

UTT/15/0326/AV - (SAFFRON WALDEN)

(Uttlesford District Council has an ownership interest in the site)

PROPOSAL: Update and installation of new illuminated and non-illuminated signage at both Waitrose Store and in and around the car park.

LOCATION: Waitrose Limited, Hill Street, Saffron Walden.

APPLICANT: John Lewis Group.

AGENT: Integrity.

EXPIRY DATE: 1 April 2015.

CASE OFFICER: Clive Theobald.

1. NOTATION

1.1 Within Town Centre / Within Conservation Area.

2. DESCRIPTION OF SITE

2.1 The site is situated on the south side of Hill Street and comprises the Waitrose store and multi-storey car park situated immediately behind. The store has been the subject of an extensive internal refit in recent months, which is still ongoing, whilst the multi storey car park situated behind, which is owned and leased by Uttlesford District Council, is presently undergoing extensive upgrade works. The car park fronts onto Elm Grove, which in part contains sheltered housing for The Fairycroft Residents Association.

3. PROPOSAL

3.1 This proposal relates to an extensive corporate advertisement upgrade for the existing Waitrose store and also for areas of the multi storey car park situated to the rear (collectively forming "the site" for the purposes of this application) in conjunction with the store's internal refit and the car park construction changes. The replacement signage as proposed comprises a large range of both primary and secondary signage which would be either in the form of non-illuminated or externally illuminated signs across the site to reflect the applicant's corporate brand and specific site and customer requirements and which would include amongst the advertising specification lettering signs, projecting signs and totem style signs.

4. APPLICANT'S CASE

4.1 None submitted.

5. RELEVANT SITE HISTORY

5.1 Four non-illuminated directional shop signs approved in 1985. Retention of two illuminated shop signs - one to Hill Street elevation and the other at rear of The Mall approved in 1986. Provision of two internally illuminated signs and one non-illuminated sign approved in 1994.

- 5.2 Single storey extension to existing store, replacement decked car park and extension over existing service area, associated works, including relocation of roof mounted plant, replacement staircase and lift block and landscaping, including removal of trees on the southern boundary and works to trees on the western boundary and ancillary café approved in 2011 (UTT/2012/10/FUL). Demolition of decked car park to rear of the existing store, including associated vehicle ramp, lift and stair block adjacent to store entrance approved in 2011 also (UTT/2013/10/CA) – permission/consent currently being implemented
- 5.3 Non Material Amendment to UTT/2012/10/FUL for internal alterations to store layout, including installation of a storage mezzanine, reduction in the size of lift shaft and stairwell, replacement of glazed area to the car park area with brick, relocation of some plant and trolley bays, and trolley bays on upper car park level to be covered approved in 2014 (UTT/14/0101/NMA). Non-material amendment to planning permission UTT/2012/10/FUL for alterations to approved internal and external layout, alteration of surface materials around car park and store entrance, and additional glazing panel on western elevation approved on 24th April 2015 (UTT/15/0965/NMA).

6. POLICIES

6.1 National Policies

National Planning Policy Framework
National Planning Policy Guidance

6.2 Uttlesford District Local Plan 2005

ULP Policy GEN1 (Access)
ULP Policy GEN2 (Design)

7. TOWN COUNCIL COMMENTS

- 7.1 The Committee objected to the illumination of the 3 No. high level signs shown as B2, B3 and B4 in the application as these would have an adverse impact on neighbouring residential properties.

8. CONSULTATIONS

Essex County Council Highways

- 8.1 The Highway Authority has no comments to make on this proposal from a highway and transportation perspective.

Conservation Officer

- 8.2 The above application relates to proposed signage for the refurbishment scheme for the Waitrose Store, Saffron Walden. The store is located in a relatively unobtrusive position within the town, enjoying a strong brand presence along Hill Street through the existent non-illuminated signage. The scheme for the refurbishment also involves extensive works to the existing car park located to the rear. The entirety of the site falls within the boundary of the Saffron Walden Conservation Area.
- 8.3 The current application seeks consent for the proposed signage scheme. Whilst I am supportive of several elements of the scheme, I do have concerns, particularly

regarding the following signs: B1, B2, B3 & B5 (internally illuminated signage). In accordance with local policy ENV1 (Uttlesford Local Plan), there is a presumption against development which fails to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. In general, the Saffron Walden Conservation Area is characterised by modest commercial signage using traditional sign written or affixed lettering on timber fascias. Signage is generally non-illuminated, with traditional lighting such as swan neck lights or uplighters. Internally illuminated signage or lettering is actively resisted.

