

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 21 June 2017

by H Lock BA(Hons) DipTP MRTPI

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

Decision date: 05 July 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/J3530/Z/17/3172012

Part Land Adjacent A12 Roundabout, North Side of Foxhall Road, Woodbridge, Suffolk

- 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 Alastair Kerr/Alterra Farms Ltd against the decision of Suffolk Coastal District Council.
 - The application Ref. DC/17/0124/ADN, dated 12 January 2017, was refused by notice dated 17 February 2017.
 - The advertisement proposed is a non-illuminated, single sided trailer sign.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issue is the effect of the advertisement on public safety and the amenity of the area.

Procedural Matters

3. The advertisement the subject of this appeal was in place at the time of the appeal site visit.
4. I have also dealt with another appeal (Ref: APP/J3530/Z/17/3172026) by the appellant for other signage on nearby land, adjacent to the A12 roundabout on the north side of Waldringfield Road, Brightwell. That appeal is the subject of a separate decision.

Reasons

Public Safety

5. The advertisement the subject of this appeal is positioned at the edge of a field next to a busy roundabout junction on the A12. At this point the road passes through a rural and open landscape, and the sign is visible from the carriageway.
 6. On approach to the roundabout from all directions there are a range of signs giving highway information and directions to towns, villages and local businesses and facilities. Whilst traffic speeds for approaching vehicles are reducing towards the roundabout, this nevertheless appears to be a busy junction with vehicles travelling at speed.
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7. The advertisement the subject of this appeal is single-sided on a metal trailer-style frame, and it is visible above the post and wire fence and roadside planting. The visibility of the sign varies depending on the direction from which it is viewed, but it is nevertheless highly visible and prominently sited next to the junction. I accept the appellant's view that the siting is not on land deemed necessary to facilitate the safe provision of the road network, nor does it cross into any visibility splays. However, given the volume and speed of traffic navigating the roundabout, I share the view of Suffolk County Council as highways authority, that large commercial signs in this location would be a significant distraction to drivers approaching the roundabout and may result in them failing to give way to vehicles on the circulatory carriageway.
8. No evidence of collision data has been supplied but I have no reason to question the number of injury collisions cited by the highways authority. On this basis, I consider that non-highway signs in this location would not be beneficial to safety. I have placed greater weight on the collision history than the estimated traffic data supplied by the appellant.
9. I note the Council's view that the sign in itself is poorly designed, and to a certain extent it is the logo rather than the text of the advertisement which draws the eye. As such, the limited information offered adds to the distraction caused by the signage, as viewers attempt to identify the purpose of the sign. However, whilst this adds to the risk to public safety, it is the siting and presence of large commercial signage close to the roundabout, as opposed to its content, that causes material harm. This potential risk would be too significant to warrant the grant of a temporary consent.
10. The appellant has drawn attention to the presence of other signs in the locality but none appear to be directly comparable in terms of their size and/or siting. Indeed most appear to be directional signs on the site of the business being promoted, as opposed to the more isolated position of the appeal sign. I do not share the appellant's view that the smaller sponsorship signs on the roundabout are a greater distraction, as their modest size limits the extent of their interruption to views at the roundabout.
11. The National Planning Practice Guidance advises that all advertisements are intended to attract attention but those at points where drivers need to take more care are more likely to affect public safety, and this includes at junctions and roundabouts¹. The Guidance sets out a list of advertisement types which may cause danger to road users, and includes those which, because of their size or siting, would obstruct or confuse a road-user's view, or would be likely to distract road-users because of their unusual nature. I consider that the appeal sign falls into this category, and I conclude that it has the potential to cause hazards to highway safety, and is therefore detrimental to public safety.

Amenity

12. As noted above, the sign is positioned in a field next to the roundabout, and at this point the landscape appears open and rural in character. The sign is large and visually intrusive, and appears incongruous in this roadside position. The temporary nature of the trailer sign, the framing of which is starting to show signs of wear, makes it an inappropriate addition to the landscape. Whilst I note that there are other signs in the area, they are not directly comparable in terms of siting, form and materials, and as such do not support the retention of this

¹ Paragraph: 067 Reference ID: 18b-067-20140306

advertisement. Moreover, the character and appearance of the retail and business area at Martlesham is far more developed than the appeal site.

13. The National Planning Policy Framework is clear that poorly placed advertisements can have a negative impact on the appearance of the built and natural environment, and this is reflected in the aims of Policy DM21 of the Suffolk Coastal District Local Plan² (LP), in so far as it relates to matters of amenity. As the powers to control advertisements may be exercised only in the interests of amenity and public safety, the development plan policies have not been decisive, but I have had regard to them as material considerations in this appeal. I also note the advice in respect of directional signs set out in the Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance 14, 'Shopfronts, Signs and Advertisements'. I find no conflict with LP Policy DM23 as it addresses specific matters in relation to residential amenity only, rather than the wider interpretation applicable in this case.

14. I therefore conclude that the advertisement detracts from the amenity of the area, and therefore conflicts with the aims of national policy and LP Policy DM21.

Other Matters

15. The appellant's statement refers to procedural matters relating to two previously refused applications, refs. DC/16/2848/AND and DC/16/2845/AND. However, there are other procedures to pursue concerns about the determination process, and such matters cannot be explored in this appeal. Regardless of any consultation responses on the previous applications, I have taken into account the comments made in relation to this specific application.

Conclusion

16. Whilst I appreciate the benefits of the signage to the appellant's business and farm diversification, on the basis of the information supplied the resultant adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the advertisement is detrimental to public safety and amenity and that the appeal should be dismissed.

H Lock

INSPECTOR

² Suffolk Coastal District Local Plan - Core Strategy & Development Management Policies Development Plan Document June 2013