
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 27 August 2020

by R Morgan MCD MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 22 September 2020

Appeal Ref: APP/M3455/Z/20/3253417

39 Hartshill Road, Hartshill, Stoke-on-Trent ST4 7QT

- 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 Alight Media against the decision of Stoke-on-Trent Council.
 - The application Ref 65206, dated 16 March 2020, was refused by notice dated 7 May 2020.
 - The advertisement proposed is replacement of existing 48-sheet advertisement display with an illuminated 48-sheet digital advertisement display.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issues are the effect of the proposal on the amenity of the area and on public safety.

Reasons

Amenity

3. When travelling along Hartshill Road (A52) towards the centre of Stoke, the area around the appeal site marks a transition between the predominately residential area of Hartshill to the north and west, and the area to the south east, which is characterised by small scale commercial development, shops and other town centre uses. This area has signs of decline and some pieces of vacant land, but there are also traditional buildings of historical interest and the area is designated as the Stoke Conservation Area (SCA).
4. The proposed digital display would be located on the end wall of a terrace of commercial properties fronting onto Hartshill Road, close to the junction with Honeywall. The proposed sign would be of a similar size to the existing paper display, which although large, is non-illuminated and does not appear obtrusive in its setting. The existing sign occupies much of the side elevation of 39 Hartshill Road, and the effect of changing the position of the sign on the wall would be minimal.
5. However, the proposed LED digital display would appear much brighter and would be far more conspicuous within the streetscene than the current hoarding. Although it would be viewed in the context of commercial development along Hartshill Road, the area is characterised by low key, small scale development and older buildings, so the large modern display would

appear out of place. Signage in the area is also generally smaller in scale than the proposed sign, and there are no other large, digital displays along this section of the A52. As a result of its size and LED digital method of illumination, the sign would stand out far more than any other feature in the streetscene, causing it to appear visually incongruous and overly dominant along this section of Hartshill Road, on the approach to the SCA.

6. Honeywall is a residential street with houses and flats along one side, which look down on the appeal site from an elevated position, across an area of amenity open space. The appeal site is close to these properties and is directly visible from them, albeit at an angle. Although the level of illumination would be within industry guidelines, the vivid display with changing images would significantly catch the eye and would appear unduly prominent and intrusive when viewed from Honeywall and the residences along it. The digital sign would alter the character of the area and cause harm to the amenity of this residential street.
7. Owing to its scale and method of illumination, I therefore find that the advertisement would introduce a visually prominent and incongruous feature which would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area. This would be contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework, which seeks to control advertisements in the interest of amenity.

Public Safety

8. The sign would be located on a busy section of the A52 close to the junction with Honeywall. I note comments from the highways officer that, due to the topography and amount of traffic, turning right out of Honeywall can be difficult at busy times and that any additional distraction should be avoided.
9. The sign would be visible to drivers making this manoeuvre, and a digital display may be more noticeable than the existing paper sign. However, drivers are accustomed to rapidly processing a wide range of visual features and signs, including digital displays. The speed of change and the transition between digital images on the display could be controlled in accordance with safety guidance, to minimise distraction. Traffic would not be travelling at fast speeds in this location, and the sign would not interfere with any road signs or traffic lights.
10. I am satisfied that the proposal would not cause undue distraction to drivers or other road users using this junction, and that the effect on public safety would be acceptable.

Other Matters

11. I note that there are other digital displays in the wider area, some of which are located on the ends of terraced buildings and in areas of mixed use. The appellant has drawn my attention to a sign at Lonsdale Street, close to a road junction and directly facing houses on the other side of the road. Whilst the proposal was considered to be acceptable by the Council, the officer report is very brief with little explanation or assessment of impacts.
12. The sign at Moorland Road, close to a road junction, was also considered acceptable by the Council although I note that concerns were raised by the

Design and Conservation officer about the impact of the proposal on a conservation area. In assessing the case, the officer noted that the existing sign was illuminated and that there were no controls in place over illumination levels, which is different from the current appeal proposal in which the existing sign is non-illuminated, and so no such fall-back position exists.

13. Whilst I note the appellants comments about inconsistent decision making by the Council, the examples provided are in different locations to the appeal proposal and do not provide a justification for allowing the proposed sign, which would cause harm to the amenity of the area.

Conclusion

14. I have found that the proposal would be acceptable in terms of public safety, but this would not outweigh the harm to amenity which I have identified. For the reasons given, I conclude that the appeal is dismissed.

R Morgan

INSPECTOR