- 8.4 At present, the skyline is dominated largely by St Mary's Church, Saffron Walden Castle and historic rooftops and chimneys which contribute to the special character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Due to the highly sensitive nature of the historic environment, the use of excessive artificial lighting is generally discouraged, particularly that which detracts from the primacy of the principle historic buildings within the Saffron Walden Conservation Area. The current scheme proposes the addition of high-level internally illuminated signage to the eastern and western elevations above the lifts, signalling the car park (B2 and B3), internally illuminated signage on the north elevation set back from the street (B5) and a replacement of the existing non-illuminated signage also on the north elevation with internally illuminated letters affixed to the prominent gable of the structure (B1).
- 8.5 Having considered the impact of the proposed scheme upon the character of the Conservation Area, I consider that the internally illuminated signage would be out of character with the Conservation Area, and would have a significant detrimental impact upon the street scene. This impact would be widely felt given the visibility from the public realm. It is felt that the signage scheme will also result in the shop and car park assuming a visual sense of prominence in the town which will actively compete and detract from the primacy of the heritage assets which form part of the significance and character of the area. I am therefore unable to support the scheme in its current form. Finally, the scheme would also set a harmful precedent for other commercial premises in the town, which we would not wish to encourage.

Initial recommendation: Refuse.

Reason: The proposed scheme would introduce highly visible and prominent signage which would be at odds with, and cause substantial harm to, the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. The scheme is neither considered to preserve nor enhance the character of the Conservation and therefore, does not accord with Policy ENV1 of the Uttlesford Local Plan, 2005.

Email received from Conservation Officer dated 15/06/15 following receipt of final revised drawings:

- 8.6 In response to the revised scheme submitted via e-mail on 15th June 2015 (Reference: Issue H - WAI.301.311), I consider that the concerns raised in my previous response dated 2nd March 2015 have now been successfully addressed. I understand that all proposed internally illuminated signage has now been omitted from the scheme, with all prominent lettering and signage being non-illuminated or externally illuminated. I now consider the proposal to be acceptable in principle. However, I note that details of the external lighting have not yet been submitted and would therefore recommend that a schedule for the external lighting be conditioned to be agreed by the Local Authority prior to the commencement of works in order to ensure that the additional lighting continues to enhance and preserve the character and appearance of the Hill Street street-scene and wider Conservation Area in accordance with ULP Policy ENV2.

9. REPRESENTATIONS

- 9.1 Notification period expired 2 March 2015. 3 letters received objecting to the proposal. Advertisement expired 12 March 2015. Site notice expired 12 March 2015.

Summary of objections as follows:

- Whilst the illuminated replacement corporate signs as proposed would be appropriate for the Hill Street shopping frontage as this is a commercial area, the new high level illuminated signs facing out from the rear car park would not be appropriate or necessary from this side onto a residential area (Elm Grove);
- The rear facing illuminated signs would have a detrimental effect on those residents living in Elm Grove opposite the Waitrose car park (including those properties occupied by the Fairycroft Residents Association) by reason of illumination;
- The District Council has a policy of not permitting internally illuminated signs within the town's conservation area, which has been policy for a number of years. This local policy should therefore be applied to the current proposal in the interests of consistency.
- Clearer new signage is required on both sides of a new gate to be retained between the Waitrose car park and Gold Street Surgery where access to the surgery is abused by the general public who are not surgery patients so that the access is not used as a short cut from Gold Street through Gold Street Mews to the Waitrose Store.

