location. I understand that your client would like to reposition the new building slightly to improve the amenity for the neighbours which sounds reasonable’.***

(Emphasis added).

The South Hams Society disagree with Case Officer’s opinion.



The current building is described as 330 m². We agree with that figure as its last sale document quotes that area. However, what is not disclosed is that the current building did in fact have separate ancillary accommodation permission (9/28/2538/89/3). Planning application 28/2013/99/F was for the removal of condition (e) of permission 9/28/2538/89/3 for ancillary accommodation (use as separate unit). But the building is a dwelling and ancillary accommodation. It is already a very large building.

We have checked the dimensions of the two floors of the proposal, the ground floor is 219 m² and the second floor is 200 m² creating a dwelling of 419 m². Worse, the revised proposal increases the visual impact size of the first floor of the building, viewed when crossing the grade II listed New Bridge.

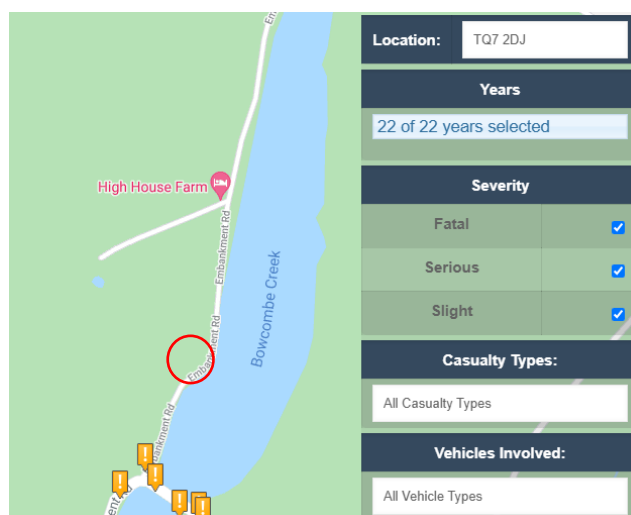
The claim that the repositioning improves the neighbourhood amenity is unfounded and is not supported by planning policy.

TTV29.4 – Position of replacement dwelling

TTV29.4 makes provision for retaining elements of the previous built form of a replacement dwelling by using the same footprint as the previous building. Circumstances may dictate that this is either not possible or practical, in which case an applicant should discuss an alternative location within a plot with the LPA before submitting an alternative location within a planning application. In most cases the relocation of a dwelling will not meet the requirements of policy TTV29 if it is not substantiated by a sound planning or engineering reason.

It is possible and practical to keep the replacement dwelling to use the current footprint. The repositioning of the new build is the reason for the new access position. The current position after a bend is in a zone where vehicle speeds are 15-20mph.

We have checked crash data for the zone and there has not been any over the last 22 years.



There are no vehicle safety issues



Currently the second floor is contained within the roof area of the building. The proposals second floor contains an enormous increase in glass viewing area.

Had the Case Officer identified the listed asset, we believe they should have come to a different conclusion. **We therefore request that the listing is specifically considered.**

This basic omission reinforces our long held view that SHDC planning department should operate a checklist procedure, like the one operated by Cornwall Council, so that the planning officer would have to carry out basic checks relating to location specific material considerations, such as, listed status, proximity to an SSSI, wildlife related measures etc., helping to ensure that such issues are not overlooked.

(b) Wildlife impacts not considered

No wildlife issues were highlighted by the Case Officer for the notable protected species of the South Hams, of which there are two at this location. The site lies within a 250 metre Cirl Bunting breeding ground and a South Hams SAC Greater Horseshoe Bat Landscape Connectivity Zone. In our view this is another considerable failing, especially considering that the field paddock is included in the landscaping scheme.

2. Evidence of pre application tree clearance

Pre-application tree clearance within the South Devon AONB is a blight on an area which should be protected. This Society has previously documented numerous cases and shared this information with SHDC planners, with little result. We genuinely wonder what the point is of the public, and even public authorities, carefully planting new trees to help combat climate change and the biodiversity crisis whilst there is an ongoing 'open season' on mature trees - particularly where they might block someone's building plans or uninterrupted view of the estuary. Salcombe is rife with examples of this.



