

Applicant: Alight Media

Description: New pair of free standing illuminated 48-sheet digital advertisement displays

Site Address: Land at Shambles House, Shambles Street, Barnsley, S70 2RN

Site Location & Description

The site is located to the South of Shambles Street on the edge of Barnsley town centre. The application specifically relates to the South Western boundary of an existing small car park. Directly to the South of the site is a KFC drive thru restaurant and associate car park which is on a lower level. To the South West is a small area of green space which sits immediately adjacent to Town End Roundabout. Shambles Street sits immediately to the North East of the site and there is a pedestrian crossing adjacent. To the North West is the entrance to Gateway Plaza multi storey car park and also vehicular entrances for an office building and car tyre business. To the North East of the site is a building with a gym fronting Shambles Street and parkour centre facing Peel Parade.

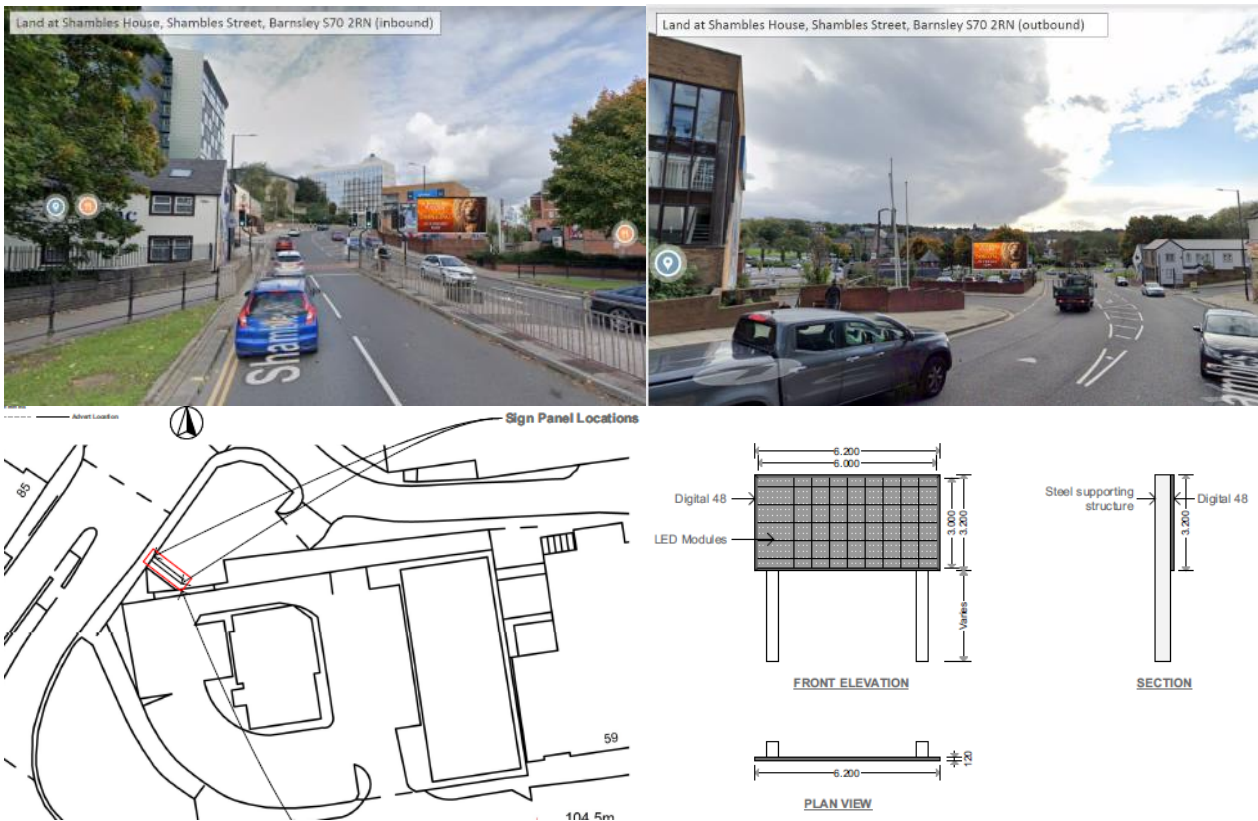
There are currently 2no. signs attached to the boundary wall adjacent to the application site, there is no history of advertisement consent for those signs.



