



Appeal Decision

Site Visit made on 13 July 2021

by J M Tweddle BSc(Hons) MSc(Dist) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 17 August 2021

Appeal Ref: APP/J2373/Z/21/3273834

Layton Methodist Church, Westcliffe Drive, Blackpool, FY3 7DZ

- 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 Trustees of Layton Methodist Church against the decision of Blackpool Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 20/0804, dated 18 December 2020, was refused by notice dated 24 March 2021.
 - The advertisement proposed is Display of LED signage above church front door facing Westcliffe Drive following the removal of three existing signs (resubmission of application 20/0072).
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. A revised version of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was published on 20 July 2021. I have had regard to the revised Framework in my decision and I am satisfied that this has not prejudiced any party.
3. The Council has drawn my attention to a number of development plan policies and supplementary planning guidance that it considers relevant to the appeal and I have taken them into account where relevant. However, powers under the Regulations¹ to control advertisements may be exercised only in the interests of amenity and public safety, taking account of any material factors. This is reiterated by the Framework and the Planning Practice guidance. Consequently, the Council's policies and guidance have not therefore, by themselves, been decisive.

Main Issue

4. The Council raise no objection to the proposed advertisement in respect of public safety and I see no reason to disagree in this regard. Accordingly, the main issue in this case is the effect of the proposed digital advertisement on the amenity of the area, having regard to the locally listed status of the appeal building.

Reasons

5. Layton Methodist Church is included on the Council's local list of non-designated heritage assets. Dating from the Inter-war period, the building is constructed of red brick with segmental-headed traceried windows and is dominated by a square tower to its southwest corner, resulting in a visually

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

striking architectural composition. The Church enjoys a prominent location, fronting Westcliffe Drive and overlooking the junction with Talbot Road, Layton Road, Grange Road and Annesley Avenue. Accordingly, it forms a prominent local landmark in this part of the town.

6. The surrounding area is predominantly residential in character. A local parade of shops and facilities exist to the north and south of the appeal site with modern shopfronts and advertisements of varying type and scale. Layton Cemetery is located directly opposite the site and provides a verdant sense of spaciousness to the area.
7. The proposal seeks to replace an existing internally illuminated sign over the main entrance to the Church with an internally illuminated full colour digital LED graphic information display measuring 2048mm by 540mm. The new LED sign would be used to advertise events and activities taking place at the Church, recognising the multi-use nature of the building beyond its traditional function as a place of worship.
8. In addition, the proposal would include the removal of three existing signs from the principal elevation, which the appellant considers to be inappropriate and do little to conserve or enhance the heritage asset. However, there is no mechanism before me that would secure the removal of these signs in the event that the appeal was to succeed.
9. The proposed sign would be of a modest scale that would not overwhelm the principal elevation of the Church. Nonetheless, its proposed digital LED method of illumination and prominent positioning over the main entrance would result in a visually discordant feature, undermining the historic character and architectural qualities of the building. In doing so, the proposed advertisement would result in clear harm to the non-designated heritage asset.
10. Furthermore, given the site's prominent location, the inclusion of a digital LED display screen with alternating imagery and text would be a conspicuous addition to the street. It would be particularly obvious in public views on the approach from Talbot Road and Annesley Avenue. Consequently, its prominent location would draw attention to its discordant appearance, resulting in harm to the visual amenity of the surrounding area.
11. Drawing all these points together, the proposed digital advertisement would appear as a prominent and discordant feature that would significantly harm the amenity of the area, having regard to the locally listed status of the appeal building. Hence, the proposal would also conflict with Policies CS7 and CS8 of the Blackpool Local Plan Part 1: Core Strategy (2012-2027) and saved policies LQ1, LQ13, BH3 and BH13 of the Blackpool Local Plan 2001-2016, which, although not decisive, together seek to achieve high standards of design, strengthen the townscape character created by historic buildings and not permit advertisements that would detract from the appearance of buildings or the wider streetscene.
12. Accordingly, the proposal would also conflict with the guidance set out in the Council's Signage Supplementary Planning Document (2018) which advises that illuminated signs on heritage assets will only be permitted where their design is well related to the building and causes no visual or physical harm to the heritage asset or its setting.

13. There would also be conflict with the policies of the Framework at paragraph 136 which recognises that the quality and character of places can suffer when advertisements are poorly sited and designed.

Other Matters

14. In support of the appeal, the appellant has drawn my attention to a consent for two digital LED display screens at Layton Institute² and advises that Blackpool has a tradition of allowing digital signage on prominent historic buildings including Blackpool Tower, Blackpool Pleasure Beach White Tower and the Winter Gardens. Be that as it may, I have considered the proposal on its own merits and reach my own conclusions regarding its effects.
15. I acknowledge the appellant's comments in relation to the challenges faced by churches and that many face the threat of closure. I also recognise the important social role that the Church plays in the local community and its desire to modernise its methods of advertising events and activities in order to reach a wider audience and realise financial efficiencies. However, these matters do not outweigh the harm I have found, and I have no evidence before me to suggest that the Church would cease its activities in the event that the appeal should not succeed. Nor am I convinced that the use of an LED digital sign is the only effective way of promoting the Church's activities to the public.

Conclusion

16. For the reasons given above, and having regard to all other material factors raised, I conclude that the appeal should fail.

J M Tweddle

INSPECTOR

² Ref. 18/0731