The landscape change at Appleford is also stark and shocking, and that is not the only location where tree clearance is occurring along Bowcombe.

UNAUTHORISED TREE CLEARANCE AT WOODSPRING:

In the decision to a previous planning application for Woodspring (ref. 28/1922/10/F) it was made clear that a wooded area was to be retained.



The image below was taken in January 2021, following the demolition of and rebuilding of Woodspring. Note the gaping hole which has appeared.

Image 2: Taken in 2021. The gap in the thinned trees is now clear





The landscape at Bowcombe is slowly but surely being degraded by the removal of trees by property owners. This is happening both after and before planning applications are submitted. In the South Hams, and particularly within the AONB where property prices are often highest, uninterrupted views of the water are a desirable asset for individual homeowners, adding to the value of their homes. To avoid difficulties with future planning applications, owners simply cut the trees down. More often than not they get away with this; like us they know that the District Council is highly unlikely to take any action.

UNAUTHORISED TREE CLEARANCE AT APPLEFORD:

At Appleford the landscape has also been stripped of trees prior to this current application.

In a previous planning application (ref. 28/0464/01/F for the erection of a garage/garden store at Appleford) the decision notice contained landscaping condition 4. The aim of this condition was specifically to protect existing trees and the hedgerow in front of the garage/workshop and towards Bowcombe Bridge, the small bridge at the head of the creek:

4. No development shall take place until there has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority a scheme of landscaping, which shall include indications of all existing trees and hedgerows on the site and details of any to be retained, together with measures for their protection in the course of development. All planting, seeding, turfing or hardsurfacing comprised in the approved landscaping scheme shall be carried out by

the end of the first planting and seeding seasons following the occupation of the buildings or completion of the development, whichever is the sooner. Any trees or plants which within a period of five years from the completion of the development die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species unless the Local Planning Authority gives written consent to any variation. The landscaping scheme shall be strictly adhered to during the course of the development and thereafter.

Despite this clear wording, trees alongside of the creek have been removed. These include a number of very large mature specimen trees (some kind of pine?) on the site where the proposed building and a new entrance to the road are to be constructed.