Proposed Development

The proposal is for a new pair of free standing digital advertising displays, with static illuminated advertising. The 2no. 48 poster panels would sit back to back and be mounted on the same 2no. post legs. Each panel would measure 6m in width and 3m in height, the new advertisements would comprise a pressed metal and reinforced plastic frame which would enclose a digital display.

They would present a range of static images. A new image will materialise every 10 seconds with the interchange between each image virtually instantaneous. Advertisements would not contain any movement, animation or special effects.



Policy Context

The Site is allocated as Urban Fabric in the Local Plan; therefore, the following policies are relevant:

Policy T4 New development and Transport Safety

Policy GD1 General Development

Policy D1 High Quality Design and Place Making

Policy Poll1 Pollution Control and Protection

SPD's

Advertisements

NPPF

The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. At the heart is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Development proposals that accord with the development plan should be approved unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out-of-date, permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework as a whole; or where specific policies in the Framework indicate development should be restricted or unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Paragraphs of particular relevance to this application include:

Para 111 - Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.

Para 126 - The creation of high-quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities.

Consultations

Highways – Object and recommend refusal

Ward Councillors – No comments

Representations

None

Assessment

Principle of Development

The Council's SPD on advertisements states that 'signs should be limited to that which is necessary. Advertisements should have regard for the design, scale and proportions of the building or site on which they are displayed. The over provision or poor design of signs can give rise to a cluttered and aggressively commercial appearance which will usually have a damaging impact upon the visual character of an area'.

In addition to 'amenity' the aim of the system to regulate advertisements also relates to 'public safety' i.e. the impact of the proposal upon the safety of pedestrians and vehicles.

Similar 48 sheet illuminated screens, with static digital imagery changed every 10 seconds, were recently refused and dismissed at appeal in similarly prominent locations within Barnsley, and within close proximity to this site at Town End Roundabout, Racecommon Road, Lower Castlereagh Street and West Way (application references: 2020/0213, 2020/1077, 2021/0496 & 2021/1243 and Appeal references APP/R4408/Z/20/3252789, APP/R4408/Z/21/3266463, APP/R4408/Z/21/3275304 & APP/R4408/Z/21/3287587 (decision pending) respectively). The main issues highlighted were the effect of the proposed advert on the visual amenity of the area and on public safety as it relates to road users.

Furthermore, there was also a similar application refused and appeal dismissed on a comparable site on Wakefield Road which is a principal route to and from the Town Centre. The application reference is 2020/0857 and the appeal reference is APP/R4408/Z/20/32608.

Amenity

The advert would be located in a prominent location immediately adjacent to Shambles Street and visible from Town End Roundabout which is a gateway into and out of Barnsley Town Centre which links to junction 37 of the M1 and Barnsley Hospital via Dodworth Road and Summer Lane. There is also a signal-controlled pedestrian crossing immediately to the South West of the site as well as the roundabout junction.

Due to their size and elevated position, the proposal would be a highly prominent feature when viewed from neighbouring roads and public vantage points. The use of the LED display with images changing at regular intervals would be eye catching, particularly during the hours of darkness. It is noted that given the site is surrounded by commercial development there are signs/advertisements within close proximity, however, these are generally related to the use of the premises on which they are sited and, although some are illuminated, they are generally smaller and do not have LCD displays with changing images.

It is appreciated that these types of advertisements are commonplace in many streetscapes in the UK, despite its busy commercial setting the advert would dominate the surrounding area given the sheer size, height and prominence of it.

