



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 March 2025 by M Long BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI

Decision by John Morrison BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 27 May 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/V3120/Z/24/3358274

Land at Radley Road, Abingdon OX14 3RY

- 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 Alight Media against the decision of Vale of White Horse District Council.
 - The application Ref is P24/V2231/A.
 - The development proposed is a new single illuminated 48-sheet digital advertisement display.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Appeal Procedure

2. The site visit was undertaken by a representative of the Inspector whose recommendation is set out below and to which the Inspector has had regard before deciding the appeal.

Procedural Matter and Main Issues

3. The Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) set out that powers thereunder shall be exercised only in the interests of amenity and public safety. The development plan can be taken into account, but only as far as policy aims are material considerations relevant to the main issue(s) which, for the purposes of this appeal, are the effect of the proposal on both amenity and public safety.

Reasons for the Recommendation

Amenity

4. Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) sets out, amongst other things, that amenity is usually the effect on visual and aural amenity in the immediate neighbourhood of an advertisement, and the local characteristics of the neighbourhood should always be considered.
5. The site is a small, grassed area at the junction of Radley Road and the road to Radley Road Industrial Estate. Radley Road has a predominantly residential character and there is a row of modest bungalows next to the site. On the opposite corner of the junction is an Indian Takeaway. It is part of a building which, through its proportions, hipped roof form and first-floor fenestration, has the appearance of being a converted dwelling that has retained some of its residential qualities. The commercial buildings in the industrial estate are well set back from the junction. For those passing along Radley Road, views of the industrial estate are fleeting, which gives it a relatively discreet presence in the wider street scene. During the site visit,

I noted some commercial vehicles and equipment located close to the site and along the road into the industrial estate.

6. Advertising in this area is primarily small-scale, static signage that promotes local businesses. This includes signs for the Indian Takeaway which appear to have some modest external lighting, as well as boards advertising businesses within the industrial estate on the grass verge opposite the junction. Digital advertisements did not appear to be prevalent in this area. This lends a pleasant consistency of scale to local adverts which contributes positively to the character and appearance of the area.
7. Given its substantial scale, elevated position mounted on steel legs and digital illumination, which would display frequently changing static imagery, the proposal would be an overly prominent addition to the street scene. It would appear incongruous with and out of scale to the wider suburban locality. Particularly when its dominant design would be viewed against the backdrop of modest bungalows.
8. Its display of frequently changing general advertisements would have an overtly commercial appearance that, unlike nearby signs that promote local businesses, would lack a clear connection to the specific commercial uses of the area. It would be at odds with the existing character of local signage which, through its comparatively modest scales and static nature, sits more comfortably within the broader residential context of Radley Road than the proposal would.
9. At night, the digital illumination of the large screen, which could display a variety of colourful advertisements, would appear conspicuous amongst the more modest illuminated signs and streetlights in this area. Even if it were fitted with a light sensor to adjust to ambient light levels and was switched off between midnight and 05:00, this would not mitigate the harm to amenity that would arise during the times it is operational, particularly during hours of darkness that fall outside the proposed switch-off period.
10. The angled position of the sign would prevent clear views of it in both directions, but this would not mitigate the harm that would arise in views where the screen is visible. The nearby tall streetlights and telegraph poles are relatively ordinary features in the street scene and would not assimilate the sign's discordant design. Soft landscaping could go some way to improving the situation but not sufficiently to make it acceptable. Any amenity benefits of planting would be modest at best.
11. The unacceptable nature of the appeal scheme in amenity terms, contrary to the aforementioned regulations, would conflict with the aims of Development Policy 22 of the Local Plan 2031 Part 2 2019 (LP2), which seeks proposals to not adversely affect the character of an area and Core Policy 37 of the Local Plan 2031 Part 1 2016, which requires proposals to be of high quality design that responds positively to the site and its surroundings. There would be additional conflict with the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) which sets out, amongst other things, that the quality and character of places can suffer when advertisements are poorly sited and designed.

Public Safety

12. Radley Road carries a moderate flow of traffic at relatively low speeds. The industrial estate appears well-frequented with numerous vehicles entering and exiting the junction. For drivers heading south-west along Radley Road, there is a

bend in the road just before the junction, after which the speed limit reduces from 30 miles per hour (mph) to 20mph. Further to the south-west of the junction is a small roundabout.

13. The proposal would be angled towards drivers heading south-west along Radley Road. For these, the bend in the road would prevent long-distance views of the screen and so there would be a relatively limited time to assimilate the advertisement within their field of vision before reaching the site. Due to the prominent appearance of the proposal, and that it may be unexpected to some drivers who would have just passed through a predominantly residential area where digital screens are not prevalent, it is likely to attract a substantial amount of attention. This would be exacerbated by a likelihood for the static imagery to change as a driver approaches the site, further drawing the eye.
14. This is an area where drivers must be alert to vehicles slowing down as they approach the roundabout and enter the 20mph limit, as well as the propensity for vehicles and cyclists to come to a stop in the carriageway and wait to cross the opposite lane of traffic to enter the road into the industrial estate. Drivers could be unduly distracted by the digital screen and the changes in its imagery which would result in an increased potential for highway collisions and unacceptable risk to public safety.
15. The proposed luminance levels would be in line with relevant guidance. Even if I recommended a condition to limit such, this would not sufficiently mitigate its overall distracting effect. It would be switched off for a period overnight, but this would not justify the harm to public safety when it is operational.
16. There may be no recent highway incidents recorded in this area, however this data relates to a context in which the proposal is not in situ. I have assessed the effect on public safety should the sign be installed, which would change the site context and increase the likelihood of unsafe highway operations. In addition, and while the full details of the Magic Roundabout scheme are not before me, from the submitted photograph, the area in front of the sign appears to be more open and allows for long-range views of it. This is not comparable to the appeal site, for the reasons I have explained above.
17. Research undertaken by Bristol City Council found no evidence that LED signs at three locations had caused a harmful distraction. However, no details of the research have been provided so I cannot be certain of its validity, scope, or which type of sites and advertisements were studied. It does not overcome my concerns outlined above.
18. I appreciate that roadside signs such as the proposal are commonplace and so are readily absorbed by highway users. Also, that they are not inherently unsafe and can be managed in accordance with the specific constraints of the location. Even taking this into account, this does not justify the identified public safety harm that would arise from the screen and its proposed operation for the reasons I have set out in regard to both main issues.
19. The proposal would result in unacceptable harm to public safety when assessed against the regulations. It would be contrary to the aims of Development Policy 22 of LP2 which seeks proposals that achieve a safe environment and do not cause a hazard to people using any type of transportation. There would be additional

conflict with the Framework which seeks to prevent development if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety.

Other Matters

20. There may be environmental benefits associated with the technology of the proposal, particularly when compared to previous methods of advertising, as well as environmental initiatives that are undertaken by the appellant and their partner organisations. Even taking into account that the display could be easily removed, these benefits do not outweigh the harm to amenity and public safety whilst the display would be in situ.
21. The proposal would have economic benefits and could support wider growth at local and national levels. Nevertheless, without evidence to suggest otherwise, the benefits from a single display would likely be modest and do not justify the harm identified above.

Conclusion and Recommendation

22. For the reasons given above, the scheme would fail an assessment against the regulations, and I should therefore recommend the appeal is dismissed.

M Long

APPEAL PLANNING OFFICER

Inspector's Decision

23. I have considered all the submitted evidence and my representative's report and on that basis the appeal is dismissed.

John Morrison

INSPECTOR