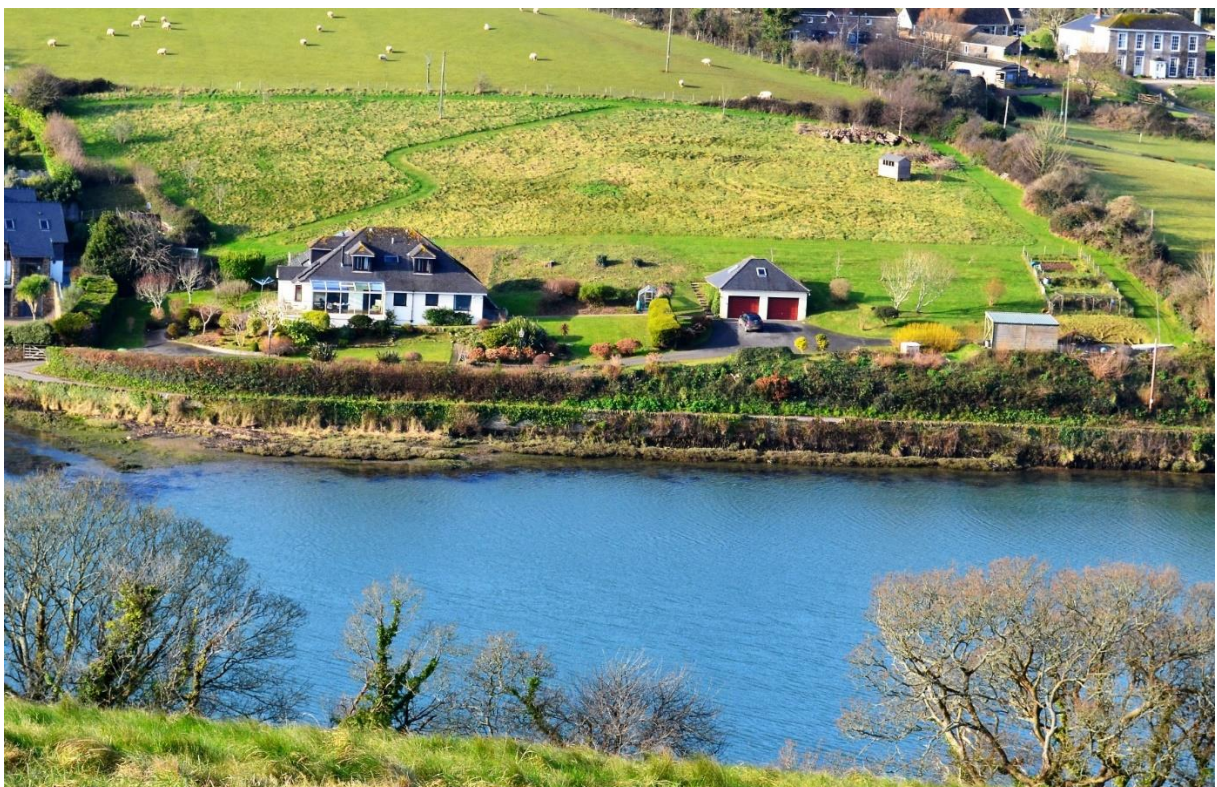


Compare the two images below.

Image 3: The Appleford site in 2018. Numerous trees form part of the landscape



Image 4: Today - only stumps remain





The previous images illustrates how landscaping, including trees, that was conditioned in perpetuity for a previous planning application at Appleford (ref. 28/0464/01/F) has been removed.

The South Hams Society hereby calls on the LPA to investigate these tree clearances to confirm whether they have been carried out in contravention of existing planning conditions.

3. The adverse visual impact of the proposed new property

The Case Officer has referred to the newly adopted Supplementary Planning Document that supports the Joint Local Plan, as follows:

'The now adopted SPD states that when considering the size of the replacement there will be two key elements taken into account when considering if the proposal represents a 'significant' change:

- 1. Whether the proposal will result in a harmful landscape or visual impact, and,*
- 2. Whether the proposal changes the size of dwelling, by number of bedrooms, to such a degree that it fails to meet the household needs of the area'.*

Given the Grade 2 listed status of New Bridge, the first point is very important.

By using overlay, the following images show the real change in footprint planned.



Image 5: The new building (in overlay) in relation to the road.



Image 6: The new building (in overlay) in relation to the current dwelling



Here we see that the footprint is significantly different. The new building will be set nearer to the road and the SSSI, and further north - where the mature trees used to be.

Image 6 perfectly illustrates why the mature pine trees had to be felled, to clear the way for the planned development.

