
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 January 2017

by John L Gray DipArch MSc Registered Architect

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

Decision date: 20 January 2017

Appeal Ref. APP/K0235/Z/16/3161737

Lidl UK GmbH, Lurke Street, Bedford, MK40 3HY

- 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 Lidl UK GmbH against the decision of Bedford Borough Council.
 - The application, ref. 16/02012ADV, dated 8 July 2016, was refused by notice dated 30 August 2016.
 - The advertisement proposed is a totem sign 7.5m high.
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Decision: the appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

1. The main issue in the appeal is the effect the proposed totem sign would have on the character and appearance of the Bedford Conservation Area.

Reasons

2. The Lidl store is a very neatly designed building. Its façade to St Peter's Street is very much in keeping with the character and appearance of the Bedford Conservation Area. The architectural style is carried through to the rear, in particular to the façade facing Lurke Street; it is let down only by the two out-of-scale Lidl signs attached to the façade and above the entrance.
 3. At first glance, there appears to be little of architectural or townscape interest to suggest that Lurke Street is part of the Conservation Area. The exception to that is the view west from High Street. It is along the narrower part of Lurke Street (perhaps its original width?), where the buildings convey something of the general scale, style and character which one would expect of a side street leading off a main town centre street. The street then quickly opens out into a rather mundane and modern scene.
 4. In looking from High Street and along that narrower section of Lurke Street, the existing Lidl sign looks out-of-scale with the buildings that frame the view. It is too large and prominent in the street scene and thus detracts from the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. In effect, it heralds the modern development that lies beyond it but does so in a position too close to High Street to sit comfortably in the context of the more traditional street scene there and in the most westerly part of Lurke Street. What is proposed would be only slightly higher, and the Lidl sign at its top would be the same size as the existing one, but it would be a totem sign, in effect a solid sign over 2.6m wide for its full height of virtually 7.5m. The saving grace of the existing Lidl sign is that, even if it seems over-large itself, one can at least see past it to what lies beyond, albeit that what can be seen is of no particular visual merit.
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The proposed sign would have a much more solid appearance, and a very modern one, contrasting much more harmfully than the existing sign with the traditional street scene along which it would be viewed. That would be the case whether or not it was illuminated.

5. Accordingly, the proposal conflicts with Policies BE9, BE16 and BE41 saved from the Bedford Borough Local Plan 2008 because it would fail to preserve the character or appearance of the Bedford Conservation Area (albeit BE16 simply says that the Council will exercise strict control over applications for new advertisements, without saying what might or might not enable consent to be granted). In not dissimilar vein, it conflicts both with Policy TC33 of the adopted Bedford Town Centre Action Area Plan 2008 and with Policy CP21 of the adopted Core Strategy and Rural Issues Plan 2008, because its design does not pay due regard to its context.
6. Perhaps unexpectedly, the proposed totem sign would not really have the same harmful impact when seen from the east along Lurke Street. That is because the lower part of its bulk would be at least partially obscured by railings and existing street furniture. Neither would it harm the setting of the listed 11/13 St Peter's Street – the sign could not be seen from the listed building and, where the two could be seen in the same view, the setting of the listed building has already been significantly degraded and the proposed sign would not make matters noticeably worse. However, neither of these factors can outweigh the conclusion above on the main issue, which leads to dismissal of the appeal.

John L Gray

Inspector