

Appeal Decision

Site visits made on 6 and 7 June 2017

by Brendan Lyons BArch MA MRTPI IHBC

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

Decision date: 22nd June 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/Q0505/Z/17/3169934

Castle Court, Castle Park, Cambridge CB3 0AU

- 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 Study Inn Ltd against the decision of Cambridge City Council.
 - The application Ref 16/1872/ADV, dated 20 October 2016, was refused by notice dated 10 January 2017.
 - The advertisement proposed comprises 2No. internally illuminated fascia signs.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues in the appeal are the effect of the display on the character and appearance of the surrounding area, which forms part of the Central Conservation Area and includes the Castle Mound scheduled monument, and on the living conditions of adjoining residents.

Reasons

3. The appeal relates to a modern four-storey building, laid out in a square around a central courtyard. The building has been converted from office use to student accommodation. The two signs for which consent is now sought are already in position, fixed to full-height glazed features that form the building's splayed corners. Each sign comprises a dark panel at top floor level with internally illuminated lettering and logo, while the sign at the main entrance also has a large internally illuminated panel showing flags of many countries, which spans the first and second floors.

Character and appearance

4. The building forms part of an enclave of modern development to the north of the complex of administrative buildings centred on the Shire Hall, and overlooked by the historic Castle Mound. It is separated from Castle Street by a terrace made up mainly of traditional two-storey and three-storey houses. Thus the character of this part of the conservation area is a combination of civic importance offset by a modest urban vernacular. Where new buildings have been inserted, they have tended to observe the generally modest character and traditional materials. The limited commercial uses along Castle Street adopt a relatively restrained approach to advertisements.
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5. The appeal building is seen in the gaps between and above buildings on Castle Street and forms a more intrusive element in the street scene because of its rather strident red glazing bars. The upper parts of both appeal signs add to this discordant quality, being large in size and extremely prominent because of their location at the top of the building and their brightly coloured graphics. In both cases, the signs are visible from Castle Street. The lower part of the main entrance sign has a significant additional adverse effect because of its scale and very bright multi-coloured panel. The sign catches the eye in views across the space next to the Shire Hall and in the glimpsed view along the side street next to the Grade II listed Social Services building.
6. On my visit, I was able to confirm the Council's concern that the signs' illumination is excessive, making them considerably more conspicuous after dark than other signs nearby. The very large flag panel forms a particularly garish feature that stands out in views from Castle Street and from the Castle Mound.
7. Because of their scale, design and level of illumination, the signs fail to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area. The larger sign detracts from the setting of the listed building. The location forms part of a very wide setting for the Castle Mound, but is of value as a backdrop to the civic complex. Its contribution has already been somewhat eroded by the development of the modern buildings, but the impact of the larger sign has a further minor adverse effect.

Living conditions

8. Following an objection, the Council considers that the larger sign has an adverse effect on residents of the four-storey apartments at 66 Castle Street, some of whose windows directly face the appeal building. While I have not been able to inspect any interiors, I accept that the degree of illumination, particularly of the flag panel, must be very noticeable from within the nearest apartments and could, unless effective blackout measures were taken, cause an intrusive ingress of light in bedrooms facing the sign. There would be a minor adverse effect on residents' living conditions as a result.

Conclusion

9. In summary, I consider that the signs are harmful to the character and appearance of the area, as well as to neighbours' living conditions. The harm to amenity would be contrary to national policy, as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework and confirmed by the Planning Practice Guidance. While the policies of the development plan are not determinative in this case, I agree with the Council that continuing the display of the signs would conflict with Policies 3/15, 4/9 and 4/11 of the Cambridge Local Plan 2006, which aim respectively to secure respect for local context and to protect the setting of scheduled monuments and the character and appearance of conservation areas. There would also be some conflict with Policy 4/13, which seeks to prevent adverse effects of pollution, which can include light pollution.
10. For the reasons set out above, and having taken all representations into account, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Brendan Lyons

INSPECTOR