10. APPRAISAL

- 10.1 The Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 state that a local planning authority when determining an application made under these provisions shall only exercise its determination powers with regard to amenity and public safety. Government advice to LPA's in considering applications for advertisement consent is contained within Circular 03/07 and more recently within paragraph 67 of the NPPF ("Advertisements should be subject to control only in the interests of amenity and public safety, taking account of cumulative impacts"). Any material policies of the development plan or other relevant factors shall be taken into consideration when making a determination. The Uttlesford Local Plan does not contain any specific policies relating to the display of advertisements, although ULP Policies GEN1 (Access) and GEN2 (Design) are of relevance to this type of application.

- 10.2 The issues to consider in the determination of the application are therefore:

- A Whether the proposal would constitute a hazard to highway safety (ULP Policy GEN1);
- B Whether the proposal would be harmful to the visual amenities of the area (ULP Policy GEN2).

A Whether the proposal would constitute a hazard to highway safety (ULP Policy GEN1).

- 10.3 In the case of public safety, the relevant factors to consider include the safety of persons using any highway and whether the display of the advertisement would obscure traffic signs or would create a hazard.

- 10.4 ECC Highways have been consulted on this application and have not raised any highway safety objections to the proposed advertising where it considers that the signs would not present a pedestrian obstruction nor constitute a hazard to highway safety. This includes the high level signs proposed. Given the lack of a highways objection, the proposal would comply with ULP Policy GEN1.

10.5 The separate representation raised by the Gold Street Surgery relating to access has been noted. However, this is not a material consideration to the planning merits of the current application under ULP Policy GEN1.

B Whether the proposal would be harmful to the visual amenities of the area (ULP Policy GEN2).

10.6 National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) states that “Amenity” is not defined exhaustively in the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007. It includes aural and visual amenity and factors relevant to amenity include the general characteristics of the locality, including the presence of any feature of historic, architectural, cultural or similar interest. It is, however, a matter of interpretation by the local planning authority as it applies in any particular case. In practice, “amenity” is usually understood and interpreted to mean the effect on visual and aural amenity in the immediate neighbourhood of an advertisement or site for the display of advertisements, where residents or passers-by will be aware of the advertisement.

10.7 In assessing amenity, the local planning authority must therefore consider the local characteristics of the neighbourhood; for example, if the locality where the advertisement is to be displayed has important scenic, historic, architectural or cultural features and whether the local planning authority would consider whether it is in scale and in keeping with these features. Para 67 of National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that poorly placed advertisements can have a negative impact on the appearance of the built and natural environment. It advises that control over outdoor advertisements should be efficient, effective and simple in concept and operation and that only those advertisements which will clearly have an appreciable impact on a building or on their surroundings should be subject to the local planning authority’s detailed assessment taking account of cumulative impacts.

10.8 The proposed corporate signage for this site has been revised and updated by the applicant since the original application submission in response to the initial concerns expressed by the Council’s Conservation Officer (see initial consultation response above) whereby two of the more prominent signs, i.e. b2 and b5, which comprised a high level internally illuminated “Waitrose” lettering sign to be located over the lifts to the car park and a “Waitrose” store entrance internally illuminated sign at the top of the entrance ramp have been removed from the scheme.

10.9 The most prominent signs remaining for the corporate upgrade would be the 500mm cap height externally illuminated “Waitrose” new design standard letter sign which would replace the existing Waitrose sign positioned at the bottom of first floor level along the Hill Street frontage building façade (sign b1), a new high level 600mm cap height non-illuminated “Waitrose” letter sign to be positioned over the lifts to the rear car park (sign B3) and a 600mm cap height externally illuminated “Waitrose” letter sign to be positioned at the end of the rear multi-storey car park onto Elm Grove.

10.10 Given the removal of internally illuminated signs b2 and b5 and the removal of the internal illumination for signs b1 (frontage) and b3 and b4 (rear car park) in favour of either externally illuminated or non-illuminated signage via negotiation with the applicant, the scheme is now considered acceptable to the Council in terms of impact upon amenity, with particular emphasis on its impact on the historic features of the conservation area where the signs would now be appropriate and would comply with ULP Policy GEN2.

