

19th September 2023

Manchester City Council
Planning Department
Town Hall Extension
Albert Square
Manchester
M60 2LA

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

Potato Wharf, Manchester M3 4NB

Removal of existing D48 and erection of DM6 advertising panel.

Dear Sir/Madam,

Please find enclosed an application for express advertisement consent to upgrade an established digital 48-sheet display panel operating with express consent, to a modern slimline digital format DM6-poster display.

The Applicant

Wildstone Group Limited [the applicant] is part of the Wildstone Group, an outdoor media infrastructure provider that owns and manages the land and equipment required for advertising. Their advertising assets are then rented to operators, who sell the advertising space to local and national companies for various advertising campaigns.

As landlords, Wildstone will always have a long-term investment in their sites regardless of who the tenant is and will manage their assets to ensure that the sites are well maintained and the displays are operating in line with planning conditions. Any problems arising from the sites can therefore be dealt with by a single controlling party.

Outdoor Advertising is now widely recognised by lenders as a property class, allowing it to attract new investment and innovation. As an outdoor media infrastructure provider, Wildstone has invested in the development of hardware in the form of the “D-Poster” panel, which is a high-quality ultra-thin display that offers a high level of control over brightness and reduced energy consumption. The control mechanisms in place enable the D-Poster to mimic a traditional format displays during the day, and appear suitably muted in low light and at night.

As the largest owner of advertising assets in the Country and landlord to all major operators, Wildstone are also able to champion and push best practice with media operators and screen maintenance / screen monitoring contractors, leading to effective systems of control being established to manage the operation of sites and displays.

Sites and content are monitored and controlled remotely in real time from a Network Operation Centre (NOC) to facilitate responsive maintenance where necessary. Engineers are located nationwide to be able to respond within 24 hours to any issues that cannot be dealt with remotely. Diagnostics software can report any small technical faults (e.g. a broken panel) so that a kill switch can turn the content to black until the engineer can reach the site.

The Proposal

The proposal seeks to upgrade an established digital 48-sheet display to a DM6 format, supporting a digitally illuminated advertising display (5m x 7.5m) directed to face southbound traffic to meet current market requirements. The lighting will be directed on to the advertisement and will be in line with the Institute of Lighting Professionals Guidance PL05 for advertising.

The proposal will streamline the existing advertising display and ensure it sits appropriately and more comfortably in between the viaducts arches. The upgraded panel will enable the improved presentation of six advertisements that rotate once every 10 seconds over a one minute cycle. Owing to the recent improvements in digital LED technology, the proposed D-Poster displays are lightweight, durable, efficient, sustainable, and can be easily erected with minimal engineering. Moreover, the digital LED technology and software enables advertising images to mimic those of the existing traditional format billboard displays, as demonstrated at **Appendix 1**.

In addition to the advertisement display, it is proposed to landscape the site through the planting of low level shrubs providing a further enhancement to the road corridor.

Conditions

All advertisements are subject to the five standard conditions set out in the Regulations. The vast majority of digital advertisement consents now also operate within an established set of parameters that include controls over the level of luminance and the proposed speed and rate of change between adverts. These “industry 3 standard” conditions have evolved over time, in order to address common concerns relating to amenity and public safety.

Wildstone and the industry body “Outsmart” have been working to establish best practice for the control of displays both at night and during the day. The D-Poster displays operate with a system of threshold controls, timers, and light sensors to ensure that the luminance never exceeds the Institute of Lighting Professional’s (ILP) newly published guidelines held within Technical Note 5 ‘The Brightness of Illuminated Advertisements including Digital Displays’ (BIADD). The BIADD document provides model conditions for digital illuminated displays to which the proposed D-Poster would adhere. The model conditions also form the basis for the proposal’s recommended conditions which are set out in **Appendix 2**.

The Site

The proposal site is located flush with the railway viaduct adjacent to Dawson Street (the A57) which serves as a main arterial transport route into and out of Manchester city centre. The A57 passes under the viaduct and buildings in the area comprise both historic and modern developments, generally of a large scale. There are residential units on the opposite side of the street and the red brick mill on the southern side of the Viaduct.

There are some trees located close to the appeal site along Potato Wharf but these are set back from the highway behind a grassed area.

The site is located close to the city centre and the character of the area is generally commercial in nature. The viaduct itself is Grade II listed and lies within the Castlefield Conservation Area. It is a substantial and robust structure which visually dominates the immediate and distant views. The site is an established location for advertisements and has an existing digital display which has been in situ since at least June 2015.

The street scene is typical of a commercial location adjacent to the A57 inner ring road where the highway passes through a built up urban area with various development, signage and advertising all forming common features. Digital advertisements of this type are a commonly located adjacent to Manchester's inner ring road and principle arterial routes. In light of the size, scale, massing, and nature of the surrounding built form, it is considered that the proposed D-Poster display would successfully integrate to site as the existing has done for more than eight years.

