



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 29 October 2024

by P J Staddon BSc, Dip, MBA (Distinction), MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 13 November 2024

Appeal Ref: APP/E3335/Z/24/3344489

Wellington Service Station, Westpark, Chelston, Somerset TA21 9AD

- 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 Motor Fuel Group against the decision of Somerset Council.
 - The application Ref is 43/24/0014/A.
 - The advertisement proposed is a '7m EV Totem Pole Sign'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. The main issues are (i) the effect of the advertisement on the visual amenity of the area, and (ii) the effect of the advertisement on highway safety.

Reasons

Amenity

3. The appeal site occupies a prominent corner site immediately adjacent to a busy roundabout on the A38 (Exeter Road). It contains a 24-hour roadside service station, which includes fuel pumps under a large canopy, HGV fuel pumps, a jetwash and carwash, and a sizeable shop with catering concessions.
4. The service station is prominent in view when approaching southbound on the A38, and when entering Westpark 26, the business park of which it forms a part. In the north-eastern part of the site, close to the adjacent roundabout, there are 2 existing large totem signs.
5. One is a large and tall illuminated filling station sign, which includes the petrol firm's logo and fuel prices. The second is a somewhat smaller and lower non-illuminated shop sign containing 4 panels advertising the retail outlet and the concessions within it. Both of these signs are double sided and can be viewed from the north and south, although the view for northbound traffic is limited by the roadside hedge until the viewer is in relatively close proximity to the roundabout.
6. The appeal proposal would introduce a 7-metre high internally illuminated totem sign, positioned between the existing 2 signs. The drawings notate that

it would be about 5 metres from the filling station sign and about 2.5 metres from the shop sign. It would advertise electrical vehicle (EV) charging facilities.

7. I have noted and considered the appellant's submissions concerning the objective of making the public aware of the EV charging facilities, that such signage would be expected at a modern service station, and that the area is not considered to have a strong sense of local distinctiveness.
8. Whilst the site is within a car dominated environment and forms part of a commercial business park, it occupies a prominent location on an important approach route identified in the Taunton Deane Site Allocations and Development Management Plan (adopted December 2016) (SADMP). Policy D2 seeks to protect the visual qualities of such routes, and the policy's supporting narrative explains that roadside advertising has tended to proliferate and become increasingly cluttered and unsightly, detracting from the quality of the area and the impression of visitors.
9. There is already a significant amount of signage material and commercial announcement within the site, along with lamp standards and illumination, both within the site and on the adjacent highway. There is also further signage close to the highway boundary, including 'Westpark 26' signs.
10. In my assessment, adding a further large illuminated totem sign in this context, being in close proximity to the existing 2 totem signs nearby, along with other advertisements and light standards, would result in excessive clutter and 'visual noise'. This would be harmful to the appearance of the streetscene and the character of the local area, and would detract from the visual impression of the area, as experienced by visitors travelling along this identified approach route.
11. On the first main issue, I conclude that the proposal would be harmful to the amenity of the area. This conflicts with SADMP policies D2 and D3, which, respectively, seek to protect the visual qualities of approach routes to Taunton and Wellington, and, amongst other matters, avoid signage which is unduly prominent or creates visual clutter when viewed with any existing signs. It would further conflict with policy DM1 of the Taunton Deane Core Strategy (adopted September 2012) which, amongst other matters, seeks to protect the street scene from unacceptable harm.

Highway safety

12. Notwithstanding my findings on the first main issue, there is no convincing evidence before me to suggest that the proposal would result in a highway safety hazard, by virtue of it creating a distraction to road users.
13. In this regard, I have noted that Somerset Council's highways officer raised no objection to the proposed totem sign, subject to controls on the level of illumination, which could be covered by a planning condition.
14. I therefore find no conflict with SADMP policy D3 or with section 9 of the National Planning Policy Framework, which require signage proposals to avoid highway safety hazards.

Conclusion

15. Whilst I have assessed that there is no convincing evidence before me to suggest that the sign would cause a highway safety danger, I have found that it would be harmful to the amenity of the area. Accordingly, the appeal is dismissed.

P. Staddon

INSPECTOR