
Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 5 October 2020

by Graham Chamberlain BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 25th November 2020

Appeal A - Appeal Ref: APP/C1950/Y/20/3250312

Comet Hotel, St Albans Road West, Hatfield, Hertfordshire AL10 9RH

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 against a refusal to grant listed building consent.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Smith of Comet Hatfield Construction Ltd against the decision of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 6/2019/3245/LB, dated 23 December 2019, was refused by notice dated 27 February 2020.
 - The works proposed are described as 'Installation of signage (multiple locations)'.
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Appeal B - Appeal Ref: APP/C1950/H/20/3250316

Comet Hotel, St Albans Road West, Hatfield, Hertfordshire AL10 9RH

- 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 Smith of Comet Hatfield Construction Ltd against the decision of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 6/2019/3244/ADV, dated 23 December 2019, was refused by notice dated 27 February 2020.
 - The advertisement proposed is described as 'installation of signage - illuminated brushed stainless-steel lettered signage (x2)'.
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Decisions

1. Appeal A – The appeal is allowed and listed building consent is granted for the installation of signage at The Comet Hotel, St Albans Road West, Hatfield, Hertfordshire AL10 9RH in accordance with the terms of the application Ref: 6/2019/3245/LB dated 23 December 2019 and subject to the following conditions:
 - 1) The works hereby authorised shall begin not later than 3 years from the date of this consent.
 - 2) The works hereby authorised shall be undertaken only in accordance with the following approved plans: Drawing numbers P1004, P1003, P1002 P1001 and P1000.
2. Appeal B - The appeal is allowed, and express consent is granted for the installation of signage, namely the two illuminated brushed stainless-steel lettered 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 Regulations¹ and the following additional condition: The intensity of the

¹ Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007

illumination of the signs permitted by this consent shall be within that recommended by the Institute of Lighting Professionals in its Professional Lighting Guide 05 (PLG 05) Brightness of Illuminated Advertisements (or its equivalent in a replacement Guide).

Preliminary Matters

3. The appeal site is referred to as the Ramada Hatfield on the application forms but as the Comet Hotel elsewhere in the submissions of the Council and appellant. I have used the latter in my formal decision as this is more accurate.

Main Issues

4. The main issues in these appeals are:
 - Whether the proposed works would preserve the Grade II listed building known as The Comet Hotel² or any features of special architectural interest that it possesses; and
 - The effect of the proposed advertisements on the amenity of the area, with particular reference to the effect on the listed building as a feature of historic and architectural interest.

Reasons

Whether the proposed works would preserve the listed building

5. The Comet Hotel was listed in 1981 and is a fine example of a 20th Century public house. It dates from the early 1930s as was probably built to cater for the growing demand for roadside facilities that followed the advent of recreational motoring. It was designed by the notable architect E B Musman and exhibits the symmetrical modern style he is associated with. The streamlined elevations are generally simple and have a horizontal emphasis that is accentuated by the shape of the windows. The curves at the front of the building and the use of geometric shapes and sharp lines throughout provide attractive art deco styling. The building's unusual and distinctive plan in the shape of an aeroplane provides it with a unique character, and supposedly provides a local connection to the De Havilland company.
6. Consequently, the significance and special interest of the listed building includes the communal, evidential, historic and aesthetic value that can be gleaned from it as an indicator of social change and local history and as an important example of modernist sculptural architecture
7. The two illuminated signs would be located on the curved 'wing tips' of the building and would therefore be visually pronounced. They would also be located where signage has not previously been positioned. It is unclear what input E B Musman had into signage and how it was intended to relate to his original design vision. However, historic photographs demonstrate that previous signage, although of differing quality, has never visually dominated the building. Consequently, there is a risk that further signage would clutter what was clearly intended as a building with a simple streamlined appearance.
8. Nevertheless, the symmetrical placement and horizontal emphasis of the signs would reinforce the architectural composition and character of the building.

² The building was listed as The Comet Public House

The content of the signage would also relate to the original use of the building as a roadside hotel, which endures. Moreover, the proposed signs would not have a strident appearance due to a siting well below the eaves line.

9. The adverts would also be reasonably modest in size when viewed in the context of the elevations as a whole and would respect the proportions of the brickwork 'fascias' they would be fixed to. The lettering and illumination would also match the existing signs on the property and employ a restrained styling that would respond positively to its the simple lines. Accordingly, the design and proposed siting of the signs has been well conceived and would respond appropriately to the architectural character of the listed building.
10. The existing signs on the building do not clutter the elevations and are logically placed to respond to both their function and the character of the building. The existing signage on the south eastern elevation is located within a recessed part of the building and is therefore reasonably discrete. The sign proposed on this elevation would be positioned away from this existing signage. As a result, it would not, in combination with the existing signs, have a harmful cluttering effect. The sign proposed for the north western elevation would be positioned closer to existing signage, but its presence would be advantageous in retaining the building's symmetry in views from Comet Way. Thus, the proposal would not harmfully clutter the building's elevations.
11. In conclusion, the proposal would preserve the listed building. Its significance and special interest would not be harmed. This would adhere to the expectations of s16(2) of the Act³, Paragraphs 184 and 185 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the 'Framework') and Policies D1 and D2 of The Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005 (LP) in so far as relevant.

The effect of the proposed advertisements on the amenity of the area

12. The Regulations, as well as Paragraph 132 of the Framework, require decisions relating to advertisement consent to be made only in the interests of amenity and public safety. Public safety is not raised as a ground of objection by the Council and I have no reason to disagree. The Regulations state that factors relevant to 'amenity' include the general characteristics of the locality, including the presence of any feature of historic or architectural interest.
13. The Council has refused the application for advertisement consent due to concerns the proposed signage would clutter the elevations of the building and detract from its architectural interest, and therefore harm the character and visual amenity of the locality. However, for the reasons already outlined, the adverts would not harmfully clutter the elevations of the listed building and would respond appropriately to its architectural interest when taken in isolation or when considered cumulatively with existing adverts. Thus, the proposal would not harm the amenity of the area.
14. In reaching this view I have considered Policy D1 of the LP, supported by the Council's Supplementary Design Guidance, which together seek to secure high quality design⁴. Given I have concluded that the proposal would not harm amenity, the proposal would not conflict with this policy and guidance.

³ The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

⁴ The Council has referred to s72 of the Act in its reason for refusal, but this is an erroneous reference because the site is not in a Conservation Area.

Conditions

15. Appeal A – In addition to imposing the standard commencement condition it is necessary to impose a drawings condition in the interests of certainty.
16. Appeal B - I have imposed the five standard conditions set out in Schedule 2 of the 2007 Regulations and a non-standard condition relating to illumination. This is necessary in the interests of maintaining public safety and visual amenity.

Conclusions

17. Appeal A - The proposal would preserve the listed building and therefore satisfy the requirements of the Act, the Framework and development plan policies in so far as relevant. The appeal should therefore be allowed.
18. Appeal B – For the reasons set out above, the proposal would not harm the amenity of the area and therefore the appeal is allowed.

Graham Chamberlain
INSPECTOR