



Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 11 November 2019

by Adrian Caines BSc(Hons) MSc TP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 2 December 2019

Appeal A Ref: APP/X5210/W/19/3229540

Suncheck Centre, 17 Woburn Place, Bloomsbury, London WC1H 0LN

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mrs Alix Knapman (Euronet Worldwide) against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Camden.
 - The application Ref 2019/1283/P, dated 7 February 2019, was refused by notice dated 17 May 2019.
 - The development proposed is described as installation of a Euronet NCR Self Serv 26 ATM through the Coram Place shop front glazed window through a new white laminate security replacing part of the existing glazing to the right of the window.
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Appeal B Ref: APP/X5210/H/19/3229549

Suncheck Centre, 17 Woburn Place, Bloomsbury, London WC1H 0LN

- 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 Mrs Alix Knapman (Euronet Worldwide) against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Camden.
 - The application Ref 2019/1744/A, dated 7 February 2019, was refused by notice dated 17 May 2019.
 - The advertisements proposed are described as NCR Self Serv 26 ATM fascia with blue surround and an illuminated blue and white ATM fascia sign with blue lettering "ATM" out of a white background. The existing projecting sign is to have new signage with blue lettering "ATM" out of a white background.
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Decision

1. Appeal A and Appeal B are both dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. The two appeals relate to the same appeal site and to each other. Although I have concluded that it is appropriate to consider them together to avoid duplication, each appeal is considered on its own merits.
3. The applications were made in the name of Ms Alix Greenaway (Euronet Worldwide). The appeals are made in the name of Mrs Alix Knapman (Euronet Worldwide). It has been clarified that this is one and the same person with Alix Knapman being the married name of Alix Greenaway, so I am satisfied that the appeals can proceed on this basis.

Main Issues

4. The first main issue in Appeal A is whether the ATM would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area (BCA), with the related main issue in Appeal B being the effect of the advertisements on the amenity of the area having regard to the BCA.
5. In addition, in respect of Appeal A only, there is a further main issue of whether the development would increase opportunities for crime and disorder in the local area.

Reasons

Conservation Area – Appeals A and B

6. The appeal site lies within the BCA. I find that the significance of the BCA derives from the quality and consistency in the formally planned street pattern, which is enhanced by the spatial character and predominant building forms surrounding it. The appeal building is a large eight storey building with dual frontages onto Woburn Place and Coram Street. The scale and well-ordered neo-Georgian detailing of the building, constructed in red brick and Portland stone, is typical of the predominant building character in the area. It is a prominent building, which through its own historic fabric and detailing, makes an important and positive contribution to the character and appearance of the BCA and its significance as a designated heritage asset, notwithstanding some modern shopfront alterations which have taken place at ground floor.
7. Camden's Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy (2011) identifies building frontages, among other things, as important elements of the public realm and states that the cumulative impact of small scale additions, including the cumulative impact of shop front alterations and excessive signage, can have an overall detrimental impact on the character of the BCA. In addition, Camden's Planning Guidance (CPG) Design (2019) requires alterations to existing shopfronts and advertisements to be sensitively designed and constructed of materials that are sympathetic to the host building so as not to detract from the character of the host building or the surrounding area. It advises that cash machines should not be dominant in size or materials, and that advertisements should be limited to only one main fascia and projecting sign per street frontage to avoid visual clutter.
8. The ATM would be installed within the Coram Street elevation of the corner ground floor unit. It would be surrounded by an internally illuminated Acrylic fascia panel with the letters 'ATM' in blue above, and placed within a new full-height white laminate security panel to the left of the doorway, replacing the current glazing. The internally illuminated projecting sign would have a white Acrylic background with blue 'ATM' letters. It has been described as a replacement for one of the two existing projecting signs on the Coram Street elevation.
9. I accept that the existing shop front and signage do not contribute positively to the quality and character of the host building and area. I also acknowledge that the ATM itself would be modest in scale and that similar ATMs are common within city centres. Nevertheless, together with the security panel, the ATM and its surround would infill the area to the side of the door, utilising unsympathetic modern materials. Their introduction onto an uncomplicated, mostly glass

frontage would emphasise the incongruity of the ATM. This would be exacerbated by the illumination of the surround, which would draw attention to the ATM, thus resulting in a dominant element within the shopfront. In combination with the extensive existing signage, which includes multiple fascia and projecting signs and other random window signage, the ATM and the proposed projecting sign would contribute to significant visual clutter, which would further compound the harm to the special quality and character of the building. As a result, the proposals would diminish the contribution that the building makes to the BCA.