It is also appreciated that the display may fall within best practice guidance for brightness and transitions are instant. However, the digital illumination would result in a visually incongruous feature that would stand out from the other, more modest, advertisements in the area and dominate the street scene. This impact would be compounded by the intermittent changing of the illuminated display that would significantly draw the eye, further accentuating its visual prominence and harmful effect on the amenity of the area, contrary to the SPD and Local Plan Policy D1.

The proposed advertisement would be harmful to the visual amenity of the area, contrary to the Regulations. The proposal would also be contrary to Policy D1 of the LP and the SPD, which, amongst other things, seek high quality design, and paragraph 136 of the Framework, which states that the quality and character of places can suffer when advertisements are poorly sited and designed.

Public Safety

Colleagues in Highways have raised concerns with this application due to the proposed positioning of the digital advertisement displays. The double-sided illuminated sign is proposed to be located directly adjacent to Shambles Street just off Townend Roundabout in Barnsley town centre. Shambles Street forms part of the main route to and from the town centre and is a section of the highway network that is very busy with both vehicular and pedestrian movements for the majority of any 24 hour period. The proposed advertisement displays are fundamentally designed to capture the attention of highway users but at this particular busy location there should be no additional factors competing for the attention of drivers as it would potentially be detrimental to highway safety.

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) states that all advertisements are intended to attract attention but those located at points where drivers need to take more care are more likely to affect public safety. Such locations include junctions, roundabouts and pedestrian crossings. It further advises that the main types of advertisement which may cause danger to road users are those which are illuminated, which could be mistaken for, or confused with, traffic lights and those which are subject to frequent changes of display.

In terms of the above guidance, this location includes junctions, a roundabout and pedestrian crossings within very close proximity of the proposed display. In particular, in this busy location where car users need to be fully aware of their surroundings with no potential distraction, drivers heading south west along Shambles Street are required, in quick succession, to be aware of vehicles turning left or right into Peel Parade, into and out of the Gateway Plaza car park access, pedestrian movements at the signalised crossing and then the approach to the roundabout.

The most concerning of these issues is that of the pedestrian crossing; the sign would be positioned very close to the crossing and during hours of darkness it could be difficult for approaching drivers to see a pedestrian wearing dark clothing when faced with a large, illuminated sign just to the side of the carriageway. Any additional competing visual stimuli along this section of the highway network would prove an unwelcome and potentially unsafe distraction.

For information, a study from Brunel University cites the abstract below:

There is growing concern that roadside advertising presents a real risk to driving safety, with conservative estimates putting external distractors responsible for up to 10% of all accidents. In this report, we present a simulator study quantifying the effects of billboards on driver attention, mental workload and performance in Urban, Motorway and Rural environments. The results demonstrate that roadside advertising has a clear detrimental effect on lateral control, increases mental workload and eye fixations, and on some roads can draw attention away from more relevant road signage. Detailed analysis of the data suggests that the effects of billboards may in fact be more consequential in scenarios which are monotonous or of lower workload. Nevertheless, the overriding conclusion is that prudence should be exercised when authorising or placing roadside advertising. The findings are discussed with respect to governmental policy and guidelines.

In conclusion, it is considered that the proposed digital displays would likely have a detrimental impact on road safety due to the potential distraction this may cause to drivers. Whilst it is difficult to quantify or assess the level of distraction, the aim of such signs is to attract the attention of passers-by, including drivers, and if a driver is distracted then this is detrimental to the ability to drive safely. As such, due to the potential for driver distraction at a critical point on the highway network it is proposed that this application be refused on road safety grounds, contrary to Local Plan Policy T4 and SPD 'Advertisements'.

Conclusion

It is concluded that the display of the advertisement would be detrimental to the interests of amenity and public safety. Therefore, for the reasons given above and having had regard to all other matters, it is recommended that the application should be refused.

Recommendation

Refused