

**WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL – DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT**  
**DELEGATED REPORT**

**APPLICATION No:** N6/2013/2092/AD

**SITE ADDRESS:** 53 Howardsgate, Welwyn Garden City

**DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT:** Installation of fascia sign, projecting sign and window vinyls.

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**RECOMMENDATION: REFUSE**

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**1. SITE DESCRIPTION:** The site is a shopfront of a designed entablature design.

**2. SITE DESIGNATION:** The site lies within the Central Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area and Town Centre as designated in the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005.

**3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY:**

N6/2006/1132/AD - Installation of internally illuminated fascia and projecting sign – Approved 27/09/2006

N6/2006/0860/AD - Installation of internally illuminated fascia and projecting sign – Refused 10/08/2006

N6/1998/0561/AD - Erection of internally illuminated fascia and projecting signs - Approved 20/07/1998

N6/1997/0782/AD - Erection of internally illuminated fascia and projecting signs - Refused 22/12/1997

N6/1976/7024/AD - Illuminated symbol on existing fascia – Approved 07/10/1976

**4. CONSULTATIONS:** None

**5. PUBLIC REPRESENTATIONS:**

No representations have been received from the public.

**6. MAIN PLANNING ISSUES AND RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES:**

The main planning issues with this application are:

- a) Impact on visual amenity and the Central Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area (D1, D2, Supplementary Design Guidance, NPPF - paragraph 67 and chapter 7)
- b) Highway Safety

**7. ANALYSIS:**

a) The application site is an original Garden City building featuring a shopfront with a designed entablature design which is bounded by others of the same design on either side. At the time of, or close to, the submission of this application, a 'flat' acrylic fascia signage of the same appearance as proposed fascia signage was erected. This signage is non-illuminated and appears to benefit from Class 5

Deemed Consent. This signage remains in place. However for the reasons set out below, given its matching design to the proposed fascia signage, it is not considered to accord with the requirements of the relevant policies of the Council's District Plan and Supplementary Design Guidance, or paragraph 67 of the NPPF.

As shown on the submitted plans, the application proposes a blue painted background to the fascia with the remaining surrounds (pilaster, entablature and others) remaining white. It would feature white text, primarily in the form of a word and corporate logo taking up approximately half of fascia width together. Further to this coverage, white text of about half the fascia height would occupy the majority width of either space to the left and right.

The Council's Supplementary Design Guidance (SDG) applies which features general guidance for advertisements in paragraph 6.5 and for advertisements in conservation areas in paragraphs 6.6, 6.7 and 6.8. Criterion (i) of para 6.5 says that proposals should be well-designed and sensitively positioned and should relate to the character, scale and design of the building in which they will be displayed and that they must not detract from the character of the building or street scene. This is reiterated in criterion (i) of paragraph 6.8. Criterion (v) of para 6.5 says that advertisements will not be permitted where they would be out of scale with the structure to which they would be attached and/or detrimental to the visual amenity of the area, especially in conservation areas.

Paragraph 6.9 of the SDG features specific design criteria for proposals on this type of designed entablature shopfront in order to secure the high quality design expected by policy D1 of the District Plan. These include the use of (i) individual lettering fixed directly to the white painted fascia, as the preferred form of advertisement. Therefore the use of acrylic lettering on the existing unauthorised signage or on the proposed fascia signage, and its siting on a blue painted fascia, would not comply with this element of criterion (i). Some nearby units of the same designed entablature shopfront design have colored fascias to a similar or greater degree than proposed, such as Specsavers adjacent to the north. However some may have been permitted prior to the 2005 District Plan adoption, such as Specsavers adjacent which was permitted in 2003. On the other side adjacent to the south, the Shoe Zone shopfront recently permitted broadly accords with the design criteria of the SDG. Furthermore, in 2012 the Council produced its guide to shopfront and advertisement design which reiterates this requirement, adding weight to the need for proposals to adhere to the guidelines set out in the SDG.

Further to the above, two other design criteria outlined in para 6.9 for designed entablature shopfronts, (ii) and (iv), are also relevant. IV has similar requirements to above. It states that a box sign with a coloured background which is less than  $1/3^{\text{rd}}$  of the length of the fascia, centrally positioned to show a white background on either side, will also be acceptable. This proposal does not propose a box sign however and therefore the blue colouring across the length of the fascia would not accord with this criterion. The signage would not however exceed the fascia depth and therefore the proposal accords with criterion (ii). However on balance, given that the design of the signage fails to accord with criteria (i) and particularly (iv), the proposal would result in a design which visually dominates the shopfront and surrounding element of street scene. In doing so, it would also fail to accord with the aims of criteria (i) and

(v) of para.6.5 and (i) of para 6.8 of the SDG which are expanded upon earlier in this section. Therefore in the above regard the proposal fails to represent high quality design and respect and relate to its surroundings as required by policies D1 and D2 of the District Plan and the NPPF.

