

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 13 June 2017

by David Troy BSc (Hons) MA MRTPI

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

Decision date: 07 July 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/Z3635/Z/17/3175458

Magna House, 18-32 London Road, Staines-Upon-Thames TW18 4BP

- 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 Threadneedle Investments Ltd against the decision of Spelthorne Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 17/00086/ADV, dated 18 January 2017, was refused by notice dated 21 March 2017.
 - The advertisement is for 1 no. illuminated totem sign.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Application for costs

2. An application for costs was made by Threadneedle Investments Ltd against the decision of Spelthorne Borough Council. This application is the subject of a separate Decision.

Procedural Matter

3. This is a retrospective application and the totem sign has already been erected. I have considered the appeal on this basis accordingly.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is the effect of the totem sign on the appearance of the appeal building and the amenity of the area.

Reasons

5. The appeal building is a three storey contemporary style office building fronting onto the A308 London Road. The property is located in a well-established employment area, with office buildings located immediately to the north-east and south-west and a vacant commercial site on the opposite side of the road. A number of office buildings have existing small totem signs, although these generally appear as clearly subordinate to the host building.
 6. The externally illuminated totem sign has a height of about 4.2m and is located within a landscaped area at the front of the appeal building. The sign contains an area of white text on a burgundy coloured background on either side and is lit by low illumination spot up lights.
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7. Paragraph 67 of the National Planning Policy Framework (Framework) states that poorly placed advertisements can have a negative impact on the appearance of the built and natural environment. However, only those advertisements which will clearly have an appreciable impact on a building or on their surroundings should be subject to the local planning authority's detailed assessment, and should be subject to control only in the interests of amenity and public safety, taking account of cumulative impacts.
8. The Planning Practice Guidance sets out at ID: 18b-079-20140306 that in assessing amenity the general characteristics of the locality should be considered, and that the scale of advertisements should be in keeping with important historic, architectural or cultural features.
9. I have considered the appellant's arguments that the siting and design of the sign is proportional to the size and scale of the appeal building and in keeping with the commercial nature of the surrounding area. However, I have viewed the appeal site and I am not persuaded by the appellant's arguments. Whilst I accept that the backdrop provided by the appeal building and the landscaping reduce the impact of the sign to some degree and ensures that the sign does not cause significant harm to the appearance of the appeal building, in my view, it does little to reduce the apparent overall height and size of the sign within the streetscene. These shortcomings are exacerbated by the sign's prominent position which can be viewed from a number of public vantage points along the busy London Road.
10. I have noted the other signs in the area drawn to my attention by the appellant. The totem signs at the front of the office buildings at Birch House and 40 London Road are small modest sized freestanding totem signs that have different development characteristics to the appeal scheme. I therefore accord them limited weight as precedents in this case.
11. I therefore consider that the sign, by virtue of its overall height, size, siting and illumination is at odds with the character of the locality where the commercial totem signs are predominantly understated and adversely harms the visual amenity of the locality. Furthermore given the design and branding of the premises and the existing external advertisement signs on the appeal building, I am in no doubt the business would still have some presence within the street scene and I give little weight to the argument that the sign is required to draw attention to the office buildings.
12. I note the appellant considers that the signage would benefit from deemed consent under Schedule 3, Part 1, Class 6 of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisement) (England) Regulations 2007 if the illumination was removed from the totem sign. However, this is not the scheme before me and in any event I am required to consider the appeal on the same basis as the Council when it made its decision.
13. Consequently, I conclude that the totem sign adversely harms the amenity of the area and conflicts with aims of the Framework as set out above. For the reasons given above, and having regard to all other matters raised, the appeal should be dismissed.

David Troy

INSPECTOR