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PROPOSED ADVERTISING DISPLAY SCREENS AT:

1) **Land at Albion Wharf,** Albion St
Planning Ref: 096236/AO/2011

2) **Land at Portland Tower,** Portland St
Planning Ref: 097131/AO/2011

HIGHWAY SAFETY REPORT

Prepared by HSR LTD on behalf of
OCEAN OUTDOOR

December 2011

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The council will be aware that HSR have been instructed as the planning consultant for two applications currently with Manchester City Council to be determined. Both are for the display of digital screens at (1) Albion Street and (2) Portland Street.

1.2 This report has been prepared following recent objections on each application from the city council's Highway Services, which are quoted below:

1) Land at Albion Wharf – Planning Ref: 096236

Albion Street/Whitworth Street West is a very busy junction on a key radial into the city. It is currently signalised with recently updated pedestrian facilities. Footfall in the area is likely to rise in line with First Street regeneration plans.

Due to the busy multi-modal uses at the junction there is concern that driver distraction may be increased as a result of large and eye-catching images projected on the screens.

Refusal is recommended on highway safety grounds.

2) Land at Portland St – Planning Ref: 097131

The sign is adjacent to the North Eastern side of Sackville Street/Portland Street signal junction. This junction has high levels of bus traffic, long-distance coaches and very heavy footfall.

Due to the combination of vehicular movements from a number of different directions and high volumes of pedestrians; the signage has the potential to cause distraction and therefore would be a safety risk in the proposed location.

Therefore we recommend refusal based on highway safety grounds.

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2 POLICY CONTEXT

2.1 Relevant policy and guidance relating to highway safety and advertisements is considered below.

PPG19: Outdoor Advertisement Control

2.2 PPG19 provides guidance on the control of outdoor advertisements. It notes in the second paragraph that the control of advertisements is limited, when justified, only in the interests of amenity and public safety.

2.3 Paragraph 3 indicates that "outdoor advertising is essential to commercial activity in a free and diverse economy".

2.4 PPG19 Paragraph 15 states that:

*"In their assessment of the public safety implications of an advertisement display, LPA's will assume that the primary purpose of an advertisement is to attract people's attention and will therefore **not** automatically assume that the primary purpose of an advertisement will distract the attention of passers-by, whether they are drivers, cyclists or pedestrians. The vital consideration, in assessing an advertisement's impact, is whether the advertisement itself, or the exact location proposed for its display, is likely to be so distracting, or so confusing, that it creates a hazard to, or endangers, people in the vicinity who are taking reasonable care for their own and others safety."*

2.5 The critical issue therefore is whether the proposed advertisements and the specifics of the site location are so distracting or so confusing that they would create a hazard to people who are taking reasonable care.

Circular 3/2007 Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007

2.6 Circular 3/2007 outlines the revised system of advertisement control and includes relevant advice about advertisements to local planning authorities and appeals to the Secretary of State.

2.7 Appendix B is concerned with the consideration of the possible effect of advertisements on public safety. The first paragraph outlines instances where drivers need to take more care such as junctions, pedestrian crossings. It also sets out that,

"There are less likely to be road safety problems if the advertisement I s on a site within a commercial or industrial locality….."

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2.8 Paragraph 2 then goes on to outline the main types of advertisement which may cause danger to road users. The descriptions of those types of advertisement are for example:

- *those which obstruct or impair sightlines at corners, bends or at a junction, or at any point of access to a highway;*
- *those which, because of their size or siting, would obstruct or confuse a road user's view, or reduce the clarity or effectiveness of a traffic sign or signal, or would be likely to distract road-users because of their unusual nature;*
- *those illuminated signs (incorporating either flashing or static lights):*
  (i) where the means of illumination is directly visible from any part of the road;
  (ii) which, because of their colour, could be mistaken for, or confused with traffic lights or other authorised signals; and
  (iii) which, because of their size of brightness, could result in glare and dazzle or distract road—users particularly in misty or wet weather;
- *those requiring close study (such as Public Information Panels),which are situated so that people looking at them would be insufficiently protected from passing vehicles; or those advertisements sited on narrow footpaths where they may interfere with safe passage by causing pedestrians to step into the road;*
- *those which resemble traffic signs, as defined in section 64 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, and may therefore be subject to removal by the highway authority under section 69 of that Act;*
- *those which embody directional or other traffic elements and which need special scrutiny because of possible resemblance to, or confusion with, traffic signs.*

2.9 It will be evident that when examined against the statutory criteria, both locations are suitable and none of the above is applicable.