The fascia signage includes a corporate logo. Paragraph 6.6 of the SDG states that the overriding aim of preserving and enhancing the uniqueness of the area is more important than the promotion of corporate images. Adjacent shopfronts have proportionately designed corporate logos, as did the previously approved frontage. In this instance the design/size of the company logo (graphic and main text element) clearly exceeds the 1/3<sup>rd</sup> fascia length sought in the SDG guidance. It is acknowledged that the guidance refers to signage/logos within box signs unlike the proposed signage which sits directly onto/along the fascia. However in whichever form the signage takes, the purpose of this 1/3<sup>rd</sup> fascia length limit for corporate logos is to ensure that advertisements sit subservient to the fascia, shopfront, host building and wider street scene in order to protect the visual amenities of the area. The proposed corporate logo would be disproportionate to the fascia and shopfront dimensions. Accordingly it would detract from the character of the shopfront and its host building, and thus the surrounding street scene of Howardsgate in this conservation area. This element of the proposal therefore fails to accord with the aims of paragraph 6.6, parts (i) and (v) of paragraph 6.5 and part (i) of paragraph 6.8 of the SDG, as expanded upon earlier in this report. In doing so, this aspect of the proposal fails to represent high quality design and fails to respect and relate to its surroundings as required by policies D1 and D2 of the District Plan respectively, and the broadly consistent design aspirations of the NPPF.

The fascia would be illuminated with 'halo' lighting. Illuminated signage exists on frontages in all directions from the application site owing to its location fronting a pedestrianised 'square' at the ends of Howardsgate. The previously approved and implemented fascia signage was internally illuminated. Therefore the principle of illuminated signage is not an unusual addition to the visual amenities of the street scene in this location. With regard to criterion (vi) of paragraph 6.5 of the SDG, the LED lighting method would achieve this through a discreet means similar to internal illumination without the need for external projecting lighting elements and thus satisfy this requirement. The level and means of illumination could be secured through the use of planning conditions to control its visual impact. Provided such conditions are secured, the proposed lighting would not detract from the character and visual amenities of the Conservation Area.

A small element of blue background and white text advertisement is proposed on the central sub-fascia/area above the central door below the fascia. Given its limited dimensions and consistent design with the remaining proposed signage, it would not be of a scale, design or siting as to appear unduly prominent on the host shopfront/building and thus the surrounding area. As such it would satisfy the above general design principles of the District Plan, SDG and NPPF.

#### Projecting Sign

The proposed projecting sign would be located at fascia height. Given its siting and dimensions, and its design, it would not appear unduly obtrusive when viewed from the street scene of Howardsgate. Its design would harmonise with the fascia depth

and as such it satisfies the relevant criteria (iv) of paragraph 6.5 of the SDG in this regard.

#### Window Vinyls

The proposed window vinyls and signage above the door, on the sub fascia, would clearly be subservient in scale, design and prominence from that of the main shopfront. As such, no objection is made to them with regard to their impact on the visual amenities of the shopfront, host building and surrounding street scene of the conservation area. They would therefore accord with the above relevant aspects of the SDG and the aforementioned aims of policies D1 and D2 of the District Plan and the NPPF.

#### Conclusion

The proposed window vinyl, advertisement on the sub-fascia above the door, means of lighting and projecting sign would accord with the aims of the SDG and policies D1 and D2 of the District Plan and the NPPF.

However the proposed fascia signage, by virtue of the scale/dimensions of the fascia signage and its design, particularly its extent of logo/text and colour coverage, would appear overly prominent and disproportionate to the fascia and wider shopfront when viewed from the surrounding area of the street scene of Howardsgate. In doing so, it would fail to represent high quality design as it would not respect the visual amenities and thus character of the host shopfront, building and street scene of the conservation area, contrary to policies D1 and D2 of the District Plan, the Council's 2005 Supplementary Design Guidance on advertisements and paragraph 67 of the NPPF.

The requirements of paragraphs 186-187 of the National Planning Policy Framework were adhered to in the consideration of this application whereby during the early stages of the application officers explained their initial concerns to the applicant's agent by email correspondence. Officers explained that the proposal was not policy compliant and how the proposal could be amended to achieve a satisfactory outcome. Numerous exchanges of correspondence took place, including receipt of a further revised set of proposals where one scheme was policy compliant and officers requested the agent's agreement to pursue with that scheme as an amendment to this application. The agent subsequently did not choose to pursue that option and after further exchanges of correspondence where officers explained to the agent that the application would be refused if continued to be assessed on the basis of the originally submitted plans, the agent ceased further contact with officers. Accordingly, after further notification from officers, the originally submitted scheme as proposed has now been recommended for refusal.

b) The proposal would involve illuminating the signage and a projecting sign. The site does not front a highway carrying vehicular traffic as it fronts a pedestrianised area. The site previously featured approved illuminated signage and a projecting sign. The projecting sign would not project higher than fascia level as is usual for such signs. The intensity and means of illumination could be controlled by way of planning conditions as a safety measure nonetheless for traffic further down the

street on Howardsgate and Stonehills. Subject to such conditions, the proposal is not considered acceptable in terms of highway safety.

**8. CONCLUSION:**

The proposal is not acceptable in terms of visual amenity.

The proposal is acceptable in terms of highway safety subject to conditions.

**RECOMMENDATION: REFUSAL AND REASON:**

1. The proposal, by virtue of the scale/dimensions of the fascia signage, extent of logo/text coverage, and its design, would fail to represent high quality design and would not respect or maintain the character and visual amenities of the host shopfront, building and the surrounding street scene of Howardsgate in the conservation area. It would therefore fail to satisfy policies D1 and D2 of the District Plan, the Council's 2005 Supplementary Design Guidance on advertisements and the NPPF

**INFORMATIVES:** None

**Signature of author**..... **Date**.....