
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 29 November 2016

by Richard Aston BSc (Hons) DipTP MRTPI

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

Decision date: 21 December 2016

Appeal Ref: APP/A3655/Z/16/3158253
5-7 Chobham Road, Woking GU21 6HX

- 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 Jon Guise (c/o Stonegate Pubs) against the decision of Woking Borough Council.
 - The application Ref PLAN/2016/0532, dated 4 May 2016, was refused in part by notice dated 14 July 2016.
 - The advertisements proposed are described as '*2 sets of halo illuminated built up fascia text fixed to panel – to replace existing. 3 sets of halo illuminated fret cut text in fascia panel. 2 internally illuminated projection signs – to replace existing*'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The Council issued a split decision in which express advertisement consent was granted for all but one of the advertisements. For the avoidance of doubt this appeal relates only to the refusal of the fascia sign referred to as No.1 on the accompanying drawings that is located on the frontage and corner of the building.
3. It was evident from my site visit that the signage was in situ. However, the 'Technical Signs' photomontages¹ submitted with the application show signage of a different appearance, although this is also different to the signage shown on the plans accompanying the application. It is clear that the Council determined the application on the basis of the signage in place and as shown on the drawings. To avoid any doubt I have also considered the proposal on the basis.

Main Issue

4. Accordingly, the main issue is the effect of the No. 1 fascia sign on visual amenity, having regard to its siting within the Woking Town Centre Conservation Area.

Reasons

5. The appeal property is located within the Woking Town Centre Conservation Area ('WTCCA'). Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that special attention must be paid to

¹ Revisions B, F and H dated 20 April 2016.

the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the area. The appeal site is in a prominent location on the corner of Commercial Way and Chobham Road, which contains a mixture of retail, commercial and other uses. There are a variety of similar fascia signs in the locality but there are also examples where existing architectural detailing has been retained.

6. The signage appears to cover the cornice and the centrally sited consoles/corbels above the entrance also appear to have been covered or removed. The cornice gives a strong line at the top of the ground floor and the console/corbel helps to visually terminate the top of the pilaster. By covering these features, the fascia is one long advertisement that fails to respect the traditional style, proportions and position for such signage, which photographic evidence reveals previously consisted of individual letters fixed to the stone fascia.
7. Furthermore, the fascia sign extends across the whole width of the frontage of the building and wraps around the corner. It is of a substantial size and depth and in combination with its relatively high level situation and its bright white colour, the eye is unacceptably drawn to it. I found that it appears visually jarring and in stark contrast with the building's mellow materials of dressed stone and red brick.
8. Consequently, even taking the commercial context into account, the sign as erected has caused harm to the visual amenity of the area. I consider it is visually intrusive and an unwelcome addition to the local area because it causes material harm to its visual amenity. As such, it fails to preserve the character and appearance of the WTCCA to which I attach considerable importance and weight.
9. Although the Council refers to development plan policies, the regulations to control advertisements require that decisions are made only in the interests of amenity and public safety. The development plan policies cannot be decisive, but I have taken them into account as a material consideration, noting that the signs do not make a positive contribution to the character, distinctiveness and significance of the historic environment.
10. I acknowledge the various other fascia signs nearby but I have not been informed as to whether they have been expressly given consent or whether, if appropriate, any action is being taken against them. Furthermore, the appeal property occupies a more prominent position and the fascia is of a greater length and prominence. Although longevity of aluminium is cited as a reason for replacing the previous timber, this does not justify the harm that I have identified. The appellant also refers to the installation of decorative mouldings/corbels to the fascia, however that is not before me as part of this appeal and would need to be the subject of further consultation. I have not therefore considered it any further.
11. For the reasons given above and having considered all other matters raised, I conclude that the proposal is unacceptable on amenity grounds and therefore the appeal is dismissed.

Richard Aston

INSPECTOR