

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 1 November 2016

by H Porter BA(Hons) PGDip IHBC

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

Decision date: 21 November 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/E0345/Z/16/3155806

120 London Road, Reading RG1 5AY

- 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 Seamus Carey (Primesight) against the decision of Reading Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 160123, dated 7 December 2015, was refused by notice dated 8 June 2016.
 - The advertisement proposed is display of 1no. single sided 48-sheet LED media display following removal of 1no. rear illuminated 48-sheet advertising hoarding.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are the effect of the proposed advertisement on public safety and on the amenity of the area, with particular regard to Granby Tavern.

Reasons

Public Safety

3. The appeal site is located on the London Road side of Cemetery Junction, a confluence of heavily-trafficked routes that lead to and from the east into central Reading. The proposed media display would be sited in the same location as an extant hoarding, set back slightly from the pavement edge between a short parade of shops and a public house. Along with heavy traffic, the area also has a high footfall, in part contributed to by the site's proximity to Reading College, a church, public swimming pool and a cluster of food and retail outlets.
 4. The proposed display would only be visible to road users approaching along the A329 (Kings Road), travelling in an easterly direction, or merging onto the west-bound A4. In this direction of travel, the appeal site becomes visible just before a traffic light controlled crossing point. Immediately after this crossing, the road splits from two lanes, plus bus lane, into three lanes, plus bus lane. While signage and road markings do inform drivers of upcoming lane changes, the relatively short stretch of road after the pedestrian crossing gives drivers limited opportunity to manoeuvre into the correct lane. The bus stops, pedestrian crossings and bus lanes add an additional layer of distraction for road users to contend with.
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5. At the time of my site visit, on a week-day lunch time, I observed a number of vehicles making last-minute lane changes. The situation is therefore already challenging to the road user, requiring a high degree of concentration. The accident report, whilst taking in a wider context than the vicinity of the appeal site, is evidence that the existing road network already poses risk and a high rate of traffic-related incidents. The fact that poor judgement was deemed to be the cause in a number of the accidents recorded indicates that a lapse in concentration on behalf of the road user could result in a potentially very serious collision.
6. Even if the media display was operated with the proposed restrictions, I consider that the screen would be more conspicuous than the existing, causing a potentially hazardous distraction in an already challenging environment for the road user. Any small increase in risk to public safety would, in this location, be unacceptable.
7. I note the appellant's experiences of working collaboratively with Highway Authorities in other boroughs. In this case, however, given the specific circumstances at the appeal site, I do not consider that agreeing suitable levels of luminance, or a period of monitoring, would sufficiently overcome the unacceptable risk to public safety that an additional environmental distraction would cause.
8. I consider therefore that the proposed media display would result in unacceptable risk to public safety. The advertisement is therefore contrary to Policy DM12 and DM22 of the Reading Borough Local Development Framework Sites and Detailed Policies Document, adopted 2012, altered 2015 (the SPDP), insofar as they seek to ensure development would not be detrimental to the safety of users of the transport network. The appeal proposal would also run contrary to the principles of the National Planning Policy Framework, March 2012 (the NPPF), which seeks to secure a good standard of amenity.

Amenity

9. The area in the vicinity of the appeal site is characterised by a mix of two-storey terraces containing ground floor retail uses, interspersed with a mix of detached public houses and ecclesiastical buildings of townscape merit. Notwithstanding the commercial character of the locality, the busy road network and proliferation of traffic signs and signals, as well as the existing hoarding, detracts from the quality and range of the surrounding architecture. The recessive height and position of the existing sign combined with its flat, unlit display, to some degree, reduces its conspicuousness in the street scene.
10. The proposed media display would occupy the same position as the extant hoarding, set back from the busy road frontage between the Crown Colonnade and Granby Tavern, a Locally Important Building. While the overall dimensions of the display would be as existing, the altered base would add solidity to it and the proposed media display would be more visually prominent. Even without moving images, transitional effects and a similar brightness, proposed display would stand out more, to the detriment of the local street scene and neighbouring buildings.
11. I therefore conclude that the proposed sign would adversely affect the visual amenity of the area, and detract from the setting of the neighbouring Granby

Tavern. The appeal proposal would consequently fail to accord with Policy DM22 of the SPDP and Policies CS33 and CS7 of the Reading Borough Local Development Framework Core Strategy, adopted 2008, altered 2015. These policies seek, amongst other things, to ensure buildings and features of local architectural and historic interest are safeguarded; the character and appearance of the area is maintained and enhanced; and advertisements respect the their surroundings and setting. The appeal proposal would also run contrary to the principles of the NPPF which seek to take account of the character of different areas are taken account of.

Conclusion

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

H Porter

INSPECTOR