
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 May 2016

by C J Ford BA (Hons) BTP Dist. MRTPI

a person appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 06 June 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/X5210/Z/16/3146812

Public footway outside Africa House, Kingsway, London WC2B 6AG

- The appeal is made under Regulation 17 of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 against a refusal to grant express consent.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Andrew Jordan (JCDecaux UK Ltd) against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Camden.
 - The application Ref 2015/5365/A, dated 22 September 2015, was refused by notice dated 22 January 2016.
 - The advertisement proposed is a double-sided freestanding Forum Structure, featuring 1 x Digital 84" screen on one side and a static poster advertisement panel on the reverse.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. Whilst the Council's description of the proposal refers to the poster panel as being non-illuminated, the appellant's appeal statement clarifies that it will be internally illuminated. In the interests of clarity, the appeal has been determined on the basis of the poster panel being internally illuminated.

Main Issues

3. The main issues in this case are:
 - i) The effect of the proposed advertisement on the visual amenity of the area.
 - ii) The effect of the proposed advertisement on highway safety.

Reasons

- i) *Visual amenity*
4. The site is located within the Kingsway Conservation Area (CA). In determining the appeal it is therefore necessary to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the CA.
 5. The Council's 'Kingsway Conservation Area Statement' indicates that the special character of the area is mainly derived from its large scale Edwardian architecture with many buildings characterised by elaborately composed and decorated Portland stone façades.

6. The character of the bus shelter location that would house the forum structure generally conforms to the above description of Kingsway. It is sited in front of Africa House, a large Grade II listed building that is faced in Portland stone. The shelter partly extends across Twyford Place, towards The Church of St Anselm & St Cecilia which is similarly a Grade II listed building with a Portland stone façade. The listed buildings make an important contribution to the character and appearance of this locality.
7. Like many of the buildings that line this part of Kingsway, commercial uses occupy the ground floor level of Africa House and they benefit from discrete signage that has been designed to respect the character of the host building and the wider area. Fixed signage within the street itself is largely limited to slim monoliths that display navigation information for tourists. There is an appreciable restraint in terms of advertisements and minimal visual clutter. This is a positive attribute in terms of the character and appearance of the CA. It maintains the visual focus upon the high quality of the surrounding buildings.
8. The existing bus shelter has a double sided poster panel at one end. Although the appellant states consent is sought for the replacement of existing illuminated advertisements, the Council indicate that a previous application was refused, (LPA reference: 2011/2650/A).
9. Despite the busy nature of the area, the proposed advertisement would feature in the foreground in certain street level views of the listed buildings. Owing to the size and illumination of the advertisement, it would be prominent in such views, drawing attention away and unduly detracting from the special interest and importance of the buildings.
10. Unlike the restrained shop front signage which is set back within the street scene, the proposed forum structure would occupy a prominent forward position. The advertisement would appear as a strident and discordant feature in an area that is relatively devoid of such advertisements. It would constitute an element of visual clutter, undermining one of the positive attributes of the CA. As a consequence, the appeal proposal would cause harm to the visual amenity of the immediate locality and wider area.
11. Despite the appellant's acceptance that in more sensitive areas the maximum night time luminance level could be limited to 300Cdm², the identified detrimental impacts could not be overcome by the imposition of conditions.
12. The parties have drawn attention to Development Plan policies, the National Planning Policy Framework, Planning Practice Guidance and local planning guidance which they consider are pertinent to this appeal. In particular, it is noted that Policy CS14 of the Camden Core Strategy 2010 seeks attractive places by preserving and enhancing Camden's rich and diverse heritage assets and their settings, including conservation areas and listed buildings. The policies and guidance have been taken into account, so far as they are material.
13. For the reasons given above, the proposed advertisement would have an unacceptably harmful effect on the visual amenity of the area. It would fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the CA. It would also detract from the setting of the adjacent listed buildings. The proposal would conflict with relevant policies and guidance.

ii) Highway safety

14. Whilst the appellant states the Council does not raise public safety as a reason for refusing consent, the decision notice specifically expresses the Council's view that the proposed digital screen would have a detrimental impact on highway safety.
15. The Council acknowledges that the level of illumination and the display of moving images could be controlled by condition but notes that advertisements are more likely to distract road users at junctions, roundabouts and pedestrian crossings. It is of the view that the display of the digital screen in the proposed location would add visual clutter and it could distract road users, particularly during hours of darkness.
16. Digital displays of the size and form proposed are commonly experienced in using the capital's transport network. Consequently, having regard to paragraph 068 of the Planning Practice Guidance, they are not of an 'unusual nature' and thereby unlikely to be a distraction to road users in that respect.
17. Although there is a junction to the south-east, it is located some distance beyond the proposed digital display. The stretch of Kingsway leading to this location is relatively straight and simple. The display would therefore be visible from some distance and it would allow ample time for it to be seen and its content noted by drivers without causing confusion or sudden visual disturbance on the approach to the junction. Provided the illumination and display were appropriately controlled by conditions, the advertisement would not be an undue distraction to drivers, including at night.
18. In light of the above, it is concluded the proposed advertisement would not have a detrimental impact on highway safety and it would not conflict with relevant policies and guidance. This includes Policy DP21 of the Camden Development Policies 2010 which expects works affecting highways to avoid causing harm to highway safety.

Conclusion

19. Notwithstanding the finding on highway safety, the identified harm in respect of the visual amenity of the area is a compelling and overriding consideration in this case.
20. The suggested benefits of the advertisement identified by the appellant have been noted which includes, amongst other things, the revenue generation for re-investment in transport infrastructure and the ability to display public information. However, advertisements are subject to control only in the interests of amenity and public safety. The conclusion on the former is determinative.
21. For the reasons given above and having regard to all other matters raised, it is concluded that the appeal should be dismissed.

C J Ford

APPOINTED PERSON