- 10.11 The submitted scheme provides specification details of the means of external lighting intended to be used (i.e. bracket mounted swivel spot lighting with spot or flood beams). However, the Conservation Officer considers that there is an opportunity for other, more appropriate forms of external lighting/fixing to be used for the scheme overall, such as swan necks or uplighters for example and it is recommend that a schedule for the external lighting be conditioned to be agreed by the Local Authority prior to the commencement of works in order to ensure that the scheme overall enhances and preserves the character and appearance of the Hill Street streetscene and wider conservation area.
- 10.12 The proposed advertising has attracted some representations from the Fairycroft Road Residents Association and also an individual resident residing within Elm Grove concerning the high level signs proposed for the Elm Grove side of the store to the rear of the car park. However, it should be noted that these were received prior to the sign revisions as previously described in this report at the request of the Conservation Officer where one of the high level signs on this side has now been removed (b2) and the two remaining signs on this side (b3 and b4) are no longer internally illuminated.
- 10.13 National Planning Policy Guidance states that it is a matter of interpretation by the local planning authority (and the Secretary of State) as to how it applies the term amenity in any particular case. However, in most cases involving illuminated advertisements, it would be the level of brightness or intensity of a particular advertisement which could detrimentally impact upon the residential amenities of an area. In the case of the current proposal, the fact that the nearest sign to Elm Grove (b4) is now shown to be externally illuminated would mean that any loss of “amenity” in this regard would not be significant, although separate means of redress would still exist under environmental health legislation should the sign consequently ever represent a light nuisance.

11. CONCLUSION

The following is a summary of the main reasons for the recommendation:

- A The proposed signage scheme would not represent a hazard to highway safety and would comply with ULP Policy GEN1;
- B The proposed signage scheme would not be harmful to the visual amenities of the area following revisions to the signage as described in this report as a result of negotiations between the Council and the applicant and would comply with ULP Policy GEN2.

RECOMMENDATION – CONDITIONAL APPROVAL

Conditions/reasons

1. Any advertisements displayed, and any site used for the display of advertisements, shall be maintained in a clean and tidy condition.

REASON: In the interests of visual amenity in accordance with ULP Policy GEN2 of the Uttlesford Local Plan (adopted 2005).

2. Any structure or hoarding erected or used principally for the purpose of displaying advertisements shall be maintained in a safe condition.

REASON: In the interests of visual amenity in accordance with ULP Policy GEN2 of the Uttlesford Local Plan (adopted 2005).

3. Where an advertisement is required under these Regulations to be removed, the removal shall be carried in accordance with details to be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

REASON: In the interests of visual amenity in accordance with ULP Policy GEN2 of the Uttlesford Local Plan (adopted 2005).

4. No advertisement is to be displayed without the permission of the owner of the site or any other person with an interest in the site entitled to grant permission.

REASON: In the interests of visual amenity in accordance with ULP Policy GEN2 of the Uttlesford Local Plan (adopted 2005).

5. No advertisement shall be sited or displayed so as to obscure, or hinder the ready interpretation of, any road traffic sign, railway signal or aid to navigation by water or air, or so as otherwise to render hazardous the use of any highway, railway, waterway or aerodrome (civil or military).

REASON: In the interests of visual amenity in accordance with ULP Policy GEN2 of the Uttlesford Local Plan (adopted 2005).

6. This consent shall expire 5 years from the date of this notice or when the business occupying the premises changes, whichever is the sooner, whereupon the signage shall be removed and any damage repaired unless further consent to display has been given by the Local Planning Authority

