
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 12 April 2022

by J D Westbrook BSc(Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 21ST April 2022

Appeal Ref: APP/B1930/Z/21/3283892
80 St Peters Street, ST ALBANS, AL1 3DQ

- 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 MRA Oxford Limited against the decision of St Albans City Council.
 - The application Ref 5/21/0353, dated 8 February 2021, was refused by notice dated 23 August 2021.
 - The advertisement proposed is the installation of front externally illuminated fascia panels and letters.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matter

2. The application to which this appeal refers resulted in a partial express consent. The proposal was for the retention of three externally illuminated fascia signs and one internally illuminated wooden wall menu display. The menu display was granted express consent, but the three fascia signs were not. This appeal relates to the refusal to grant consent for the fascia signs.

Main Issue

3. The main issue in this case is the effect of the three externally illuminated fascia signs on the character and appearance of the St Albans Conservation Area (CA).

Reasons

4. The three externally illuminated fascia signs are in place on the appeal property, which is a detached, brick-built restaurant building situated at the junction of Harpenden Road and Stonecross, around 800 metres north of the centre of the city. The site is located close to the northern edge of the CA, and the property is a Locally Listed Building.
5. There are two wide fascia signs, one either side of the central entrance door. They both have flat cut, mirror polished gold lettering on a landscape backing panel of blue-painted powder coated aluminium. They are externally illuminated to a level of 3cd/m², the illumination being of a static nature. There is also an upper-level panel sign, with a portrait panel in blue acrylic, incorporating the restaurant's registered logo. This upper-level sign is externally illuminated to a level of 2cd/m², and is also static in nature.

6. The Council considers that the proposed external illumination of the fascia signs is acceptable within a Conservation Area, and I concur with that view. However, the Council contends that the use of less traditional materials in the fascia signs, including blue aluminium, polished stainless steel and acrylic lettering is not appropriate in a Conservation Area. The appeal property is locally listed and it occupies a particularly prominent location, such that the impact of the signs on the visual amenity of the CA is significant.
7. The appellants contend that the installed signage is replacement for earlier signage on the property, when under a previous ownership, and that it represents an attempt to refresh the exterior as part of works carried out by way of investment in the appeal premises. Moreover, care was taken only to place advertisements where there had long been signage already and a similar arrangement is displayed. Finally, the appellants contend that maintaining good levels of visitation is important to the continued economic vitality of the unit, and that the signage is an important element in attracting customers.
8. Policy 87 of the Council's Local Plan (LP) indicates that, with regard to Locally Listed Buildings, planning permission will not be granted for alterations and extensions unless features of architectural or historic interest are preserved. Policy 90 of the LP indicates that advertisements should be designed to take into account the safeguarding of historic features and they should have regard to the design of the building and the location. Advertisements which do not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of a Conservation Area will be refused.
9. In this case, the appeal property occupies a prominent site where the A1081, St Peters Street, running north out of the city centre, meets the B651 at what is, effectively, a Y-junction. The appeal property forms a focal feature within the arms of the Y-junction. It is a brick-built structure, with a symmetrical façade.
10. The upper-level sign would appear to be a replacement for an externally illuminated 'cartoon-style' sign, which related to a previous use of the property as 'The Cricketers' Public House. Given that the cartoon no longer applies to the current use of the property, and would, therefore, now seem somewhat out of context, I consider that the use of the restaurant logo in its place does not result in any harm to the appearance of the property.
11. With regard to the two larger fascia signs, one either side of the front entrance, I find that the use of coloured fascia boards, coupled with the non-traditional materials chosen, results in an unsympathetic design and appearance in relation to the style and character of the building in this prominent location. I note that the appellants desire a readily noticeable signage on the building for sound business reasons, but I am not convinced that the design and materials chosen are the only options available. Previous uses have apparently not used coloured fascia boards, but have relied solely on illuminated lettering, which I consider to be more appropriate on this style of building and in this part of the CA. I note that the only other equivalent signage on a significant building in the vicinity is attached to the front elevation of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, a few metres to the south, and this takes the form of individual letters fixed directly to the brick wall background.
12. The Appellants point to the signage on the nearby Jolly Sailor Public House, on Stonecross, which includes lettering on a fascia board. However, this is a very

different design of building in a less prominent position, and I do not, therefore, consider that it should be seen as a precedent for the current signage on the appeal building.

13. In conclusion, I find that the fascia boards/signage currently in place on the appeal property are harmful to the visual amenity of the locality, and that, as a result, they do not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the CA. Whilst the harm is less than substantial, there are no public benefits to outweigh this harm. On this basis also, I find that the proposal conflicts with Policies 87 and 90 of the LP. Accordingly, I dismiss the appeal.

J D Westbrook

INSPECTOR