

DC/2015/01542

THE INSTALLATION OF A FREESTANDING 7M HIGH TOTEM SIGN

WESTGATE, LAND OFF MERTHYR ROAD, LLANFOIST

RECOMMENDATION: REFUSE

Case Officer: Kate Bingham

Date Registered: 16th December 2015

1.0 APPLICATION DETAILS

- 1.1 This is an application for express consent to display an advertisement in respect of a 7 metre high totem sign in association with a McDonalds drive through restaurant that was granted planning consent in November 2015. The proposed totem sign comprises a timber effect aluminium pole with an internally illuminated 'golden arch' on a khaki (dark green) background at the top (1.44m x 1.25m) together with an internally illuminated 'open 24 hours' sign (1.44m x 0.96m) and an internally illuminated 'drive-thru' sign below (1.44m x 0.63m). The signage is repeated on both sides of the proposed totem.
- 1.2 The site fronts the Heads of the Valleys Road and forms part of a wider 'commercial' development approved under outline consent DC/2008/00818 granted on 14th October 2010. Access to the site would be provided via a spine road serving the wider development site secured through Reserved Matters consent DC/2013/00266.
- 1.3 Fascia signs on the proposed building and various signs around it have also been granted express consent to display advertisements but a similar application for an 8m high totem sign was refused on the basis that the illuminated totem sign would, by reason of its elevated position and 24 hour illumination, create an intrusive vertical feature interrupting views into and out of the Brecon Beacons National Park to the detriment of the overall character of this area and the setting of the Blaenavon World Heritage site, contrary to Policies DES3, LC2 and LC3 of the adopted Monmouthshire Local Development Plan.
- 1.4 The single difference between the previously refused application for a totem and this application is the reduction in height of the sign by 1 metre. The previous original application was for a 12m high totem which was reduced to 8m prior to determination. It is perhaps worth noting therefore that the sign now proposed is 5 metres lower than that for which consent was originally sought.

2.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

DC/2008/00818 - A) residential and commercial development (outline) B) Alterations and improvements to the existing highway network, improvements to the drainage network (detailed application) - approved 14/10/10

DC/2013/00266 - Approval of reserved matters relating to the access arrangements for the entire site, and full details of all reserved matters (layout, scale, external appearance, access and landscaping) relating to the residential element of the site, as permitted by outline planning permission DC/2008/00818; approved September 2013

DC/2013/00856 - Erection of 61 bedroom hotel (Class C1) and associated restaurant / public house (Class A3) plus associated access, car parking and landscaping - approved January 2014

DC/2013/00871 – Costa Coffee restaurant with drive-through facility; approved August 2015

DC/2014/00998 – Various signs associated with McDonald’s restaurant; approved 2015.

DC/2014/00999 – Fascia signs associated with McDonald’s restaurant; approved 2015.

DC/2014/01000 – Freestanding restaurant with associated drive-thru lane, car parking and landscaping; installation of 2 No. customer order display and canopy; approved. 2015.

DC/2014/01001 – Freestanding 8m high illuminated totem sign; refused 2015.

DC/2015/01428 – Discharge of landscaping condition from consent DC/2014/01000 (drive-through restaurant); ongoing.

3.0 LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICIES

3.1 Strategic Policies

S13 – Landscape, Green Infrastructure and the Natural Environment
S17 – Place Making and Design

3.2 Development Management Policies

DES3 – Advertisements
LC2 – Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site
LC3 – Brecon Beacons National Park

4.0 REPRESENTATIONS

4.1 Consultation Responses

4.1.0 Torfaen County Borough Council (in relation to the World Heritage Site) – No comments received to date.

4.1.1 Brecon Beacons National Park Authority – Objects to the proposed development on grounds that the proposed restaurant and associated advertisement proposals would have a detrimental landscape and visual impact on both views into and out of the National Park to the detriment of its special qualities.

The application site is located in an elevated position, and at its nearest, is approximately 1km east of the Brecon Beacons National Park boundary. The Blaenavon World Heritage Site also partly shares the National Park’s boundary at this location. It is understood from the application documentation that the proposal is associated with the erection of a freestanding restaurant and associated advertisements. The National Park Authority has objected to previous applications at this site.

The information provided as part of the application is generally poor and limited detail has been provided in terms of the landscape and visual impact that this development would have despite its elevated position adjacent to the A465 and in close proximity to the Brecon Beacons National Park, and Blaenavon World Heritage Site. It is acknowledged that this proposal is located within a wider area that is designated within the Monmouthshire Local Development Plan for employment purposes. However, significant concerns are raised in relation to the landscape and visual impact of this development on the National Park based on the information submitted at present.