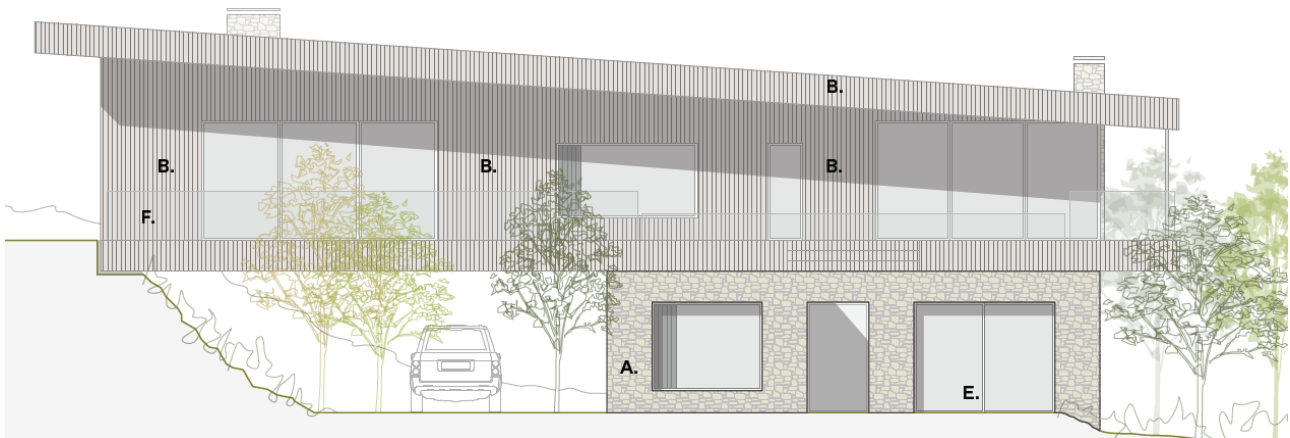


So what built form can we expect to see at this highly visible location in future?

Image 7 Previous proposal – view from New Bridge



Image 8 Revised proposal – view from New Bridge



The changes do not reduce visual impact but increase visual impact from New Bridge and the changes are extremely minimal. It is why we state that all the objections recorded are still relevant.

The next three images record the changing scene from the listed bridge.



The image above shows the position of the new build.

This design can only be described as ultra-modern with a large increase in glazing on the expansive first floor 'platform'. Is it suitable for this sensitive location?



In terms of visual impact, it is clear that as the new building at Appleford shifts nearer the road and into the estuary and creek view (as illustrated by the overlay plans above), its visibility will substantially increase. **It will also be highly visible from the Charleton PRoW.**

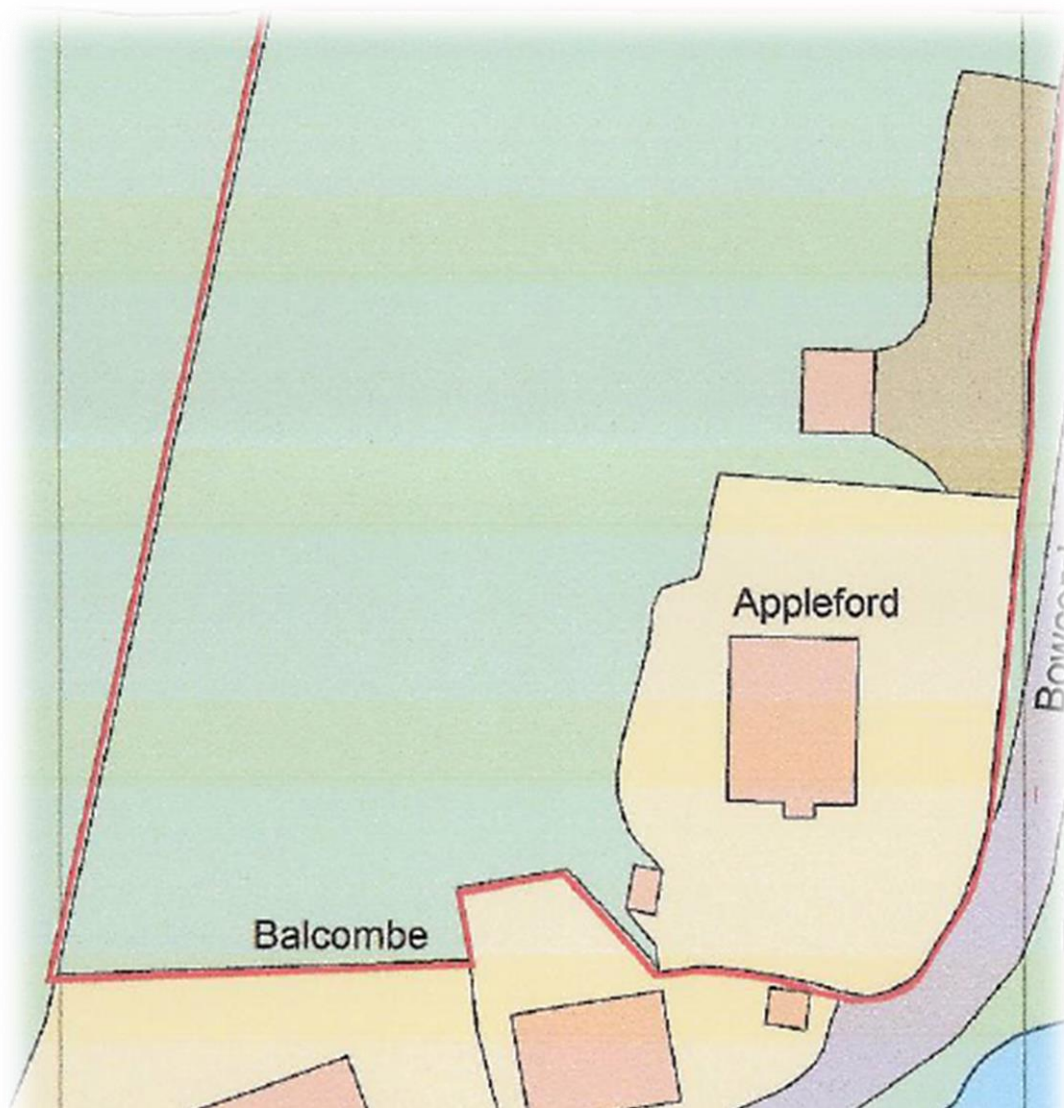
The South Hams Society believes that the proposed development introduces a new and inappropriate built form into this highly sensitive estuary setting. Sadly, we already know what oversized modern houses do to this setting. It will be another unwelcome intrusion into an already threatened location within the Undeveloped Coast.