10. My attention has been drawn to a previous planning and advert permission for an ATM in the shop front¹, but from the information before me, it was in a different part of the shopfront and I am not aware of the circumstances that led to that proposal being accepted. Moreover, it would have pre-dated the current development plan, local design guidance and the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) against which I must consider these proposals. In any case, I am required to consider the proposals on their own individual merits, which is the approach that I have taken in determining these appeals, and I have found that they would be harmful.
11. For all these reasons, I conclude that the ATM and advertisements would fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the BCA. As such, the proposals in Appeal A would be contrary to Camden Local Plan 2017 (LP) Policies D1, D2, D3, D4 and the CPG Design guidance on shopfronts and ATMs. Collectively, these seek high quality design, detailing and materials, which respects local character and preserves, or where possible, enhances the historic environment. In respect of Appeal B, the Framework requires that advertisements should be subject to control only in the interests of amenity and public safety. Given my findings above, I conclude that the advertisements would be harmful to amenity. The Council has also referenced LP Policy A1 in the refusal reasons for Appeal A, but it relates to living conditions matters and is therefore not relevant to this main issue, and I find no conflict with it.
12. The harm to the BCA as a designated heritage asset would be 'less than substantial' in the terms of paragraph 196 of the Framework and is therefore required to be weighed against the public benefits of the scheme. The ATM would offer a public benefit by providing access to cash for the community, but bearing in mind the availability of at least three alternative ATM facilities close by, and increasing use of cashless transactions by the general public, I attach very little weight to this benefit. Accordingly, this benefit does not outweigh the less than substantial harm to the designated heritage asset.

Crime – Appeal A

13. I note that the Council's Community Safety team did not object to the ATM, but did raise some concern over attracting begging by rough sleepers, albeit it hadn't received recent reports of such activities. However, during my site visit I did observe begging outside the hotel on the opposite side of the road near the tourist bus stop, but I appreciate this is only a snapshot observation.
14. More crucially, the Metropolitan Police Services (MPS) has formally objected to the ATM. It highlights that the area is currently suffering from a high number of

¹ 2008/0946P & 2008/0950/A

rough sleepers and that users of the existing ATM devices in the area are subjected to aggressive and intimidating begging.

15. Whilst I appreciate these concerns, I am also mindful that such effects could similarly be attributed to many other locations in the city and there is little substantive evidence before me to establish a direct link between ATMs and anti-social behaviour in the area, indeed the begging I witnessed was not related to an ATM.
16. Nevertheless, a further concern raised by the MPS is the potential for the ATM users to be targeted by distraction thefts, which are said to occur in the area. The MPS advises that because this particular area contains a large number of hotels, tourist attractions and student accommodation, it has many people who may potentially be taken advantage of in this manner.
17. The adjoining building on Woburn Place is a student hall of residence, and as I already alluded to, immediately opposite is a hotel and busy hop on/off tourist bus stop. Given the use of the appeal site as a foreign exchange, I accept that there is a reasonable likelihood that this particular ATM would be used by many tourists and students who may have naivety to local crime issues. The clear lines of sight to the ATM in this location would allow users withdrawing money to be observed, and to be potentially earmarked as a target for theft. As this would be directly related to the appeal proposal, and in the absence of any contradictory evidence before me, it is reasonable to give significant weight to the MPS concerns in this respect.
18. I acknowledge that the appellant company is prepared to introduce any additional security specifications on the ATM as recommended by the MPS, but whilst such measures would be appropriate to protect the personal safety of its users whilst withdrawing money, they would not sufficiently reduce the risk of users being targeted afterwards in the manner suggested by the MPS.
19. Having regard to all these matters, I conclude, in respect of appeal A, that the development would have the realistic potential to increase opportunities for crime and disorder in the local area. As such, it would be contrary to LP Policy C5, which requires new development to reduce crime opportunities and help to create safe and secure places, particularly in areas of high crime levels, such as Bloomsbury and other places identified in the policy.

Conclusion

20. For the reasons above, having regard to all matters raised, I conclude that Appeal A and Appeal B should be dismissed.

Adrian Caines

INSPECTOR