
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 28 February 2025

by S Poole BA(Hons) DipArch MPhil MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18th March 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/X5210/Z/24/3358105

University of London Birkbeck College, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HX

- The appeal is made under Regulation 17 of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) against a refusal to grant express consent.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Daniel Xuereb, Birkbeck, University of London, against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Camden.
 - The application Ref is 2024/3655/A.
 - The advertisement proposed is the display of 9 banners around the site.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The advertisements described above are in place. This appeal therefore relates to an application for retrospective advertisement consent.
3. In the interest of clarity I have used the description of the proposed advertisements used on the decision notice in the banner heading above.
4. The Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 (the Regulations) require that applications for the display of advertisements are considered in the interests of amenity and public safety, taking into account the provisions of the development plan, so far as they are material, and any other relevant factors.
5. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was revised on 12 December 2024. Those parts of the Framework most relevant to this appeal have not been amended. As a result, I have not sought submissions on the revised Framework, and I am satisfied that no party's interests have been prejudiced by taking this approach.

Main Issues

6. The main issues are the effects of the proposed advertisements on visual amenity and whether they preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.

Reasons

7. The appeal site is occupied by 3 substantial adjoining buildings ranging in height from 5 to 7 storeys that form an urban block bounded on their long sides by Mallet Street and Torrington Square. The ends of the block face Byng Place to the north and a pedestrian route next to Senate House to the south. These buildings form the main campus of Birkbeck University and are part of a wider campus of university buildings.
8. The appeal site is situated within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area (CA) which comprises a large and varied part of central London. The area of the CA within which the appeal site is situated is dominated by large-scale institutional buildings including the University of London precinct and its associated colleges and faculties and the British Museum. As well as including some exemplary 18th and 19th century buildings, there are examples of 20th century architecture of international repute. Whilst many original small-scale domestic terraces have been lost to make way for the educational buildings the area generally retains its original street pattern and squares and, by comparison to the nearby commercial areas, the university precinct is quieter and less visually cluttered due to the absence of commercial uses and large scale and illuminated signage.
9. The buildings within the appeal site have been identified as making a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the CA and the site forms part of the settings of neighbouring listed buildings including 42-56 Torrington Place, Senate House and the School of Oriental & African Studies. The high architectural quality of the buildings within and surrounding the appeal site and the restrained institutional appearance of the area are key aspects of the amenity, character and appearance of the CA to which I attach significant weight.
10. The appeal scheme comprises the installation of 9 banner signs 6 of which are about 10.5m high by 1.8m wide with the other 3 being about 10.5m high by 1.1m. These are located at high level on the corners of the appeal site and display the Birkbeck branding in bright colours. These banners are visible in long views from Gorden Square, in views along Malet Street and Torrington Place and from Torrington Square.
11. Due to their size, siting and appearance and the restrained, institutional and high quality character and appearance of the area the banners are overly prominent and highly incongruous features in the street scene. I therefore conclude that the appeal scheme results in clear and unacceptable harm to visual amenity and fails to preserve the character and appearance of the CA.
12. I have taken into account Policies D1, D2 and D4 of the London Borough of Camden Local Plan 2017 which, amongst other matters, seek to protect amenity and so are material in this case. Given I have concluded that the proposal harms amenity, it therefore conflicts with these policies.

Other Matters

13. The appellant advises that Birkbeck College has identified a need to stand out from its competition, identify itself as an independent higher education institution and attract students. However, the Regulations stipulate that advertisements are subject to control only in the interests of amenity and public safety, and therefore

the benefits referred to cannot be taken into account. Accordingly, I attach minimal weight to these matters.

Conclusion

14. For the reasons set out above, and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should fail.

S Poole

INSPECTOR