



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 26 January 2024

by E Worthington BA (Hons) MTP MUED MRTPI IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 5th March 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/B4215/Y/23/3329750

Victoria Railway Station, Long Millgate, Manchester, M3 1WY

- The appeal is made under section 20 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 against a refusal to grant listed building consent.
 - The appeal is made by Mr James Lomax, Northern Rail Limited, against the decision of Manchester City Council.
 - The application Ref 136972/LO/2023, dated 14 May 2023, was refused by notice dated 29 June 2023.
 - The works proposed are described as '3no. advertising screens at Victoria Train Station.'
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Procedural Matters

2. As the works relate to a listed building, I have had special regard to sections 16(2) and 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act).
 3. There is no appeal relating to advertisement consent before me. Nevertheless, Section 7 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act) 1990 states that listed building consent is required for the demolition of a listed building or for its alteration or extension in any manner which would affect its character as a building of special architectural or historic interest.
 4. The appellant questions the need for listed building consent. It is argued that the proposed screens would be sited in the modern parts of the station which do not play a role in contributing to the significance of the listed building (and as such, they would not affect the special architectural or historic interest of the building). I note that the appellant sought confirmation of this during pre-application discussions with the Council but received no response. Reference is also made to existing adverts and screens at the station for which the Council did not require listed building consent and to inconsistency in the Council's approach. On the other hand, the Council maintains it has been consistent in requiring listed building consent for digital advertisement boards at the station (as opposed to more minor works).
 5. The details of those existing advertisements are not before me for consideration and the question of whether or not listed building consent is required does not affect the validity of this appeal, which I must determine on its own merits and on the basis of the evidence before me. Besides, the effect of the proposed works on the listed building and its character as a building of special architectural or historic interest is considered in my reasoning below.
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6. On 19 December 2023 the government published its revised National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). Whilst this post-dates the evidence provided by the main parties in relation to this appeal, since the revised Framework's approach to the main issue in this case has not altered significantly, I confirm that all references to the Framework in this decision are to the updated 2023 version.

Main Issue

7. The main issue is whether the works would preserve the Grade II listed building Victoria Station including concourse to rear with restaurant and booking hall (Ref: 1254725) and any of the features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses.

Reasons

The listed building

8. The station's original block to Hunt's Bank Approach dates to 1844 and was built for the Manchester and Leeds Railway Company in an Italianate style of sandstone and ashlar with slate roofs. A second storey was added later. The station was altered and greatly enlarged in 1909 with a significant new extension at right angles to the northern end of the old station, to provide an L shaped plan. This extensive main station façade is built in the Edwardian neo-baroque style over four storeys and 31 bays with an ornate glass and iron canopy facing Victoria Station Approach.
9. The building has been subject to many alterations and phases of development associated with the expansion and contraction of the railways including the introduction of the metrolink tram stop. Notably, it was comprehensively modernised in 2015 with the introduction of a substantial new roof comprising curved steel ribs rising from concrete buttresses and a roof clad in ETFE which encloses the concourse under a futuristic bubble like structure.
10. The appellant argues that if the listing entry were to be updated it would exclude the modern parts of the station. However, I am mindful that architectural interest includes the quality, nature and significance of the design as well as aspects such as decoration and materials. Moreover, architectural significance does not need to be related to a single period to be important, there is often value in the juxtaposition of different styles and techniques that contribute to the historic layering of the building. In this case, whilst the distinctive sweeping roof structure stands in contrast to the traditional buildings it adjoins, it unifies and encapsulates them and has been carefully designed to allow the historic elements of the building to be appreciated.
11. This being so, I am not persuaded that the new additions have created two separate stations as suggested by the appellant. The building retains its identity and architectural interest as a purpose built station, and is a good example of this type of building and of the particular architectural styles fashionable at the times of the construction of its two main historic parts. It is also of historic interest as a longstanding transport hub that tells of Manchester's important history and development as a thriving industrial city.

12. From the evidence before me, insofar as it relates to this appeal, I find that the special interest of the listed building is drawn from its longstanding use as an important transport hub as well as from its grand scale and proportions and successful adaptation and phasing over time. It is also derived from the carefully considered relationship between the old and new parts of the building, and the important remaining elements of its historic fabric and traditional distinctive internal architectural features and use of traditional materials.

The proposed works

13. Three digital advertisement boards are proposed within the station building. These would measure some 1.83 metres in height and 1.108 metres in width. They would be of a modern design and the screen would sit flush within a flat display with a black border. They are intended to be of a human scale and sited so as not to interfere with the movement of people through the station.
14. The screen in location 1 would be attached to the wall of Platform 6b. The screen in location 2 would introduce a freestanding board adjacent to the station's ticket turnstiles. It would sit on a 0.45 metre high plinth giving an overall height of 2.28m, and would be finished in brushed steel. The screen in location 3 would be on the side elevation of a lift shaft structure.
15. I acknowledge that all the proposed screens would be within modern parts of the active station and would not be fixed to the historic fabric of the building. Nevertheless, as set out above, the building falls to be considered as a whole. I also appreciate that there are other advertisements within the station building (including three existing screens with the same specification as those proposed) and accept that the principle of advertisements in a busy station is not in itself unacceptable.
16. The freestanding screen proposed in location 2 would be sited adjacent to the ticket barriers on the platform side of the concourse and would back onto a short run of low metal railings/barriers. I saw at my site inspection that there is some existing signage to the railings/barriers, and other freestanding advertisements including a screen nearby in the area beyond the ticket barriers in the main part of the concourse.
17. Whilst the proposed screen would be orientated such that it would not directly obscure any views of the historic parts of the building, it would nevertheless be seen on approach to the ticket barriers from the platforms against the backdrop of the historic part of the building. Here, despite the intervening elements of the modern part of the building, it would be appreciated in the context of the grand neo-baroque rear façade of the 1909 block.
18. Due to its exposed stand-alone position in what is effectively an open area within the building delineated only by the low railings/barriers, and as a result of its digital nature, it would appear as an obvious and intrusive feature. This would be so despite the existing nearby screen which is set somewhat apart from the site of the proposed screen in a more sheltered section of the concourse beyond the ticket barriers, and seen in a different context. Thus I find that this proposed screen would appear as a prominent and incongruous feature that would draw attention away from the historic internal façade beyond, and detract from the overall character of the station.