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3 ADVERTISEMENT DISPLAYS AND LOCATION

3.1 It is clear therefore that the correct assessment of such proposals should be in relation to the advertisement itself and the location.

3.2 Both the advertising sites will be located so that they will not interrupt the visibility of any highways. Therefore it is logical to assume that the location and the displays themselves will not cause any distraction or confusion to any road users which would endanger people in the vicinity who are taking reasonable care for their own and others safety.

3.3 The proposed displays are not located in positions where drivers need to take exceptional care, for instance at pedestrian crossings, or other places where local conditions present special traffic hazards. Furthermore as the Circular states, as this is located within a commercial area there are less likely to be road safety problems.

3.4 Given the size of the proposed units it will be apparent that any image displayed will be visible and therefore will be easily assimilated within fractions of a second without the need for close study.

3.5 The displays have been designed so that they have good angles of presentation to the road within a motorist's normal 'cone of vision' and within areas where advertising displays are common such that drivers will be familiar to such features having already passed a number of roadside advertising panels. The displays together with the advertising structure will have long distance views and will not appear as a sudden surprise.

3.6 The screens will display single ten second advertisements. This short timeframe will help ensure there will be no long-dwell times from passersby. All the screens will also have the facility to display public/emergency announcements as and when required.

1) Land at Albion Wharf

3.7 As the council will be aware, the proposed screens and elegant supporting structure have already been installed at this location. However it is important to note that the new scheme simply replaced a rudimentary structure which was supporting existing digital displays.

3.8 The current displays have been in situ for over 7 months and the screens previous to these, for nearly 2 years. The principle of the digital displays has therefore been established for some time. During this period there have been no issues whatsoever in relation to highway safety. Furthermore no evidence has been submitted to show either the old or existing screens have had any adverse impact on highway safety.

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3.9 Traffic is well controlled in this area and those travelling to the city centre from the south, who would have exited the A57(M) Mancunian Way, would have passed an advertising tower overlooking the motorway which has similar digital advertising screens.

2) Land at Portland Tower

3.10 The proposed advertising structure is part of the regeneration of the site and is due to replace the existing Bruntwood totem sign. It is important to note that these proposed screens will not display any moving images or any streaming video content.

3.11 This is an uncomplicated part of the road network within the city centre and traffic is well controlled and moves freely along Portland Street. Whilst this junction may be busy it is not uncommon or unusually high given its location at the heart of the city.

3.12 High volumes of traffic should not automatically render this proposal inappropriate. Indeed as stated above, there have been new digital advertising screens erected directly overlooking the elevated Mancunian Way which has higher volumes of traffic travelling at much greater speed.

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4 EXISTING DIGITAL ADVERTISING SITES

4.1 Digital advertising screens are not new in Manchester and there are several which have been in operation for some time. This includes the council's own screen which was re-located to Piccadilly Gardens and the advertising tower with moving images outside Manchester Piccadilly Railway Station on Piccadilly.

4.2 There have also been several new digital advertising screens installed by Media Co throughout the city as part of the planned network of advertising sites in direct partnership with the council.

4.3 Of particular note are the towers granted consent adjacent to the Mancunian Way at the junction of Princess Road, Ref: 097532/AOH/2011. There are two large portrait digital screens facing the traffic on the elevated road, which is classed as a motorway. Consent has also recently been granted for a digital screen at the underpass on the Mancunian Way/Chester Road, Ref: 097559/AO/2011/C1. It is clear therefore the council has considered similar digital screens and has granted consent on several different occasions.

4.4 Most importantly, Highway Services have not objected to any of these digital screens which are arguably in more sensitive locations in regard to the highway safety.

5 SUMMARY

5.1 This Report has been prepared in order to objectively examine and assess the safety issues of the advertisement applications at Albion Wharf and Portland Tower.

5.2 Both sites are located within vibrant commercial urban areas with a number of advertising features. This is an environment within which the proposals are compatible.

5.3 Both locations are suitable for advertising purposes when examined against central government guidance and legislation. Furthermore it is now clear that the proposed displays themselves are not so unusual that they could cause any distraction to those taking reasonable care.

5.4 Taking all matters into consideration, it can be concluded that both the proposals are acceptable in highway safety terms.