



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 18 September 2023

by Chris Couper BA (Hons) DiP TP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 29 September 2023

Appeal Ref: APP/Y3425/Z/23/3318432

Stafford Rangers Football Club, Astonfields Road, Stafford, Staffordshire ST16 3UF

- 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 Stafford Rangers Football Club against the decision of Stafford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 22/36757/ADV, dated 4 November 2022, was refused by notice dated 8 February 2023.
 - The advertisement proposed is described as a freestanding digital advertising and information sign for the display of static information and advertisements for the football club.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and express consent is granted for a freestanding digital advertising and information sign for the display of static information and advertisements as applied for. The consent is for five years from the date of this decision and is subject to the five standard conditions set out in the Regulations, and the following additional conditions:
 - 1) The intensity of the illumination of the freestanding digital advertising and information sign permitted by this consent shall be no greater than 600 candela between sunrise and sunset, and 300 candela at all other times.
 - 2) The development hereby permitted shall have a minimum display time of 10 seconds between each advert. The interval between advertisements shall take place over a period no greater than one second and the complete screen shall change with no visual effects (including swiping, scrolling or other animated transition methods) between displays.

Background and Procedural Matters

2. The appeal is being pursued by Stafford Rangers Football Club ('the Club') in accordance with an email from their agent dated 10 May 2023. Although described as being 'for the football club', I understand that the proposal would be used for commercial advertising, but that the Club would have access to that space.
3. The Regulations are clear that powers should be exercised only in the interests of amenity and public safety, taking into account the provisions of the development plan, so far as they are material; and any other relevant factors. I have considered the appeal on this basis, and I have framed the main issue accordingly.

Main Issue

4. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

5. The proposed advertisement would be sited close to the highway at the edge of the Club's car park. At around 3 metres high and 6 metres wide, and elevated on timber slats about 1.25 metres off the ground, it would be a large illuminated feature, which would be prominent in the streetscene looking eastwards along Astonfields Road.
6. However, in those views, it would be seen in the context of the vehicular dealerships on the opposite side of the road, which are much larger commercial buildings with an array of fascia signage and tall flag poles, as well as the existing building, floodlights, other structures and advertisements at the Club. In the wider area, I observed an industrial estate, along with other commercial premises further to the west along Astonfields Road, including a roofing yard and Volkswagen dealership, which also display a variety of signs.
7. Although there are nearby residential properties at Peter James Court, these are a little way beyond, and off-set to one side of, the site, with the proposed advertisement largely framed by a backdrop of tall trees and shrubs.
8. The proposal would be smaller compared to the combined size of the two advertisement hoardings which were previously allowed and displayed on the site, as illustrated by photograph number 2 in the appellant's statement of case. Unlike those former advertisements, and some existing advertisements nearby, this one would be illuminated, but in this predominantly commercial setting, it would not appear out of place, and it would not harm the character and appearance of the area.
9. In reaching that conclusion I have had regard to the stance in the National Planning Practice Guidance at ID: 18b-079-20140306 that the local characteristics of the neighbourhood should always be considered.
10. I have also considered Policy N1 of The Plan for Stafford Borough 2011 – 2031 (2014). Amongst other things, this expects proposals to take into account the local character and context of the area, and is thus material in this case. For the above reasons, the scheme would not conflict with that approach; nor with the similar stance at paragraphs 130 and 136 of the National Planning Policy Framework.
11. The consent is subject to the five standard conditions in the Regulations. Additionally, in the interests of the character and appearance of the area and highway safety, a condition is necessary setting out the maximum permitted illumination intensity. The Council has suggested that the luminance levels shall be no greater than 300 candela, whilst the appellant states that up to 600 candela should be permitted during daylight hours.
12. I have limited evidence on this matter, but having regard to the general advice in the Professional Lighting Guide 05 (PLG 05) Brightness of Illuminated Advertisements by the Institute of Lighting Professionals, and the details of a permitted advertisement at 27-34 Greyfriars (Ref: 17/25975/ADV), I consider

that the illumination levels set out at paragraph 7.9 and at Section 9 of the appellant's statement of case would be appropriate. In the interests of clarity, I have used the terms sunrise and sunset in my condition.

13. Finally, in the interests of highway safety, Staffordshire County Council has recommended a condition requiring that each advertisement shall have a minimum display time of 5 minutes, but I have no evidence in support of that particular interval.
14. Having regard to the time generally taken by drivers to travel along this stretch of road, and to the details of the permitted advertisement on the busy section of road at 27-34 Greyfriars, I see no cogent reason why a minimum 10 second interval would not be sufficient in order to prevent significant driver distraction.
15. For the reasons outlined above, and having regard to all other matters raised, the proposed freestanding digital advertising and information sign for the display of static information and advertisements would not harm the character and appearance of the area, and the appeal is therefore allowed.

Chris Couper

INSPECTOR