19. The screen proposed in location 3 would be attached to the tall flank wall of the lift shaft. This structure is an imposing and prominent architectural feature within the building that was constructed as part of the redevelopment of the station in high quality sandstone cladding. Located where the steps lead down to the metrolink tram platforms, there are already two high level non-illuminated directional signs on this elevation.
20. The proposed screen would sit below these close to ground level, in a clear and prominent position. As a result of its siting and digital nature, it would be readily visible in views taken on approach from the south on the concourse where it would be a strident and eye catching feature. It would be seen here in the immediate context of the rear façade of the historic 1909 block, and in the foreground in some longer range views looking northwards along the concourse towards the distinctive historic domed former first class refreshment room. As such, it would compete visually with these important historic elements of the building.
21. Furthermore, in adding unnecessarily to the existing low key directional signage on the flank of the lift shaft structure and obscuring some of the sandstone cladding there, it would detract from the clean lines and relatively uncluttered elevation. Whilst there are other screens nearby on the concourse, these are not appreciated in the same views or context as the appeal proposal and do not justify an additional screen in the location proposed.
22. The screen proposed in location 1 would be attached to the stone wall constructed during the more recent phases of the station's development on Platform 6b. Whilst it would be some distance from the historic parts of the building and would not be seen alongside them, the stone faced wall and existing signage there is finished in high quality materials intended to respect the historic character of the station.
23. In particular, the proposed screen would have a close and uncomfortable visual relationship with the existing understated non-illuminated cut out lettering signage that reads 'Manchester Victoria'. Due to its siting and digital nature, it would draw attention away from that feature and compete visually with it. Whilst the appellant refers to 10 four sheet boards and 4 six sheets boards on Platform 6a, these are not seen in the immediate vicinity of the location of the proposed screen which would sit within a clear section of the traditionally designed stone wall in an area of high footfall at the bottom of the stairs. In my view, the piecemeal addition of an awkwardly sited and prominent digital screen there would detract from the high quality finish and design objective for Platform 6b, and therefore from the character of the building overall.
24. Bringing matters together, for the reasons given, I find that the proposed screens would be appreciated as prominent and unsympathetic additions that would detract from the character of the station building as a whole and contribute to the further proliferation of advertisements and visual clutter there. In eroding the design intention of the more modern parts of the building (which were carefully designed to respect the historic character of the station as part of a significant and high quality refurbishment), the proposed screens would weaken the important relationship between the old and new parts of the building, and in doing so would detract from the important remaining elements of its historic fabric and traditional distinctive internal architectural features.

25. This being so, I consider overall that the proposed works would impair the building's historic legibility and reduce its authenticity. They would thus have a detrimental effect on Victoria Station and its character as a building of special architectural and historic interest. That the Council did not dispute the appellant's heritage impact assessment does not alter my view.
26. I therefore conclude on the main issue that the proposed works would fail to preserve the special interest of the listed building. I give this harm considerable importance and weight in the balance of this appeal.

The heritage balance

27. The Framework advises at paragraph 205 that when considering the impact of a proposal on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. Paragraph 206 advises that significance can be harmed or lost through the alteration or destruction of those assets or from development within their setting and that this should have a clear and convincing justification. I consider that the harm to the listed building in this case would be less than substantial, but nevertheless of considerable importance and weight. Paragraph 208 of the Framework requires that less than substantial harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.
28. The appellant indicates that the proceeds raised through the use of the screens would contribute to the overall operation costs of the station. It is also stated that the financial income arising from the increased advertising space would allow for future investment into customer services and assets at stations.
29. Whilst I accept that this would be a public benefit of the proposed works, the economic benefits that would arise in this regard are not quantified. In my view they are likely to be modest in the context of the overall costs involved in running the station/trainline. It is also argued that the proposed screens would make a small contribution to the continued optimum viable use of the station which provides an important public function. However, I am mindful that the station is already in operation and have seen nothing to suggest that its use as such would cease in the absence of the screens proposed.
30. I therefore find that the public benefits in this case are insufficient to outweigh the harm to the designated heritage asset that I have identified. For these reasons the works fail to satisfy the requirements of the Act and paragraph 203 of the Framework.
31. Although the decision notice refers to various policies in the Manchester Core Strategy and the saved policies in the Unitary Development plan for the City of Manchester, I am mindful that listed building appeals are not subject to Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and so do not need to be determined in accordance with the development plan.

Other Matters

32. Reference is made to pre-application discussions, where the appellant expressed a willingness to consider alternative locations for the screens but received no further advice from the Council. I have also had regard to the appellant's correspondence with the Council during the determination of the

application that erroneously suggested that one of the signs would tie directly into the historic fabric. Whilst that is a matter between the Council and the appellant, I note that this argument was not continued into the decision notice or the Council's appeal case. In any event, I confirm that I have considered the appeal scheme on its own merits, on the basis of the evidence before me, and made my own assessment as to its impacts.

33. There are other heritage assets nearby including conservation areas and other listed buildings, however given their internal nature these would not be affected by the proposed works. The absence of harm in this regard counts neither for, nor against the appeal scheme.

Conclusion

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

E Worthington

INSPECTOR