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22 May 2024



The decades-long planning battle to build almost 100 homes and a hotel opposite Hampton Court Palace will soon be decided with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport set to rule on the matter once and for all.

The government department is calling for new information and evidence over proposals from Network Rail Infrastructure and Alexpo to build 97 homes and an 84-bed hotel, together with shops and new access space around Hampton Court station in East Molesey.

The former Jolly Boatman site lies next to the River Thames and overlooks the palace. Elmbridge Borough Council originally rejected the plans but their decision was later overturned on appeal.

The original application received more than 1,800 objections and 131 letters of support and was refused due to "excessive height and bulk" and "harm to numerous heritage assets".

Hampton Court Rescue Campaign (HCRC) argued it would spoil views across the river of Hampton Court Palace.

It is now in the hands of the Secretary of State because the law states developments within half a mile of the historic home of King Henry must be approved by the senior minister.

A spokesperson for HCRC wrote: "For over 100 years, Hampton Court Palace has benefited from the unique protection of the Act, which has successfully restricted developments over 50 ft in height in the environs of the Palace.

"In the Council's Development Brief for the site there is a requirement that any scheme must categorically be below 50 feet."

Permission was granted after the planning inspector ruled it would fit with the surroundings while the hotel, retail units and riverside restaurant would make life better for visitors.

Furthermore, the inspector said the plans would support the rest of the town.

People using the station, the inspector added, would have improved access to the bridge.

They said: "Taken together, these features of the design would result in a place that would be accessible and easy to move around."

On height, the inspector said: "The distinctive treatment of the upper level, together with the depth and width of the podium gardens, would break up the mass of the built form.

"Whilst they would clearly be seen as part of a larger scheme, I do not think that they would be perceived as a single mass, either in views from the park or in longer views from the north bank of the River Thames."

They added:"Some parties sought to criticise the design on the basis that it would not be sufficiently eye-catching or innovative.

"I agree that this is not a design that seeks to make an assertive architectural statement. However, in this case I do not regard that as a negative.

"I consider that the design would result in a calm, well-ordered scheme with sufficient presence to hold its own in the street scene."

The consultation includes an open text box for people's views and space to attach documents and is available via the department's website or by searching Hampton Court consultation.

Image: Jolly Boatman development viewed from across River Thames. Credit Alexpo. Henry VIII clipart cactus cowboy

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