Planning Policy

The legislative framework for the control of advertisements is contained within The Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 (the "Regulations"). Regulation 3 states that advertising should be controlled in the interest of amenity and public safety, taking into account the provisions of the development plan, in so far as they are material, in addition to any other relevant factors.

The National Planning Policy Framework 2021 (NPPF) sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. In accordance with Paragraph 136 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) advertisements should be subject to control only in the interests of amenity and public safety, taking into account cumulative impacts. As described in the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) the regime is a "lighter touch" than the system for obtaining planning permission for development. The NPPG also clarifies that a local plan does not have to contain advertisement policies and that if such policies are considered necessary to protect the unique character of a particular area, these should be evidence-based.

The statutory development plan for Manchester City Council consists of the Core Strategy (2012), Proposals Map and Extant Unitary Development Plan Policies. Consideration has also been given over to the relevant Supplementary Planning Documents.

Policy EN1 of the Core Strategy sets out the need for all development proposals to contribute positively and to be designed in a way which enhances the overall image of the City.

DC15.1 defers to the advertisement regulations and the need for advertisements to be considered in the interests of amenity and public safety.

Policy CC 9 (Design and Heritage) states that development in Manchester should preserve or enhance the heritage assets including listed buildings and conservation areas. Policy EN3 echoes this and states that new developments must be designed so as to support the Council in preserving or, where possible, enhancing the historic environment, the character, setting and accessibility of areas and buildings of acknowledged importance.

Planning Considerations

In line with the Town and Country Planning Act (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) consideration of the proposals need to be given over to amenity and public safety.

Amenity

The proposal is for a replacement digital panel, on a site in which the principle of advertising has been firmly established through the previous application allowed on appeal (ref. 105529/AOH/2014/C1). In terms of the proposal's impact upon the character and appearance of the surrounding area, it is considered that a DM6 panel would be acceptable at the site location. It is located within a busy commercial environment adjacent to Manchester's inner ring road where large format roadside advertising is an established and accepted feature of the environment.

The panel would be positioned on the same column of the viaduct and part of the adjacent arch as the existing panel is currently. Whilst it is acknowledged that the viaduct is Grade II Listed, and officers had raised concerns in the previous application (ref. 105529/AOH/2014/C1) that a panel in this location would be detrimental to the surrounding environment, the Inspector, who subsequently allowed the application on appeal considered that *"given that the proposal would be positioned in the same location as the existing advert, the only view that it would partially obstruct would be that of the Viaduct's column and part of the adjacent arch. ... it would be no more poorly placed than the existing advert which...is largely absorbed into the appearance of the Viaduct as a result of the substantial height and massive scale of that structure."* This is also considered to apply in the case of the proposed DM6 panel as there have been no material change in the site's circumstances in heritage terms. Although taller in height, it is narrower in width, it does not overhang the viaduct on the western side as the existing panel does and it will be viewed against the backdrop of the viaduct column and will therefore not be unduly dominant and would, therefore, preserve the setting and the character and appearance of the viaduct.

In addition to the consent mentioned above directly on the proposal site, within Manchester an application for a D96 panel within the vicinity of the railway viaduct was allowed on appeal (*Land to the South-east of Crane Street, Manchester – ref. 106259/AOH/2014/C2*). Again, whilst the Council refused the application on the grounds of amenity, the Inspector was of the opinion that it was a *'robust feature which would add interest'* to the area. It was considered that *'the display would be contained below the viaduct parapet, at a point where stark elements of the electrified railway infrastructure already intrude on to the skyline'*. The proposed panel would be viewed within the context of the viaduct and would therefore not be seen as an overly prominent feature of the landscape. This application provides another precedent for a panel in a similar environment within the City.

Map 1 (below) shows the spatial coverage of other DM6 panels within Manchester and Salford City Councils.



Number Reference	Site Name	Planning ref. No
1	Albion Street	107386/AOH/2014/C1
2	9 Whitworth Street West	122579/AOH/2019
3	Dantzic Street	125295/AOH/2019
4	Gateway Piccadilly	056139/AO/CITY3/99
5	Trinity Way	14/64247/ADV & 15/67476/ADV
6	Trafford Tower x2	78053/AA/2012
7	University Road West	16/68766/ADV
8	Regent Road	17/69522/ADV
9	A57 Mancunian Way	107665/AOH/2014/N2
10	Manchester Arena Approach	130791/AOH/2021
11	City Centre Trinity Way	22/80300/ADV
12	48 Crescent	18/72120/ADV

The table below pulls out the most relevant consents listed above within Manchester and Salford City Councils for comparison:

Site No.	Address/Site Name	Local Planning Authority	Type of Advertisement	Planning Reference, Decision (date)
1	Storm, Trinity Way, Salford, Manchester	Salford City Council	1xDM6	15/67476/ADV approved 03.02.2016

2	The Printworks, Withy Grove, Manchester	Manchester City Council	Various LED screens	136226/AO/2023 Approved 05/04.2023
---	---	-------------------------	---------------------	---------------------------------------

Table 1: Comparable Consents –See **Appendix 3** for images

Site 1 – ‘Storm’, a DM6 panel on Trinity Way in Greater Manchester is comparable in the context of the panel being set against the backdrop of a railway viaduct on a busy road leading into Manchester. Officers acknowledged that the site stands in a highly prominent location, however given the surrounding context and the composition of the locality it was not considered to result in visual harm to the surroundings.

