



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 11 March 2024

by J Reid BA(Hons) BArch(Hons) RIBA

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 18th March 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/Q3820/Z/23/3332621

Crawley Audi, Maidenbower Office Park, Balcombe Road, Maidenbower, Crawley RH10 7ZJ

- The appeal is made under Regulation 17 of The Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) against a refusal to grant express consent.
 - The appeal is made by Mr Nick Jones of Harwoods Ltd against the decision of Crawley Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is CR/2021/0936/ADV.
 - The advertisement is "1 digital free standing externally illuminated(maximum luminance 300CD/M2) sign. Operational during office hours only".
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main issue

2. The main issue is the effect that the advertisement has on the street scene in the nearby parts of Balcombe Road and the roundabout, and thus, on amenity.

Reasons

3. The commercial garage at the appeal site includes a car sales showroom and forecourt. The site is situated within Maidenbower business park on the roughly east side of the roundabout where Lucerne Drive meets Balcombe Road, so the junction 10A link road from the roundabout to the northbound M23 curves around the south part of the site. The site is within a mainly commercial area, but a mainly residential area lies roughly west of Balcombe Road and the roundabout. The trees on both sides of Balcombe Road roughly north of the well-vegetated roundabout, and on its east side to roughly south, provide a partial leafy setting, but the garage's forecourt is mainly open, and its buildings are set well back from the roads.
4. The roughly 4.5 m tall advertisement (sign) is prominently sited towards the north west corner of the site, close to the south west end of the south east side pavement in the business park's service road. The roughly 6 m² landscape orientated street-facing screen faces roughly north west towards the roundabout and its junction with the north part of Balcombe Road. So, the appeal sign can be seen by road and pavement users from both nearby parts of Balcombe Road and the roundabout.
5. The other signs at the site include the branded logo and the lettering towards each end of the upper part of the garage building's roughly west facing glazed

wall, a totem sign near the site's north west corner and 3 tall flags in the grass verge facing the roundabout, which are in a row to roughly south of the totem sign. Whilst these signs advertise the commercial offering at the site, they respect the elegant modern design of the building and the ordered layout of the neatly parked vehicles on its good-sized forecourt.

6. By contrast, the appeal sign is mainly characterised by its tall height and its bulky base and pole, its top heavy appearance and dissonant frame, and the disconcerting gap between the base and the forecourt. Because the appeal sign is uncomfortably squeezed-in by, and taller than, the well-proportioned totem sign and the nearby road sign, and because it is much bulkier than the nearby signs including the delicate flags, the appeal sign dominates its mainly open surroundings. Moreover, as the appeal sign is poorly related to the other signs, it looks incongruous. So, due to its form, scale and siting, the appeal sign detracts from the character and appearance of the site and its surroundings.
7. The Council has not raised concerns about public safety. For reasons including that the appeal sign does not appear to be within or to overhang the public highway, I agree. However, as the digital sign near Three Bridges Station is over a mile away, where the site specific circumstances differ, it provides little support for this discordant sign. So, whilst matters including the level of illumination could reasonably be controlled by condition, they would not be enough to make this unacceptable sign acceptable. The appellant's concerns about the Council's handling of the application are not relevant to my findings.
8. Therefore, I consider that the advertisement harms the street scene in the nearby parts of Balcombe Road and the roundabout, and so, it harms amenity. It is also contrary to Policy CH3 of the Crawley Borough Local Plan 2015-2030 which seeks high quality design and respect for context, guidance in the Crawley Borough Council Urban Design Supplementary Planning Document, and the National Planning Policy Framework which aims to achieve well-designed and beautiful places.

Conclusion

9. For the reasons given, the appeal should be dismissed.

J Reid

INSPECTOR