



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 15 July 2025

by **David Murray** BA (Hons) DMS MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 21st July 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/Y3615/H/25/3364063

The Friary, North Street, Guildford, GU1 4YT

- The appeal is made under Regulation 17 of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) against a failure to give notice within the prescribed period of a decision on an application for express consent to display an advertisement.
 - The appeal is made by ECE Planning Ltd against Guildford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 25/P/00150.
 - The advertisement proposed is the removal of three existing back illuminated advertisements and the erection of a digital screen.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issues

2. Although the appeal is against non-determination the Council has set out in representations why the appeal should be dismissed. From these the main issues are the effect on the amenity of the area including the setting of the Rodboro Buildings, a listed building opposite the site, and the setting of the Bridge Street Conservation Area.

Reasons

Background

3. The appeal site comprises The Friary shopping mall in the centre of Guildford and in particular the west facing elevation along Onslow Street. This elevation has a high brick wall with three projecting elements which lead up to gable features at roof level. To the northern end of this wall is a large glazed entranceway into the mall. At the moment there are three advertisements set into the brick work at a relatively low level and each is some 9m wide. It is proposed to replace these with a single internally illuminated digital screen which would measure about 9m by 3m and would be positioned some 4m above the ground. The proposal is to display static content that would change about every 10 seconds and would be in operation from 0700 to 2230 each day with adaptive illumination.
4. The appeal site lies alongside but outside the boundary of the Bridge Street Conservation Area which locally runs along Onslow Street. Moreover, Rodboro Buildings, a Listed Building grade II, lies directly opposite the site of the proposed digital screen in Onslow Street. Other relevant buildings which are locally listed are set out in the appellant's Heritage Statement.

Effect on character and appearance

5. The statements from the Council and particularly from the appellant, as well as the Bridge Street Conservation Area Appraisal (2003), set out the significance of the local part of the conservation area and other heritage assets. To the west of the Conservation Area the area is generally typified by large scale town centre buildings which front the gyratory main road traffic system.
6. At the site visit I considered the effect of the proposed digital screen from the various roads and public places around the site. Seen from Onslow Steet to the north, because of the curve in the road the proposed digital sign would not be seen until almost at the entrance to The Friary and then it would be at an oblique angle and would not stand out in this view of the frontage. Similarly from the part of Onslow Street to the south and around the MacDonalds building the digital screen would also be seen at an oblique angle and it would not be prominent in this part of the street scene.
7. The area from where the screen would be most noticeable is from Bridge Street. When approaching from the river the screen would be seen in a prominent location alongside the corner elevation of the Rodboro Buildings. Although the screen would be seen close to the glazed entrance way which bears the name The Friary, this does not have the same visual prominence. I find that because of its height above ground and its scale and illumination, together with the contrast with the large areas of brickwork on the exterior of the building, the display screen proposed would have a considerable visual prominence which would dominate and be significantly harmful to the appearance of the townscape of the exterior elevation of The Friary and its wider character. The proposal would therefore harm the amenity of the area.
8. I acknowledge that the digital screen would replace the three present back-illuminated advertisements and there would be a material reduction in the nett area of illuminated advertisements displayed on the building. However, the existing advertisements are much nearer ground level and in total do not have the same visual impact as that proposed with the elevated digital display. Moreover, in the critical views when approaching on Bridge Street, only the first panel is seen initially, then two, and it is only when well into the corner with Onslow Street that the three panels are read together. Therefore in visual terms the removal of the three panels does not have a significant effect on weighing up their visual impact on this critical view compared to the appeal scheme. The visual impact of the screen would also harm the setting of the Rodboro Buildings opposite the site as the screen would visually overpower the presence of this corner building and draw attention away from its special architectural form. Overall, I find that the scale and height above ground of the proposal digital display would have a very prominent and imposing impact which would harm materially the amenity of the area.
9. In assessing the effect on the other heritage assets and their setting I have paid special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the setting of the Conservation Area. The visual impact I have identified through the scale, height above ground and illumination of the display would also have a harmful effect on the setting of the Bridge Street Conservation Area by spoiling the appearance of the area and being harmful to its character. As such the proposal would neither conserve or enhance these aspects which contribute to the significance of this designated asset.

10. In terms of the guidance in section 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) I find that the proposal would result in 'less than substantial harm'. I would judge this harm as low to medium, however, the Framework makes clear that great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. Moreover, there are no material public benefits put forward which outweigh the harm.
11. I have taken account of Policy D10 in the Guildford Borough Local Plan and Development Management Policies (2023) regarding advertisements and conclude that there would be harm to amenity under parts 1 (b) and (c) regarding the size and position of the digital screen as well as part 6 regarding the protection of heritage assets.
12. I have also taken account of the other appeal decisions put forward by the appellant which concern, along with other aspects, where digital screens have been permitted elsewhere. However these cases relate to well-known areas (Piccadilly Circus and the London Palladium in London, and the Jewellery Quarter in Birmingham) where the inspectors found that such large-scale advertisements were part of the culture and character of the area, or where a screen was a replacement of a long established one. Therefore, these cases do not appear to involve circumstances or a site similar to the appeal one and I have not been able to place much weight on these decisions.
13. Overall I conclude that the harm to amenity that the proposal would cause is not outweighed by any other consideration.

Conclusion

14. For the reasons given above the appeal should be dismissed.

David Murray

INSPECTOR