



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 19 July 2023

by Hannah Guest BSc (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 22 August 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/E0345/Z/23/3317591

Existing Advertising site at Basingstoke Road, corner of Elgar Road, Reading, RG2 0DP

- 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 JC Decaux UK Ltd against the decision of Reading Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 221158, dated 3 August 2022, was refused by notice dated 10 February 2023.
 - The advertisement proposed is removal of the existing four advertisement displays, followed by the installation of an internally illuminated digital advertisement as illustrated within the attached documentation.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The proposal includes the removal of four existing advertisements currently located on the appeal site. However, while the installation of the proposed advertisement would replace the larger 12m by 3m display, there is no substantive evidence before me demonstrating the legality of the existing signs or whether a discontinuance notice has been served by the Council to remove the other three advertisements. As shown below, the removal of the existing advertisements has not affected my decision on the main issues.

Main Issues

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

Reasons

Amenity

4. The appeal site is located next to the junction of the B3031 Basingstoke Road and Elgar Road South. The area is largely dominated by the road junction and frequent movement of traffic.
 5. Elgar Road South separates an area that is primarily commercial and industrial from an area that is primarily residential. There is a degree of vibrancy in the area, arising from the frequent traffic movements, and pedestrian and cycle movements. However, the moderate scale of the houses and the low and simple profiles of the commercial and industrial buildings provide more of a restrained backdrop and, together with the wide highway arrangement in this location, create a sense of spaciousness.
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6. In terms of advertisements, the four existing large advertisement displays, currently located on the appeal site, consist of three 6m x 3m displays and one 12m x 3m display. Two of the displays are externally illuminated.
7. There are also a variety of other advertisements within the immediate area. However, these advertisements are more modest in size, most are fixed to buildings rather than freestanding, and they tend to relate to the businesses where they are located. Although some of the other advertisements are internally illuminated, there did not appear to be any digital advertisements that changed their display in the immediate area.
8. The proposed advertisement would be a similar size to the three existing 6m x 3m advertisement displays on the appeal site. It would be located at the entrance to Elgar Road where the 12m x 3m display is currently positioned. In comparison to the existing advertisements on the appeal site, which are printed images, as well as other advertisements in the area, the proposed advertisement would be digital with a LED screen capable of showing static images that are automatically replaced every 10 seconds.
9. The existing advertisements are a prominent feature in the street scene, and the proposed advertisement, by virtue of its digital screen, internal illumination and change of display, would be even more prominent. Given the unassuming townscape and spacious character of the area, whether or not the proposed advertisement was considered to be an example of innovation, it would appear obtrusive and incongruous in the street scene, resulting in harm to the amenity of the area. This would be the case whether or not the existing advertisements were removed. In coming to this view, I have taken into account that there would be a moderate level of background lighting during dark provided by lighting columns and traffic.
10. In addition, the proposed advertisement would also obstruct ground and first floor windows of the adjacent house, No. 142 Basingstoke Road, which would have a direct and detrimental effect on the residential visual amenity of the occupants.
11. I have taken into account Policy OU4 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) (Local Plan), which seeks to ensure that the display of advertisements does not result in harm to amenity. While Policy CC7 of the Local Plan does not relate directly to advertisements, it also seeks to protect amenity by ensuring all development maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area. It is therefore material in this case. Given that I have concluded that the proposal would harm amenity, it would conflict with both of these policies.

Public Safety

12. Planning Practice Guidance advises on the locations and types of advertisement most likely to affect public safety on roads. It includes junctions and those advertisements that are internally illuminated and subject to frequent changes in display, such as the proposal.
13. I saw that, although generally moving at relatively slow speeds, a steady amount of traffic passes through the junction, which is likely to increase at peak times in the day.
14. The proposed advertisement would be seen by drivers approaching the junction from the south along the B3031 Basingstoke Road. For these drivers, the

junction includes a left filter lane onto Elgar Road South that is not controlled by traffic signals, as well as a short section of bus lane that requires buses to re-join the traffic as they move through the junction. These types of highway arrangements require drivers to take more care to ensure public safety. Also, despite the provision of central refuges, not all of the crossing points at the junction have separate signals for pedestrians.

15. From my observations on site, the proposed advertisement would not interfere with views of the traffic signals to such a degree that, this alone, would compromise public safety. Nevertheless, the proposed advertisement, by virtue of its external illumination and change of display, could be a distraction to drivers when approaching and moving through the junction. As such, there would be an increased risk of collision with other motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians. Thus, I find the proposed advertisement would harm public safety.
16. The appellant is willing for three conditions to be imposed on any consent in order to control the illuminance of the proposed advertisement, the type of images displayed and the time between changes in the display. However, even if these conditions were imposed, the proposed advertisement would still provide a level of distraction to drivers, over and above that of the existing advertisements, which would compromise highway safety. Thus, the imposition of these conditions would not fully address the harm that I have identified.
17. Accordingly, the proposal would conflict with Policy TR3 of the Local Plan. While this policy does not relate directly to advertisements, it is material in this case, as it seeks, amongst other things, to protect public safety, by ensuring that proposals would not be detrimental to the safety of users of the transport network, including pedestrians and cyclists.

Conclusion

18. For the reasons above, and having had regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Hannah Guest

INSPECTOR