The Landscape and Character Assessment for the Brecon Beacons National Park (2012) seeks to identify specific landscape characteristics of the National Park and particularly seeks to inform means in which these landscape characteristics should be protected and/or enhanced. The application site is generally at its nearest to the Bloreng Hill and Slopes Landscape Character Area where the impact of surrounding settlements outside of the National Park is acknowledged and the need to reduce the visual impact of development on the National Park is highlighted.

Whilst it is understood that the proposal will result in the removal of existing unsightly buildings, concerns are raised in relation to the proposed restaurant in terms of its elevated siting and external lighting. In particular, it is considered that the proposal would interrupt views into and out of the National Park and would introduce a highly visible vertical feature and would also introduce a feature that would be highly visible at night to the detriment of the overall character of this area and the setting of the National Park and the area of the Blaenavon World Heritage site situated within. The proposal would, by reason of its elevated position, 24 hour illumination and a lack of landscaping, in the Authority's opinion, create an intrusive feature in the skyline interrupting views of the National Park to the detriment of its special qualities. The permitted restaurant and associated signage will be clearly visible from the A465 and the National Park Authority considers additional 7m high signage unnecessary.

Whilst the submission of additional information may allay some of the above concerns, at present based upon the information submitted, the Authority objects to the proposal as it would result in the introduction of an intrusive form of development in an elevated position, illuminated for a 24 hour period, with limited landscaping that would interrupt views into and out of the National Park to the detriment of its special qualities.

4.1.2 Llanfoist Community Council – recommends refusal. Please note the following comments/recommendations;

- The site/land is already elevated, therefore 7m is unnecessary.
- The recommendation of the council is that the height should be no higher than the roofline of the building.
- The site is on the edge of the BBNP who have a 'dark skies' policy and such powerful illumination would give unnecessary light pollution as well as being inappropriate so close to a World Heritage Site.

Please note that the Community Council wish to speak at Committee.

4.1.3 Welsh Government Transport Division – No comments received to date. Did not object to previous application for a higher totem.

4.1.4 Cadw – No comments received to date. Did not object to previous application for a higher totem.

4.1.5 MCC Green Infrastructure (GI) Team – Comments to follow as late correspondence.

4.2 Neighbour Notification

4.2.1 Total of 21 representations received.

4.2.2 17 objections for the following reasons:

- Already have permission for multiple signs; totem is unnecessary.
- Scale of sign unnecessary for the location as the restaurant will be visible from the road anyway.
- BBNP have expressed considerable concerns about the signage that should be heeded.
- From the road the sign will always be seen against the Blorenge and not in keeping with this mountain landscape.
- Blot on the landscape when viewed from Abergavenny Castle.
- Light pollution.
- Totem sign will add to the eyesore already being created on this site.
- Visual vandalism.
- Sends out the wrong signal to tourists arriving in the town attracted by its reputation for good food.
- Application woefully lacking in any assessment of the local environment.
- Visible well beyond the sight of immediate road users for whom it is presumably designed.
- Already turned down, why does it have to be considered again?

4.2.3 4 letters of support for the following reasons:

- What about the pylons that have always been such a beautiful welcome to Wales?
- There will be a Premier Inn, Costa and Brewers Fayre all with similar signs on the site.
- There used to be a Peugeot sign in the same area that didn't seem to bother anyone.
- Lets move on and get the site completed.

4.3 Other Representations

4.3.1 Abergavenny and District Civic Society – objects to the proposal.

This application follows the refusal of an 8m high totem sign. The height of that proposal has been reduced from 12m before the Committee considered it. The application for a reduction of height by another 1m suggests that the applicants have not accepted the message that the authority considered an illuminated totem sign to be both excessive advertising and visually unacceptable. The previous evaluation of DC/2014/01001 and the reasons for refusal for an 8m high totem sign apply equally to one that is 1m shorter. It is especially relevant that the totem would stand apart from the restaurant building and therefore be particularly prominent from the north-east, silhouetted against the Blorenge.

4.3.2 SEWBREC Search Results – Various species of bats recorded foraging/commuting and Great Crested Newts within the vicinity of the site.

4.4 Local Member Representations

Local Member Cllr Hickman – objects. This is a step too far. About 30 signs have already been given permission for this restaurant, I am also sure that the ‘M’ sign will be on the road signage directing traffic to the area. The position of the restaurant is raised well above the carriageway enabling customers to seek it out without the need to add a further 7 metres blot on the landscape directly in front of the Bloreng mountain. McDonalds have permission for the restaurant, now they should try to do the decent thing and not ruin the area any more than needs be!