It is therefore considered that in line with the previous and surrounding consents, there would be little difference when compared with the existing situation, the proposal would continue to preserve the setting of the listed viaduct and the character of conservation area, in line with Policy CC9.

Concerning illumination, the strict controls placed over the proposed D-Poster’s operation (in accordance with the ILPs BIADD document) and its mimicry of traditional format advertising, sees that it would remain respectful of its surroundings at all times. This is supported by **Appendix 1** which compares a D-Poster display to a traditional format display. With the appropriate controls in place, digital advertisements fairly represent traditional format advertisements and do not appear overly prominent or dominant by comparison. At night, the D-poster is programmed to accord with the ILP guidance for Environmental Zone 4 (EZ 4) and will not therefore exceed 300cd/m².

Given the proposal seeks to replace an existing advert with one of a similar nature, it would not be considered to harm amenity, the qualities of the site, or the character and appearance of the wider area.

Public Safety

When assessing public safety, the key considerations are whether the location is appropriate (i.e. undemanding on the driver) and whether the level of illumination and the sequential change between advertisements is controlled to prevent distraction from the driving task.

As the principle of an advertisement is already established at this location, and the scheme does not differ materially from the existing advertisement, the Council need only consider whether the proposed controls are sufficient to ensure that there is no additional distraction which would cause an unacceptable impact on highway safety. Should the Council’s Highways department identify any reasons why the location might be challenging to drivers, the applicant would be open to discussing alternative controls. However, it should be noted that the proposed conditions are now well established as best practice and as such any change would be unusual and would need to be evidence based and specific to the location.

Furthermore, digital advertising is now a common feature in town centres and adjacent to major roads across the country. There is no causal evidence that digital advertisements cause traffic collisions. Nevertheless, it is an accepted fact that advertisements are intended to attract attention. As such, they are best located in situations where demands on drivers are low and they do not conflict or confuse with other traffic signs or signals. No concerns were raised on previous applications with regards to highways and the nature of the highway has not altered since then and therefore the same approach should be taken.

The proposal site is located adjacent to the railway viaduct whereby the A57, a key transport route, leading into and circling Manchester City centre and comprising of three lanes, runs through it. The road environment is uncomplicated and the panel would be seen by traffic travelling south, which is well lit, straight, level and has good visibility for drivers on the approach. As such, drivers would be entirely capable of glancing at the advertisements whilst maintaining stopping distances and an awareness of surrounding traffic movements. The cognitive demand on road users at this point is slow and there are no fundamental reasons why advertising would be inappropriate.

The proposal will be visible in long views for those travelling south and as such will allow drivers time to assimilate advertisements as part of the surrounding environment. This stretch of the A57 is also uncomplicated and does not require significant cognitive load to navigate. Therefore, the location of the advertising panel is not within the decision making zone of traffic travelling and would therefore still be considered acceptable in highways terms.

Furthermore, regarding the history of highways incidents at the site location, the site has an enviable record, with no incidents recorded over the past five years (www.crashmap.co.uk) on this stretch of the road.

Conclusion

The proposal seeks to replace and upgrade the existing D48 panel with a DM6 panel in a location in which advertising of this nature is considered to be acceptable given the established nature of the site. It has also been demonstrated to be an acceptable location in amenity and public safety terms at appeal and the previous consent for a digital panel on the site is a material consideration in the determination of this application.

The proposed advertisement would be seen within the context of the busy commercial and highways environment in which it would be situated. Additionally, taking account of the existing advert, it would not be materially different to the existing situation.

The proposed landscaping will ensure visual improvements are brought to the area and the proposed conditions to control the luminance of the digital display and its hours of operation will ensure that there is no adverse impact on visual or residential amenity or public safety.

For these reasons and the positive benefits set out, it is considered that the application should be granted express consent subject to appropriate planning conditions.

Application Submission

In order to complete the application, please find attached the following documentation:

- Completed application forms
- Letter Statement (this letter);
- Architectural drawings including;
 - [15198_PA_01 Site Location Plan]
 - [15198_PA_02 Existing Site Plan]
 - [15198_PA_03 Proposed Site Plan]
 - [15198_PA_04 Existing and Proposed Elevations]

Additionally, we will arrange payment to Manchester City Council to cover the cost of the Advertisement Consent application.

I trust that the above is clear and we look forward to receiving notification that the application has been registered in due course. Should you have any queries in relation to any of the attached information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully,



Annie Reid
Planning Manager
020 7751 7315
annie.reid@wildstoneplanning.co.uk