

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	243198
Site Address:	Unit 1, 125 Reading Road, Wokingham, RG41 1HD
Expiry Date:	4 March 2025
Site Visit Date:	09/01/2024 – See 232988
Proposal: Application for advertisement consent for the proposed installation of 1 no. internally illuminated LED totem signboard.	

PLANNING POLICY

National Policy	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG)
MDD Local Plan (MDD)	TB19 – Outdoor advertising
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document – Section 7

PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
200987	Full planning application for the proposed change of use from A1 (Retail) to B2 (General Industrial) for the use as a motorcycle repairs and MOT facility.	Approval, 22/06/2020
193282	Application for a certificate of lawfulness for the proposed use of building for motorcycle repairs and MOT facility.	Refused, 23/03/2020
232988	Full application for the proposed erection of a two-storey front extension to provide retail space.	Refused 25/01/2024
240383	Full application for the proposed erection of a two storey front extension to provide retail space.	Refused, 05/04/2024
242533	Full application for the erection of two storey front extension to provide additional retail floor space.	Approved, 13/12/2024

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

WBC Highways	No objections, subject to a condition.
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REPRESENTATIONS

No public consultation is undertaken for advertisement consent applications.

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The application site pertains to land located outside a retail unit that fronts onto the northern side of Reading Road. Unit 1 is currently occupied by 'Rideworx Ltd,' a motorcycle dealership.

Proposal:

Advertisement consent is sought for the installation of an internally illuminated LED digital totem signboard. The proposed sign would stand at 5 metres in height, 2.1 metres in width, and have a depth of 0.35 metres. The advertisements will be internally illuminated at a level of 300 cd/m², with the upper LED screen displaying static images that change every 10 seconds.

The display will incorporate an inbuilt light sensor control system that adjusts the luminance based on ambient light levels, ensuring the brightness does not exceed 300 cd/m² during dark hours. The screen will be used to display private advertisements for local businesses.

Policy Requirements:

The Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 2007, the display of outdoor advertisements can only be controlled in the interests of 'amenity' and 'public safety'.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) at paragraph 141 states that 'the quality and character of places can suffer when advertisements are poorly sited and designed.'

Policy CP1 of the Core Strategy states that planning permission will be granted for development proposals that maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment.

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that planning permission will be granted for proposals that are of an appropriate scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area together with a high quality of design without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land users including open spaces or occupiers and their quality of life.

Policy TB19 of the adopted MDD states that the Council will only permit outdoor advertisement where there is no adverse impact on highway safety, no harmful impact on the amenity of adjoining land uses and no harmful impact on the character and appearance of the area. In this instance, Policy TB19 of the MDD would be treated as a material consideration.

Impact on Amenity:

Policy TB19 of the adopted MDD states the following:
The Council will only permit outdoor advertisements where they demonstrate:

- a) There is no adverse impact upon highway safety.
- b) There is no harmful impact on the amenity of the adjoining land uses.
- c) There is no harmful impact on the character or appearance of the area.

Principle SH8 of the Borough Design Guide SPD states:

‘Internally illuminated signs may be appropriate in some locations away from heritage assets provided that they are well designed and in proportion with the building.’

“Amenity” is not defined exhaustively in the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007. It includes aural and visual amenity (regulation 2(1)) 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 (regulation 3(2)(a)). In practice, “amenity” is usually understood 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.

The proposed signboard with LED screen would, due to its size, scale, and illumination, appear visually dominant and unduly prominent within the street scene. It would be 5 metres high and two metres wide, rising significantly above the nearby bus stop.



Figure 1 - Contextual rendering of the proposed totem signboard within the street scene.

The top section of the sign would be a large LED illuminated screen approximately 3.84 sqm that would show static images up to one every 10 seconds. The bottom of the screen would be 3 metres high with the top section rising up to 5 metres. This would be significantly prominent and eye-catching within the street scene due to its elevated position. This section of Reading Road is long and straight, and the LED screen would be seen from distant views when travelling along the road. The changing display would further draw attention, intensifying its visual impact and creating a constantly shifting focal point that disrupts the surrounding environment.

The presence of the bus shelter and traffic sign would not screen the signboard from views along Reading Road when approaching from west to east, the sign would remain fully visible from east to west – as clearly demonstrated by the submitted contextual rendering.

The immediate vicinity along this section of Reading Road features a variety of street furniture, including street lighting columns, utility posts, a bus shelter, and, most notably, a collection of panel signs primarily serving local businesses.

There are two existing totem signs, associated with 'KwikFit' and the 'Shell' fuel but these are materially different. There are currently no illuminated digital advertising boards of this scale in the area. The KwikFit sign is non-illuminated, while the Shell sign is only partially illuminated to a modest degree, displaying fuel prices in lit numerals. In any case, the Shell fuel station totem signboard and KwikFit sign contain basic and simple logos and text and are austere. In contrast the proposed totem would have a large LED screen displaying pictures that constantly change. It would be visually busy and would be a significant prominent feature in the street scene.

Although the display luminance would be adjusted to ambient light levels during dark hours, the sign—being the only digital display of this scale in the area—would still stand out significantly. In fact, during nighttime, the illuminated display would likely appear even more conspicuous, drawing greater attention due to the contrast with the surrounding environment, where no similar digital signage currently exists.

Whilst there are a number of commercial premises in the immediate area, they are generally low-rise buildings. The site is not in a town centre, a high-density location or has high rise development where such signage may be less conspicuous. Reading Road has suburban characteristics and this section has many prominent trees that contribute to the setting. The proposed large LED screen raised significantly high up in the air would be a jarring and incongruous feature that would harm the character and appearance of the area.

Overall, the proposed signage would be harmful to the character and appearance of the surrounding area, conflicting with Policy TB19 of the MDD (2014) and the Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Impact on public safety:

The Council's Highways Officer has reviewed this application and has raised no objections to the proposed development, subject to a condition to restrict the luminance of the screen so it does not pose a distraction or risk to highway users.

No concerns have been raised that the advertisements could obscure sightlines of CCTV cameras to hinder public safety.

Conclusion

Overall, due to the identified harm to the prevailing character and appearance of the street scene, the proposal is contrary to policy TB19 of the MDD (2014) and will form

a reason for refusal.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010):

In determining this application the Council is required to have due regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief. There is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that persons with protected characteristics as identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application and there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

RECOMMENDATION

Recommendation:	Refusal
Date:	27 February 2025
Earliest date for decision:	28 January 2025

**Recommendation
agreed by:
(Authorised Officer)**

MC

Date: 03.03.2025