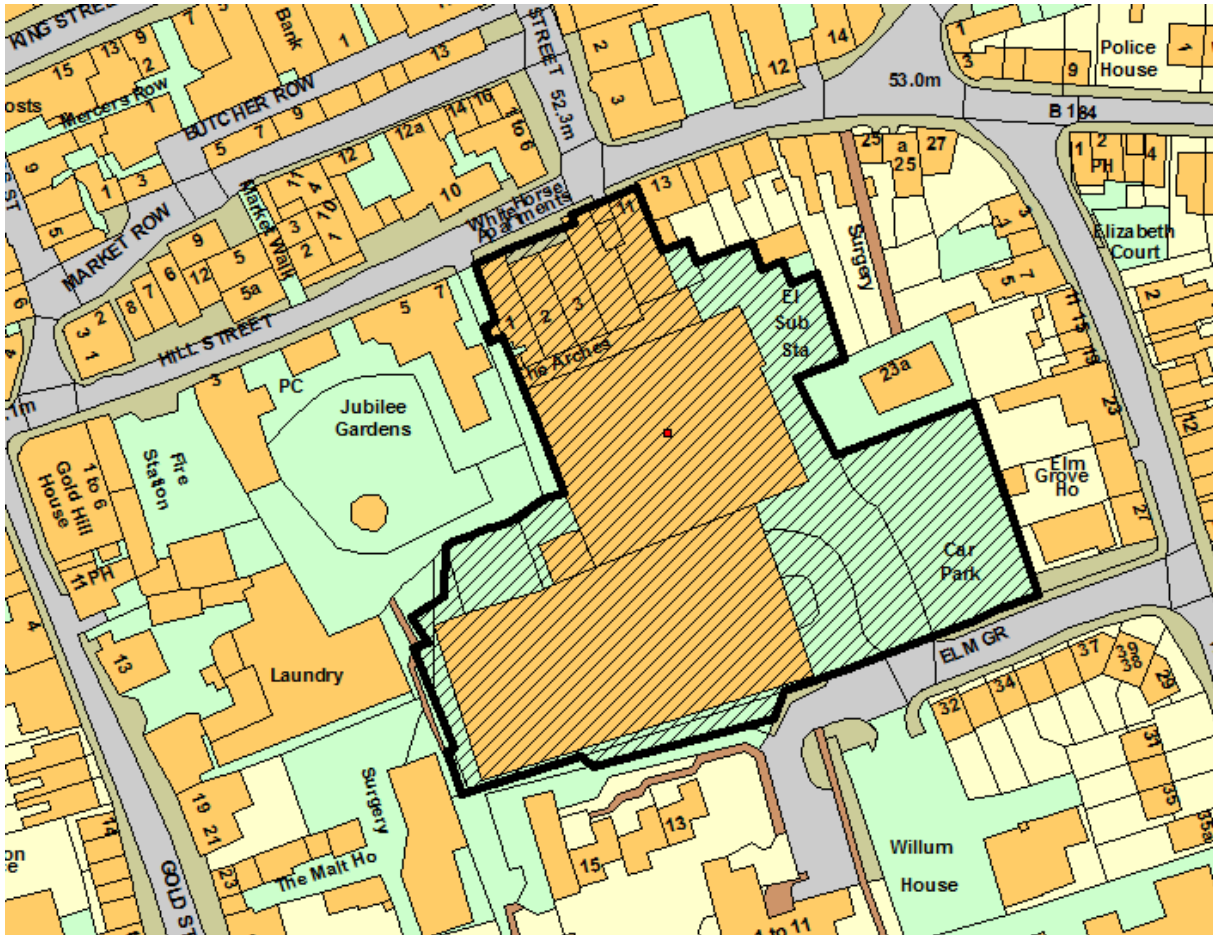
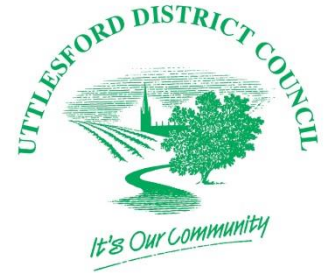
REASON: In the interests of visual amenity in accordance with ULP Policy GEN2 of the Uttlesford Local Plan (adopted 2005).

7. A schedule showing details of the external light fittings proposed to be used for the advertising hereby permitted shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Authority prior to implementation and thereafter the means of external light fitting shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details.

REASON: In order to enhance and preserve the character and appearance of the Hill Street streetscene and wider conservation area in the interests of amenity in accordance with ULP Policy GEN2 of the Uttlesford Local Plan (adopted 2005).

Application no.: UTT/15/0326/AV

Address: Waitrose Limited, Hill Street, Saffron Walden.



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Organisation: Uttlesford District Council

Department: Planning

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