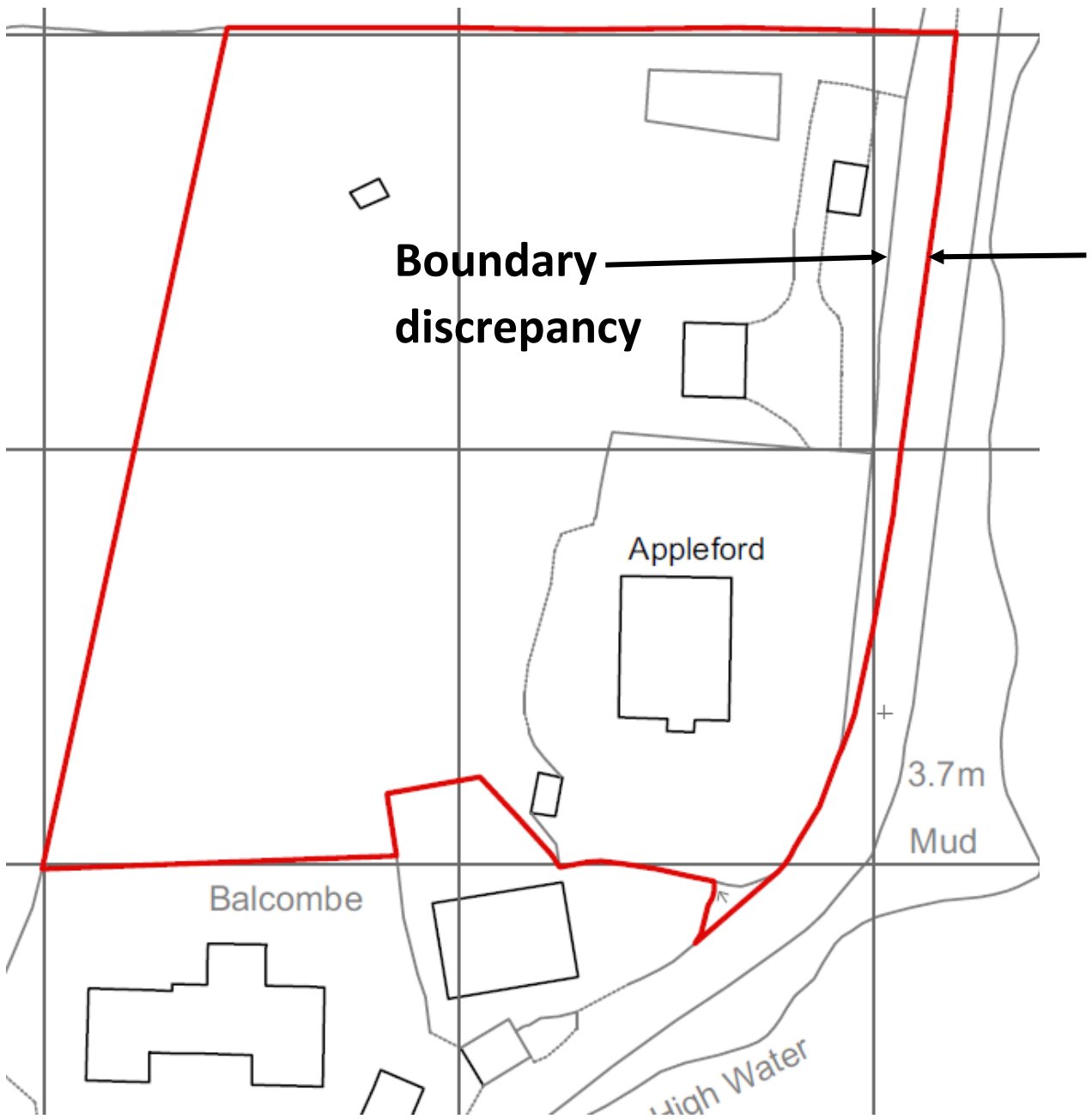
We strongly believe that it will inevitably have significant adverse impacts on the natural beauty, special qualities, distinctive character, landscape and scenic beauty of the site.

