



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 January 2017

by **Alexander Walker MPlan MRTPI**

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

Decision date: 31st January 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/Y1945/Z/3158493

107-115 The Parade High Street, Watford WD17 1LU

- 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 Stonegate Pubs against the decision of Watford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 16/00892/ADV, dated 22 June 2016, was refused by notice dated 12 August 2016.
 - The advertisement proposed is 2 sets of internally illuminated fascia text and 2 internally illuminated projection signs.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The Council issued a split decision in which express advertisement consent was granted for a *freestanding totem sign*. For the avoidance of doubt this appeal relates only to the refusal of the fascia and projecting signs as set out in my final bullet point above.
3. At the time of my site visit the projecting signs which were the subject of application ref 16/00892/ADV were already in place. In addition, there were also two fascia text signs, similar to those that formed part of the application. However, the drawings submitted with the application indicate that the fascia signs would rise above the height of the fascia. The fascia signs in situ do not rise above the top of the fascia and, as the appellant as pointed out, they are in fact smaller.
4. Furthermore, the details contained in the drawings submitted with the application with regard to the frontage of the property do not correspond with the existing building. The drawings depict a traditional frontage whereas the design of the existing frontage is more contemporary. The Council confirm that unauthorised alterations to the frontage took place following the submission of the application.
5. There are no drawings or details submitted in respect of the fascia signs that are in situ. Accordingly, I cannot consider them as part of this appeal. I have determined the appeal based on an assessment of the proposal that was considered by the Council, including its effect on the traditional frontage, and not what is currently in situ.

Main Issue

6. The main issue is the effect of the advertisements on the visual amenity of the locally listed building and its surroundings, including the Civic Core Conservation Area.
-

Reasons

7. The appeal property is an early 20th century, locally listed building located within the Civic Core Conservation Area (the CA). The building is a large, three-storey property located on a corner linking The Parade with Gaumont Approach/Albert Road South. Although the building is set behind the building line of the adjacent properties to the south, due to its size and corner location, it is nevertheless prominent within the streetscene, particularly when approaching from the north.
8. The wider area consists of a mixture of traditional and modern buildings, which generally comprise retail or commercial properties on the ground floor. Advertisements are common within these premises, many having internally illuminated box fascia signs, including the adjoining property, 'Woody Express'. Furthermore, there are examples of internally illuminated projecting signs. I therefore consider that illumination of signs forms a part of the character of the area.
9. The traditional shop frontage, as depicted in the application submission drawings and the photographs contained in the Officer's Report, comprised timber pilasters; cornices; console brackets; and, a shallow fascia. The top of the fascia defined the boundary between the ground floor frontage and the upper floors.
10. The proposed fascia text signs would rise above the height of the traditional fascia, detracting from the important role it plays in defining the frontage. Furthermore, due to their size and height, they would fail to respect the existing proportions of the frontage and the overall building, appearing unduly prominent and detracting from the character and appearance of the building and the wider CA.
11. I have had regard to the previous fascia signs. However, these were contained within the fascia and were smaller in size than the proposed. Therefore, I cannot draw any direct comparison between them.
12. In terms of their illumination, the changing of colours would provide a visual distraction that draws attention away from the fine architectural detailing of the building, which would further detract from the character and appearance of the building and the CA. Nevertheless, a condition could be imposed limiting the illumination to white light only, as suggested by the appellant and similar to that imposed on the express consent granted by the Council for the freestanding totem sign.
13. Turning now to the projecting signs, whilst there are projecting signs at first floor level on other traditional buildings in the locality, they are not internally illuminated or the same size as the proposed. Due to their size, height and illumination, the proposed projecting signs appear excessively bulky and create an awkward and incoherent relationship between the commercial appearance of the ground floor shop frontage and the architectural detailing of the upper floors. As a result, they appear incongruous and significantly harm the character and appearance of the building and the CA.
14. I note that there were previously internally illuminated projecting signs in similar positions to the proposed. However, whilst illuminated, the previous

signs were not the same design as the proposed solid, square signs and therefore I cannot draw a direct comparison between them.

15. I find therefore that the proposal would represent disruptive and incongruous additions that would significantly harm the character and appearance of the locally listed building and the CA, thus harming the visual amenity of the area.
16. In their reasons for refusal, the Council have cited Policies UD1 and UD2 of the Watford Local Plan Core Strategy 2006-31; saved policies U15, U17, U18 and U25 of the Watford District Plan 200, The Watford Borough Council Shopfront Design Guide 2013 and the National Planning Policy Framework, which they consider to be relevant to this appeal. I have taken them in to account as a material consideration. However, the power under the 2007 Regulations to control advertisements may be exercised only in the interests of amenity and public safety, taking account of any material factors. Accordingly, whilst I have taken account of the Council's policies, they have not, by themselves, been decisive.

Other Matters

17. I have had regard to the need for the advertisements in order to promote the business. However, I see no reason why alternative, more suitable advertisements would not equally achieve this.
18. I have also had regard to the appellant's argument that any harm caused as a result of the advertisements would only be temporary. However, I do not find that the harm I have identified, temporary or otherwise, would be acceptable.
19. Furthermore, I note the appellant's argument that there is a fallback position in that a larger amount of signage could be displayed under deemed consent rights under the 2007 Regulations. However, I have not been presented with any drawings of what such a scheme would look like if it were to be implemented. Therefore, I cannot make any comparison with the proposal before me and as a result can only attribute this matter limited weight.

Conclusion and Conditions

20. For the reasons given above, having regard to all matters raised, the appeal is dismissed.

Alexander Walker

INSPECTOR