
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 10 March 2022

by David Reed BSc DipTP DMS MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 21 March 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/N5660/Z/22/3292305

Land at Westminster Bridge Road, Lambeth, SE1 7EH

- 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 Thomas Johnston, JCDecaux UK Ltd against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Lambeth.
 - The application Ref 21/04223/ADV, dated 1 November 2021, was refused by notice dated 23 December 2021.
 - The advertisement proposed is the installation of an internally illuminated digital display on a specially designed Wilmotte leg.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

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

Reasons

Amenity

3. The proposal is for a freestanding digital display unit, 6.43 m wide and 3.56 m high, supported 3 m above ground level by a Wilmotte angle leg. The display would be located on the back edge of the footway immediately outside the grounds of St Thomas' Hospital where it would face traffic travelling westbound along Westminster Bridge Road at the traffic light controlled junction with Lambeth Palace Road. It would therefore occupy a prominent position on the approach to Westminster Bridge, inside the Albert Embankment/South Bank Conservation Areas (CAs) which extend along the River Thames frontage.
4. The digital display would be seen against a backdrop of tall deciduous trees behind which lie the large scale buildings of St Thomas' Hospital. The other buildings in the immediate vicinity are also large scale, including the Park Plaza Hotel opposite, the Urbanest/DLD College building, the County Hall complex, Becket House and Waterloo Station. Whilst a heavily trafficked and busy part of Central London, with various traffic and building signs, the area is mainly free of street clutter with advertisements generally small scale and limited to roadside bus shelters.
5. In this context the proposal, an isolated advertisement in front of St Thomas' Hospital, would appear intrusive and incongruous in the street scene. The

display would detract from the amenity value of the roadside trees, in fact some of the low thin branches which overhang the footway would need to be cut back to accommodate it. It would add a large, intrusive, commercial sign into a high quality environment of large scale institutional and other buildings.

6. This is reflected in the location of the site within the Albert Embankment CA, next to the South Bank CA and within the setting of the Lambert Palace CA which lies to the south. Large scale billboards and digital advertisements are not characteristic of these CAs. The visually important and locally listed early 20th century County Hall complex lies just across the road to the north west. The display would also be seen on an important approach to the Westminster World Heritage Site (WHS), just before the classic riverside view of the Palace of Westminster opens up across Westminster Bridge. Indeed, when walking past the Urbanest/DLD College building, the display unit would be in the foreground when the Elizabeth Tower is first seen in the distance.
7. There are just two examples of large digital advertisements in the vicinity of the site. One faces traffic heading eastbound along Addington Street, but this is mounted against the long side of Waterloo Station, arguably providing some visual interest. The other lies on the corner of Lambeth Place Road and Royal Street, but this screens an unattractive gable end and is understood to be temporary until the site is redeveloped. Consequently, neither are comparable to the current proposal.
8. For these reasons the proposal would significantly harm the amenity of the area. It would fail to conserve the character and appearance of the CAs and would detract from the approach to the Westminster WHS.

Public safety

9. The advertisement display would be seen by traffic approaching the traffic lights controlling the Westminster Bridge Road/Lambeth Palace Road junction. Planning Practice Guidance advises that all advertisements are intended to attract attention but those at points such as junctions and pedestrian crossings, where drivers need to take more care, are more likely to affect public safety.
10. In this case, being sited behind the traffic lights, from some positions on the approach the display would frame the signal heads themselves, potentially causing a visual clash or conflict for approaching drivers. The display could also distract drivers when stopping or moving off from the stop line. The scope for confusing or distracting drivers could therefore result in a danger to road users and an adverse effect on public safety.

Conclusion

11. Advertisements are subject to control in the interests of amenity and public safety. Account has been taken of the conflict with Policies Q17, Q22 and Q23 of the Lambeth Local Plan 2021 insofar as they are material to these issues. Notwithstanding the economic benefits that would be generated by the proposal, in the light of the conclusions in relation to amenity and public safety, the appeal should be dismissed.

David Reed

INSPECTOR