

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 25 April 2023

by A Caines BSc(Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18 May 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/R5510/Z/22/3310368

Pavement Outside 63 (Natwest) Ruislip High Street, Ruislip HA4 8JB

- 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 (J C Decaux UK Ltd) against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Hillingdon.
 - The application Ref 77304/ADV/2022/45, dated 25 May 2022, was refused by notice dated 15 September 2022.
 - The advertisement proposed is an internally illuminated freestanding double-sided digital advertisement unit - advertised space measuring 1065mm x 1895mm.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. I undertook the site visit in conjunction with appeals for digital advertisements outside Nos 80, 100-102, 144, and 145-147 Ruislip High Street¹; each of which is subject to a separate decision, albeit there is some repetition involved.

Main Issue

3. The Council did not raise any concern in relation to public safety, and I have no reason to disagree. Therefore, the main issue for this appeal is the effect of the advertisements on amenity, with regard to the Ruislip Conservation Area.

Reasons

4. The appeal site is part of the pavement on Ruislip High Street and is within the Ruislip Conservation Area (the CA). High Street forms the commercial hub of the area, with parades of shops on both sides. It is described in the Ruislip Conservation Area Appraisal (2010) (the Appraisal) as a busy and traditional high street, mainly comprised of early 20th century shops of a variety of styles characteristic of the period with interesting architectural detailing and decoration, especially at the upper levels. However, the Appraisal also warns that poorly designed modern shopfronts and signage of inappropriate size, position, materials, and illumination, are negative factors which detract from the CA. It further notes that while the quality of the public realm is generally good, there is some clutter from traffic signage and cable cabinets, as well as from advertising boards and seating outside shops and restaurants.

¹ Appeal refs: APP/R5510/Z/22/3310367; APP/R5510/Z/22/3310369; APP/R5510/Z/22/3310371; APP/R5510/Z/22/3310372

5. More recent additions to the public realm include multiple communication hubs and other freestanding advertisement display units, some with regularly changing advertisements on the back. The number of these units within such a short stretch of road means they are often seen together, and combined with other street furniture, bus shelters, A-boards, and outdoor seating, now results in an excessive proliferation of pavement advertisements and general clutter, to the serious detriment of the character and appearance of the CA.
6. The appeal site is in a prominent corner position, close to the eastern junction of High Street with Midcroft in the northern part of High Street. The proposal would be located outside No 63, which is a distinctive 1930s former bank decorated with stilted window arches and contains multi-paned sash windows. It is identified in the Appraisal as a 'key unlisted building' that contributes positively to the significance of the CA. The location is also a termination of a 'key view' identified in the Appraisal. The existing double-sided poster display unit is a negative feature at the appeal site.
7. As the proposal is a replacement for the existing poster display unit, it would not create additional physical clutter or obstruction within the pavement. Nevertheless, it would have a more solid form compared to the existing unit, and due to its design, colour, and double-sided digital display screens, would be overtly more modern and eye-catching in appearance. It is also significant that the images on the digital display screens would change at regular intervals, whereas the current poster displays do not.
8. Consequently, the proposed digital advertisement unit would have a greater degree of prominence in the street scene. In my judgement, it would be a jarring feature against the key unlisted building it would be closely experienced with, and unduly intrusive in this prominent location and 'key view', both individually, and cumulatively with other advertisement units in the vicinity, including another nearby freestanding unit outside No 80. This would be the case even if the levels of illumination and the speed and frequency of image transitions on the display screens were carefully controlled.
9. For these reasons, I find that the proposal would be materially more harmful than the existing advertisement unit and would only serve to exacerbate the negative influences in this area. The proposal would therefore be harmful to the visual amenity of the area, and would not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the CA. Whilst not decisive, the proposal also conflicts with the relevant design, public realm, advertisement, and historic environment protection objectives of Policies BE1 and HE1 of the Hillingdon Local Plan: Part One - Strategic Policies (2012); Policies DMHB1, DMHB3, DMHB4, DMHB11, DMHB12 and DMHB13A of the Hillingdon Local Plan Part Two - Development Management Policies (2020); Policies HC1, D3 and D8 of the London Plan (2021); and Parts 12 and 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Other Matters

10. I have noted the 'Smart City' features of the proposed unit, but there are already multiple communication hubs along High Street with apparently similar functionality. In any event, the Regulations to control advertisements require that decisions are made only in the interests of amenity and public safety. The harm I have identified in respect of amenity is determinative in this case.

Conclusion

11. For the reasons given, I conclude that the proposed digital advertisement unit would be detrimental to the interests of amenity. Accordingly, the appeal should be dismissed.

A Caines

INSPECTOR