
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 30 January 2020

by R Morgan MCD MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 16 March 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/C4235/Z/19/3243209

Vernon Building Society, 17-19 St Petersgate, Stockport SK1 1HF

- 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 Miss Michelle Shaw against the decision of Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council.
 - The application Ref DC/074818, dated 4 November 2019, was refused by notice dated 25 November 2019.
 - The advertisement proposed is 2 no. LED internally illuminated formed aluminium panels.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and express consent is granted for the display of the signs as applied for. The consent is for five years from the date of this decision and is subject to the five standard conditions set out in the Regulations and the following additional conditions:
 - The intensity of the illumination of the signs permitted by this consent shall be no greater than 180 candela.

Procedural Matter

2. The signs have already been erected. The application is therefore retrospective and I have determined the appeal on the same basis.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the advertisements on the visual amenity of the area.

Reasons

4. The signs which are the subject of this appeal are sited on a modern three storey office building occupied by Vernon Building Society, located in Stockport town centre. The ground floor of the building is used as a branch with offices above.
5. The site is located within the St Peters Conservation Area (CA) which covers a significant part of the town centre. In accordance with the statutory duty set out in Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, I have paid special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.
6. The area is associated with the industrial development of the town, and St Petersgate is an important historical route within in the CA. Along St

Petersgate are groups of nineteenth and early twentieth century commercial buildings, as well as more modern developments which vary considerably in their architectural style and contribution to the CA.

7. The Vernon Building Society occupies a three-storey, modern red brick building, with buff coloured brick banding highlighting the fenestration. The building itself has been designed to reflect the character of the area and contributes positively to the CA.
8. Uses in the area surrounding the appeal site are predominately commercial and retail, but the area does not appear to be particularly thriving, with a number of vacant shop units. Whilst some examples of sensitive shop fronts and signage exist along the street, many are not of a high quality and do not contribute positively to the CA.
9. The appeal proposal consists of 2 aluminium panel signs, with vinyl applied to acrylic, each with coloured lettering on a white background. The signs are located on either side of the main entrance to the building, which is on the corner of St Petersgate and Etchells Street. The signage is a replacement for previous non illuminated lettering which was in the same position. Three illuminated circular signs, also with coloured lettering on a white background, were considered to be like for like replacements and do not form part of the application.
10. The appeal signage comprises of rectangular white panels which are larger than the previous green lettering. However, they are the same width as the windows below and positioned so that the brick banding remains visible. In the context of the building, the scale of the signage is appropriate and does not appear overly large or excessive. The design, which incorporates the new company logo, is not unattractive and does not appear out of place on this modern building. White signage, render and shop fronts are a common feature in the area which provides contrast with the traditional red brick buildings, and the white appearance of the signs does not appear obtrusive within the streetscene.
11. The Council has referred to the Shopfronts and Related Advertisements SPD, which refers to the use of materials in shop fronts, and says that glossy reflective surfaces such as acrylic sheeting, and projecting box signs with or without illuminations are normally out of place in conservation areas (paragraphs 6.12 and 8.1). However, in the area immediately surrounding the appeal site there are many examples of large plastic style advertisements on shop fronts, and projecting box signs are a common feature.
12. I agree that the poor quality signage in the area around the appeal site detracts from the character and appearance of the conservation area and that further poor quality advertisements should be avoided. However, in this case the signage is not unduly large or prominent in the streetscene and the materials used are appropriate within the context of this modern building.
13. The signs are internally illuminated and I note the Council's comments that such signs are not generally appropriate in conservation areas. I agree that the street is not poorly lit and that the building society is generally not open after dark. However, the lighting of the signs is fairly subtle as only the letters and the logo are illuminated, within the otherwise white background. The existing round signs on the building are already lit and the additional modest

illumination of the two appeal signs does not stand out as an incongruous feature in relation to the building, or the streetscene.

14. I conclude that the signs have not caused any significant harm to the visual amenity of the area, and the character and appearance of the conservation area has been preserved.
15. I have taken into account the provisions of the development plan, so far as they are relevant, in accordance with the Regulations. I have found no conflict with Saved Policy HC1.3 of the Unitary Development Plan Review 2006, which is concerned with development in conservation areas, or Policies SIE-1 and SIE-3 of the Core Strategy 2011 which require high quality design in new development and the protection of the historic environment. There is also no conflict with the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework relating to design or the historic environment.

Conclusion

16. For the reasons outlined above the appeal is allowed. In addition to the standard conditions, the Council has suggested the inclusion of an additional condition to limit levels of illumination in the interests of highway safety, which I have imposed.

R Morgan

INSPECTOR