



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 17 January 2023

by A.Graham BA(hons) MAued IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 21st February 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/B4215/W/22/3302598

Land Adjacent to the Railway Bridge on Stockport Road, Opposite Slade Lane, Manchester M13 0RZ

- 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 Network Rail against the decision of Manchester City Council.
 - The application Ref: 133242/AOH/2022 dated 15 March 2022, was refused by notice dated 12 May 2022.
 - The application is for installation of 48 sheet digital LED billboard to replace the current static billboards on site.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issue is the impact of the proposal upon the amenity and character and appearance of the area and upon the setting of a Grade II Listed Building.

Reasons

3. The appeal site is located upon an existing railway embankment associated with a bridge that serves the Manchester to London railway line and crosses Stockport Road in this location. The site is to the outskirts of what appears as a thriving local centre at Longsight with shops and market a short distance to the north. There is also an existing bus stop immediately adjacent to the site and to the opposite side of the railway bridge there are more houses and retail premises.
4. The site is roughly triangular in shape and currently includes one large 98 sheet advertisement hoarding and a smaller 48 type hoarding that is positioned in an alternative orientation parallel to the road so that the panels appear somewhat angled in different directions. The larger such hoarding is externally illuminated with a projecting strip light from its upper edge. Due to the topography and the railway embankment, there is a change in level between the existing pedestrian footway along Stockport Road and the location of the hoardings upon the site. This, together with a brick plinth wall raises the level of the hoardings above street level and means that the upper edge of the boards are around a similar height as that of the railway bridge railings.
5. To the opposite side of Stockport Road there is a triangular shaped public park that marks the junction of Stockport Road and Slade Lane. To the southern end

of this park there is the Slade Lane Neighbourhood Centre which is a Grade II Listed Building. The Listed Building faces onto the park and although some mature trees obscure the structure, it is visible from the surrounds of the appeal site itself. The Listed Building was likely a former vicarage and is now a community building. Its significance is largely determined through its architectural and aesthetic heritage value as well as its communal significance. The building stands at a higher level above the road and as such it commands a dominant position over Stockport Road and can be seen when looking towards the appeal site itself from Longsight centre which also adds to the building's significance.

6. In light of the identification of this Listed Building, I am required by Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. This is reflected within the National Planning Policy Framework (The Framework) that also states when considering the impact of proposed development on the significance of a heritage asset, that 'great weight' should be given to the asset's conservation.
7. The proposal before me would seek to remove the existing advertisement hoardings and replace them with a single LED illuminated panel that would face in a northerly direction towards the Longsight local centre. The panel would be constructed at a similar height above street level and upon a dark coloured plinth similar to that of the existing hoarding, but it would inevitably be smaller and reduce the size of the overall existing advertisements by around two thirds.
8. Policy EN1 of the Manchester Core Strategy outlines the Urban Design requirements that development should have regard to. This includes exploiting the opportunities for good design in order to enhance the overall image of the city, particularly on major routes. This is reflected in Policy DM1 which states that development should have regard to an area's character as well as built heritage. Although these are advisory policy requirements in this case, they do represent the expectation of how such proposals should respond to an area's visual amenity and as such I consider them relevant to this appeal.
9. Despite the amount of time that these hoardings have been present here, they do detract somewhat from the character and appearance of the area in their current form. They are of a large scale and they dominate the road frontage being obviously out of scale to the pedestrian environment that predominates within the local centre nearby. As a result, I consider that the existing hoardings represent a poor Urban Design response to this locality and fail to improve the visual amenity or the perception of the city.
10. Even so, through this proposal there is the potential that the existing appearance of the streetscene would be somewhat improved. This would occur through the physical reduction of the amount of signage here. Despite this, the proposed hoarding would still represent a large scale advertisement that continues to exhibit many of the disbenefits of those that currently exist. These would include the fact that the hoarding would still be located at a significantly higher level above the footway and would represent an intervention that is wholly out of scale with the pedestrian experience.

Moreover, the proposed hoarding would make the appearance of the sign felt more abruptly through its illuminated nature that would further cause harm to the visual amenity of the area.

11. Subsequent to this, I consider that the proposed hoarding would be within the setting of the Grade II Listed Building and would be visible within views of the Listed Building itself, especially when seen from parts of the park and Slade Lane. Despite the Listed Building being set across the road and within some tree coverage, I consider that there would still be the potential for some impact to the significance of this heritage asset.
12. Although the removal of the existing hoardings would offer some benefit to its setting, the siting of the advertisement panel and its illuminated nature would introduce a new structure, that, by definition, would be fighting for attention, on a comparable height to that of the Listed Building. As such the proposed LED advertisement would continue much of the detracting that already exists except in a more modern aesthetic.
13. Although I consider that there is some minor public benefit in the removal of some of the hoardings and also some potential for very limited benefit in terms of the ability to broadcast public service announcements on the proposed screen, I do not consider that these benefits are substantial enough to outweigh the less than substantial harm that would occur to the setting of the Listed Building as a result of these proposals.
14. In light of my findings above, although I find some minor benefit in the removal of some of these hoardings, I do not consider that the benefits of the reduced signage are significant enough to outweigh the harm to the visual amenity of the area that would be largely maintained through this proposal.
15. In light of the above assessment therefore, the proposal before me would result in a continuation of a harmful intervention that would fail to take the opportunities for good design in order to enhance the overall image of the city in this location or to respond well to the setting of a Listed Building. As such the proposal would cause harm to the visual amenities of the area.
16. As such the proposal would cause harm to the visual amenities of the area. It would also be in conflict with Policies EN1, DM1 and SP1 of the City of Manchester Core Strategy and Policies E3.3, DC15.1 and DC15.2 of the saved Manchester City Council Unitary Development Plan (UDP). Furthermore, the proposal would fail in its duty to respond to the visual amenities of the area through good design and the need for such proposals to create high quality and beautiful places as included within National Planning Policy Framework.

Conclusion

17. For the reasons given above, and taking into account of all other matters raised, I dismiss the appeal.

A Graham

INSPECTOR