Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 25 August 2009

by Simon Berkeley BA MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

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Decision date:
11 September 2009

124 Market Street, Manchester M1 1WA
Appeal A Reference: APP/B4215/H/09/2103804
Appeal B Reference: APP/B4215/H/09/2103805

- Both appeals are made under Regulation 17 of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 against a refusal to grant express consent.
- Both appeals are made by The Whitbread Group against the decision of Manchester City Council.
- In Appeal A, the application reference is 088272/AO/2008/C1. In Appeal B, the application reference is 088274/AO/2008/C1.
- Both applications are dated 14 November 2008. The application in Appeal A was refused by notice dated 10 March 2009. The application in Appeal B was refused by notice dated 11 March 2009.
- In Appeal A, the advertisement proposed is 1 x fascia sign – internally illuminated, 1 x fascia sign – internally illuminated roundel, and 1 x projecting sign – internally illuminated.
- In Appeal B, the advertisement proposed is a pierced Costa roundel sign.

Decisions

1. I dismiss Appeal A.

2. I dismiss Appeal B.

Main issue

3. The main issue in both appeals is the effect of the signs on the amenity of the area.

Reasons

4. These appeals relate to a Costa Coffee premises in the city centre. On my site visit, I saw that all the signs for which consent is sought have already been installed.

5. The coffee shop is in the ground floor of a large building that includes a number of commercial units. Of some vintage, the building's façade incorporates a range of design detailing. Indeed, in my opinion, though not a listed building, it is of some architectural merit. Among the contributing features is a cornice which projects outwards below the first floor window cills. This articulates the delineation between the ground floor primary retail and commercial frontage and the other storeys above. A granite fascia below the cornice further emphasis this, where signage has not been installed on it. As I see it, this architectural definition is an important component in the building's composition.

6. Appeal A concerns a fascia sign positioned just below the cornice, on the granite fascia. It is approximately 1.3 metres high, and extends the width of the Costa Coffee unit, wrapping around the corner adjacent to Caffé Nero. As a consequence of its size, proximity to the cornice, and its projection, it erodes the architectural function and effect of the cornice. That the colour and texture of the granite fascia underneath may have been altered in more recent times does not change this. In my view, the Costa Coffee fascia dominates this part of the building's façade. The size of the lettering and the inset roundel sign add to this. Overall, these two signs stand out here. They are prominent even in the context of this busy shopping street and surrounding signage, including that over the entrance into Caffé Nero, which is recessed behind the building's frontage. It seems likely to me that the illumination of the fascia and roundel sign adds to their intrusive effect at night time.

7. The projecting double-sided roundel sign is more modest in size. At the opposite end of the Costa Coffee frontage from the inset roundel bearing the same logo, it avoids causing a cluttering effect on the building, to any significant extent. In short, considered in isolation, I consider that this sign is not detrimental to the visual amenity of the surrounding area. Whilst I therefore find this sign acceptable, despite its illumination, that is insufficient to outweigh the harm to amenity I judge the other Appeal A signs cause.

8. On the other hand, though, the pierced roundel sign in Appeal B is fixed by cross braces below the inset roundel, carrying the same Costa Coffee emblem, and is of a similar design. This repetitious arrangement, and the size of the signs involved, creates a quite substantial impression of advertisement clutter on this prominent corner. In my view, the pierced roundel sign looks rather awkward and out of place as a result, and its illumination is likely to increase its degree of intrusion.

9. The Council have drawn attention to policies in the Unitary Development Plan for Manchester, and the Piccadilly Partnership Commercial Frontages Design Guide. I have taken these into account as material considerations. However, the Regulations require that the local planning authority, and the Secretary of State on appeal, shall exercise their powers only in the interests of amenity, and where applicable, public safety. As such, I consider that the Council's policies should not, by themselves, be decisive in determining the appeals.

10. I acknowledge the appellant's contention that the advertisements proposed would not require express consent if they were not illuminated, and the Council's contrary view. Notwithstanding this, I have determined the appeals before me on the merits of the signs proposed. In addition, whilst a condition limiting the illumination to the lettering and symbol devices only would help matters, it would not overcome my primary reasons for rejecting the appeals.

11. For the reasons given above and having regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the display of the signs in both appeals is detrimental to the visual amenity of the surrounding area.

Simon Berkeley

INSPECTOR