4. Apparent discrepancy in the site plans

We note that the site plan from a previous application (ref. 28/0468/14/F) does not agree with the current site plan ref. 3943/20/FUL. In particular the proposed drive is closer to the public road. We recommend that the planning department request sight of the title plan.

Image 9: Application 28/0468/14/F site plan superimposed over site plan 3943/20/FUL







5. Existing scenic harm at this location

Image 10: The iconic Bowcombe landscape in 2008



Image 11: Today, after unsympathetic development and tree fellings





Image 12: Bowcombe in 2021, scene of palatial new builds



Summary

In our view, the Bowcombe creek and New Bridge setting is uniquely rich and beautiful, for many it is one of their best loved places in the South Hams. Sloping hills meet the Kingsbridge Salcombe SSSI estuary on both sides of a long and historically noteworthy 'new' bridge. Locals and visitors come here to swim and boat. Those driving over the bridge enjoy stunning views across the water. This is the special setting which we can all enjoy as we take the main route east out of Kingsbridge through the villages to Dartmouth.

It is therefore all the more shocking that Bowcombe has not been protected from inappropriate development despite the Local Planning Authority's statutory duty to do so.

Viewed from all sides, the negative visual impact of recent developments is undeniable - the two previous demolitions and prominent new builds (Image 12) now dominate the setting. The previously unspoilt estuary scene has been irreparably damaged by these oversized buildings.

Worse, as the images show, the development of these individual homes has been facilitated by the cynical removal of trees. This is now happening again at Appleford.

The result is a shameful 'gain' for the few at the cost of a degraded landscape for the many.

The South Hams Society has supplied these images in the hope that the evidence will lead to (a) refusal of this application and (b) investigation into how the mature trees were cut down.

In planning terms, we OBJECT to the proposed development because it:

- fails to conserve and enhance the natural beauty and special qualities of the South Devon AONB and heritage assets
- conflicts with the aims and objectives of policies DEV1, DEV2, DEV20, DEV21, DEV23, DEV24, DEV25, DEV26 & DEV28 of the 2019 Joint Local Plan. Also TTV26 and TTV29
- is contrary to the guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework including, but not limited to, paragraphs 170, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 184, 185, 189, 190, 192, 193, 194, 195 and 196
- conflicts with SPT1, SPT11 and SPT12, and the Supplementary Planning Document, and
- is contrary to the South Devon AONB Management Plan including Policies Lan/P1, P2, P3, P4 and P5, Lan Man/P1, Mar/P1 and Plan/P2.

Submitted on behalf of the South Hams Society