

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 21 November 2023

by John D Allan BA(Hons) BTP MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 07.12.2023

Appeal Ref: APP/P1750/Z/23/3327231

41 Station Road, Aldershot, Hampshire, GU11 1BA

- 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 Wildstone Estates Limited against the decision of Rushmoor Borough Council.
 - The application Ref 23/00306/ADVPP, dated 12 April 2023, was refused by notice dated 12 June 2023.
 - The advertisement proposed is the installation of digital advertising display.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The Council has raised no concern regarding the effect of the advertisement on public safety. I have no reason to disagree. The main issue therefore is the effect of the proposed advertisement on the visual amenity of the area.

Reasons

3. The appeal property is a three-storey building with a single-storey rear addition occupying a corner plot within a commercial parade, which sits directly at the back edge of the adjoining footpaths. Its side return to Little Wellington Street has two 6mx3m non-illuminated paper and paste advertising displays along its length at ground floor. The property is within a town-centre fringe location with a mix of surrounding ground floor commercial uses, with mixed commercial and residential above, amongst some other more contemporary residential blocks, including the high-rise Stafford House on the opposite corner of the junction between Little Wellington Street and Station Road. The Council has identified No 41 as a locally listed heritage asset by virtue of its external architectural interest and as being part of the area's wider Victorian heritage, which is reinforced by a group of three grade II listed buildings comprising the former Masonic Hall, the General Post Office, and the Palace Cinema to either side of Station Road, all located south of the appeal site and nearer to the town centre's core.
 4. The proposal would see the two paper and paste displays replaced with a contemporary 6mx3m digital advertising display set 5.4m above ground level on the appeal property's side gable, effectively straddling the first and second floors of the building.
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5. Notwithstanding the commercial uses in the locality, I saw advertising along Station Road to be very muted and low key, limited mostly to facias above ground floor shopfronts, and with principally external illumination. Although alone in terms of their form, the existing advertisements displayed to the side of the appeal property reasonably respect their setting.
6. The appellants point out that there would be a 50% net reduction in advertising space on the side of No 41. However, I do not share their view that the change from replacing the existing two displays to a single digital display would be 'modest'. On the contrary, notwithstanding any controls that could be imposed by condition upon the intensity of illumination, the digital panel would overtly break from the established character of the area. It would introduce a large, internally illuminated panel at an elevated level that would be alien and out of keeping within its setting. Furthermore, its form and siting would show no respect for the architectural composition or historic character of the building. In particular, the height of the display's base would be poorly aligned with the first-floor oriel windows to the front elevation of the building. Consequently the placement of the advertisement would be openly perceived to be disjointed and ill-conceived when looking north towards the appeal site along Station Road.
7. My impression overall is that the advertisement would stand out as an unsympathetic, incongruous, and visually dominant feature within the locality, including when viewed at close quarters in the outlook from facing flats opposite in Stafford House, and that it would detract from the traditional character and appearance of the appeal property. In this regard the proposal would harm the amenity of the area.
8. I have considered the grade II listed buildings nearby but given the separation distances from the appeal site these are removed from the immediate visual context of No 41. I am therefore satisfied that the proposal would not directly affect the historic or architectural appearance of these heritage assets. However, this does not alter my conclusions upon the main issue.
9. Given the harm that I have identified to the amenity of the area, including to the character of the appeal property, there would be conflict with the requirements Policy DE9 of the Rushmoor Local Plan (2014-2032) adopted in 2019, which deals with advertisements. This is a material consideration that weighs further against the proposal.
10. Paragraph 136 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that advertisements should be subject to control only in the interests of amenity and public safety, taking account of cumulative impacts. It also states that the quality and character of places can suffer when advertisements are poorly sited and designed. Having viewed the appeal site from various aspects along Station Road and surroundings, for the reasons given I find that the proposed digital advertisement display would appear poorly sited and poorly designed having regard to the established character of the street scene. This would be to the detriment of amenity. Other appeal decisions in other parts of the country that have been put to me by the appellants do not alter my findings as far as they relate to the particular merits and circumstances of the case that is before me. Other factors put to me by the appellants are not relevant to my assessment. Consequently, based upon the harm that I have identified, the appeal is dismissed.

John D Allan INSPECTOR