5.0 EVALUATION

5.1 Principle of Development

Local Development Plan Policy DES3 deals specifically with advertisements;

Proposals for advertisements will only be permitted where:

- a) having regard to the existing number and siting of advertisements in the locality the proposal would not result in an unacceptable clutter of advertisements;
- b) if located within the open countryside they would not unacceptably detract from the rural setting of the locality;
- c) if located in a Conservation Area, they would not unacceptably detract from the character or appearance of the area and if a hanging sign, would not result in undue visual clutter. They should be of an appropriate size and materials for the building from which they hang with a traditional bracket;
- d) if located within the open countryside or Conservation Areas, illumination is only appropriate to uses that reasonably expect to trade at night.

The proposed totem sign would, by design, be visible from a wider area which includes the Brecon Beacons National Park (BBNP) and the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site (BILWHS). The proposed sign should also therefore be considered under LDP policies LC2 and LC3 that refer to these areas.

5.2 Visual Amenity and Impact on Brecon Beacons National Park and World Heritage Site

5.2.1 With regards to criterion (a) of Policy DES3, the use of the building as a drive through restaurant clearly requires some signage and therefore illuminated fascia signs as well as welcome/goodbye signs together with various non-illuminated small directional signage have already been granted express consent. There is currently no other signage in the area except at the entrance to Westgate Yard which is some distance to the west of the application site although there is an extant consent for a Premier Inn, Brewers Fayre and Costa Coffee unit on the adjacent site which will inevitably have some associated signage (although no applications for advertisement consent have been submitted to date). Any applications for signage on the adjacent site would have to be considered on their own merits having regard to the McDonalds site.

5.2.2 Criterion (b) of Policy DES3 requires that advertisements do not detract from the rural setting when located in the open countryside. Given that this site is allocated for office and industrial use in the LDP, it is considered that this criterion does not strictly apply. However, it is considered that due to the visibility of the proposed totem, it will detract from the wider area which is open countryside and is designated for its special qualities. Policy LC3 relating to development within the vicinity of the BBNP states that *‘development that would cause unacceptable harm to the qualities that justify the*

designation of the Brecon Beacons National Park or its setting will not be permitted' and it is noted that in their objection, the National Park Authority have referred specifically to the proposed totem on the basis that it would introduce an intrusive vertical feature in the skyline that will interrupt views into and out of the National Park to the detriment of the overall character of the area as well as the BILWHS which is afforded protection under Policy LC2. Monmouthshire planning officers agree with this assessment and consider that the proposed totem would cause unacceptable harm to the qualities that justify the designation of both the BBNP and the BILWHS. The reduction in height by 1 metre will have a limited effect on the impact of the sign due to the elevated position of the proposed totem sign and the open nature of the site.

Criterion (c) of Policy DES3 refers to advertisements in conservation areas only. This site is not in a conservation area.

Criterion (d) of Policy DES3 requires that in the open countryside illumination is only appropriate to uses that reasonably expect to trade at night. Although as described above, the application site is not in open countryside, the restaurant clearly expects to trade at night. Other signs within applications DC/2014/00998 and 00999, some of which would be illuminated, would reasonably provide potential customers with the information they need to find and use the restaurant without the need for the more intrusive totem sign that would cause harm to the wider landscape.

The planting required under the earlier Section 106 Agreement and that to be implemented by McDonalds will help to soften the proposed building over time but given the proposed location of the totem within the elevated site and the fact that by its very nature the sign is designed to be visible outside the site to a wide area, it is not considered that landscaping would mitigate the adverse visual impact in this case.

5.3 Residential Amenity

The proposed totem sign has been sited to afford maximum visibility from the A465 (T) in order to attract passing trade. As a result it will also be prominent when viewed from the Barratts development beyond. However, given that the site is separated from the application site by the A465 (T) and two slip roads, all of which would be well-lit during the evenings and night time, it is not considered that the illumination of the proposed sign would be likely to cause a nuisance to occupiers at night. The closest of the new Persimmon homes currently being constructed to the south on the site will be some 140 metres from the site and the sign is proposed on the north-western edge of the site so the illumination is unlikely to cause a nuisance to any of these properties.

5.4 Biodiversity

The site is not recorded as a foraging area or commuting route for bats that are the only species recorded within the vicinity of the site that are sensitive to light.

6.0 **RECOMMENDATION: REFUSE**

Reason(s) for Refusal:

1. The proposed illuminated totem sign would, by reason of its elevated position and 24 hour illumination, create an intrusive vertical feature interrupting views into and out of the Brecon Beacons National Park to the detriment of the overall character of this area and the setting of the Blaenavon World Heritage site, contrary to Policies DES3, LC2 and LC3 of the adopted Monmouthshire Local Development Plan.