



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 15 August 2025

by **K E Down MA(Oxon) MSc MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 28 August 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/F3545/Z/25/3368356

Land adjacent to Bury Road (A134), Clay Lane, Hepworth, Suffolk, IP22 2PY

- 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 Ms N Parkington, Clarkes of Walsham Ltd against the decision of West Suffolk Council.
 - The application Ref is DC/25/0361/ADV.
 - The advertisement proposed is a directional sign for Clarkes of Walsham Ltd.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Main Issue

2. The main issue is the effect of the proposed sign on the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

Reasons

3. The Council has referred to Policies DM2 and DM38 of the West Suffolk Joint Development Management Policies Document (DMP), February 2015. These are design and advertisement policies. The Council also referred in its refusal to Policy DM17 but it has confirmed that this was in error since the policy relates to conservation areas and the site does not lie within a conservation area. The Regulations require that decisions are made only in the interests of amenity and public safety. This is reiterated in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The Council's policies alone cannot be decisive, but I have taken them into account as a material planning consideration. The NPPF makes clear that advertisement control should be simple, efficient and effective.
4. The appeal site is on the corner of a field at a cross-roads junction between the busy A134 Bury Road, Clay Lane and Summer Road. Clay Lane is a narrow lane. Summer Road is wider, provides access to a number of commercial and industrial premises and also to the settlement of Walsham where the appellant has premises. The character of the area at the junction is one of open countryside, albeit traversed by a busy main road. Hedgerows are intermittent giving wide views of a relatively flat, undeveloped and mainly agricultural landscape. There is a dwelling and associated outbuildings on one corner of the junction.

5. Although at the time of my site visit there were other signs on different corners of the junction these were generally smaller, lower and more muted than the appeal sign. Moreover, I have no evidence regarding their planning status.
6. The proposed advertising sign would be free standing and non-illuminated. It would be some 1.7m high and 2.02m wide. It would be arranged as two angled advertising panels and the structure would have a depth of about 1.13m. The base of the advertisement would be some 1.3m above the ground giving it a maximum height of about 3m. The largest lettering would be some 0.3m high.
7. The structure, which was in place at the time of my site visit, would be a large and bulky assembly that would be clearly visible in the landscape. Not only would it be prominent in the street scene when viewed from the A134, it would also be obtrusive when seen from the open agricultural land surrounding the junction and from points on both Summer Road and Clay Lane. Overall, it would appear as a dominant and visually intrusive development in the area.
8. The appellant describes the sign as a directional sign and it is clear that there is a long history of concern regarding HGV vehicles using an alternative route, through a village and past a primary school. According to the evidence, Walsham Parish Council raised the issue as long ago as 2008 and Hepworth Parish Council supports the principle of the current application, whilst noting that the proposed sign is disproportionately larger than other signs in the area. I have sympathy with the desire of the parish councils and the appellant to direct HGV traffic away from sensitive built up areas.
9. Nevertheless, the proposed sign, owing to its scale and design has the primary appearance of an advertisement for the company, rather than a directional sign. In addition, the position of the sign, whilst prominent in the street scene, does not immediately indicate that it is intended for directional purposes. Neither can I agree with the appellant that it is either modest or visually marginal in the rural landscape.
10. Overall, I appreciate the need for a directional sign that is clearly visible, and I accept that it needs to be large enough to be read at a distance. However, this does not outweigh the need to protect the visual amenity of the surrounding rural area. In my view, owing to its design, scale and prominent siting, the proposed structure would fail to meet this objective. On the contrary, it would be an unsympathetic, bulky and alien construction that would detract from the visual quality of the area. I therefore conclude that the proposed advertisement would have a materially detrimental effect on the visual amenity of the surrounding area.
11. The appellant states that Clarkes of Walsham is the largest employer and enterprise in the village, and I have no reason to doubt that. The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) makes clear that when dealing with applications for signposting in rural areas, decision makers should bear in mind that appropriate signposting can benefit the local economy, and this should be reflected in their decision making. Nevertheless, this does not mean that all signs in rural areas that are intended to be directional should be permitted when they are clearly detrimental to visual amenity.
12. The PPG states that where signs have to be refused on amenity grounds, efforts should be made where practicable to suggest an alternative site or sign and to co-operate with the applicant/appellant in devising an acceptable signposting scheme. Whilst there has been some communication between the Council and the appellant

in that regard, this appears not to have been productive to date. That does not weigh in favour of the proposed advertisement but may indicate that scope exists for further discussion.

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

KE Down
INSPECTOR