

Report to District Development Control Committee



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Date of meeting: 2 March 2009

Subject: Advertisement application EPF/2432/08 for the installation of sponsorship information signage at 15 locations in the District.

**Officer contact for further information: J Shingler Ext 4106
Committee Secretary: S Hill Ext 4249**

Recommendation(s):

(1) That Advertisement Consent for the signage proposed at locations 1-14 inclusive be granted; and

(2) That Advertisement Consent for the signage at location 15, be refused for the following reason:

1. The proposed signage, given its location, is likely to be a distraction to drivers, that may result in early braking that could result in harm to highway safety, contrary to policies DBE13 and ST4 of the adopted Local Plan and Local Plan Alterations.

1. (Director of Planning and Economic Development) This application is before this Committee as the Applicant is Epping Forest District Council and the application includes signage in more than one Area Planning Sub Committee Area and is a District -wide initiative.

Planning Issues

Description of Proposal:

2. The proposal is for the installation of sponsorship information signage at 15 locations in the District. The signs proposed are non-illuminated, powder coated aluminium signs of a simple rectangular design. Each sign will include a top panel with Essex County Council Logo and Epping Forest District Council Logo, below which will be information regarding the sponsor, as yet the details of sponsors are obviously not known and therefore the detailing of the wording and design on the main body of each sign is unknown.

3. The proposed signs come in two sizes, Sign A 1625mm wide x 950mm deep and 250mm above ground level and sign B 1152mm wide x 500mm deep and 100mm above ground level. Examples of the signs are shown at Annex 1 to this report. The roundabout signs are each to be sited such that they are clearly visible to traffic approaching the roundabout and the exact siting will be dependant on the positioning of other signage on the roundabouts.

Description of Sites

3. The signs proposed are as follows;

Location 1. Roundabout: Epping New Road/Earls Path. 2 signs type B. The site is within the Metropolitan Green Belt and Epping Forest Land in a relatively rural location and close to the locally Listed Robin Hood Public House.

Location 2. Roundabout: Honey Lane South of M25. 3 signs type A. The site is within the Metropolitan Green Belt, there are no immediate neighbours and the area is dominated by road infrastructure.

Location 3. Roundabout: Honey Lane north of M25. 4 signs type A. The site is within the Metropolitan Green Belt and adjacent to the Swallow Hotel at the entrance to Waltham Abbey.

Location 4. Roundabout: Sewardstone Road/A121. 4 Signs type A. The site is within the Metropolitan Green Belt and adjacent to residential Development and the Sainsbury Distribution Centre.

Location 5. Roundabout: Lower Island Way/A121. 4 signs type A. This site is also in the Metropolitan Green Belt although it is sandwiched between residential development and the Sainsbury Distribution Centre.

Location 6. Roundabout: Abbeyview/Highbridge Street. 4 signs type A. The site is within the urban area of Waltham Abbey but is outside of the conservation area.

Location 7. Roundabout: Abbeyview/Crooked Mile. 4 Signs type A. The site is within the Metropolitan Green Belt, but is on the edge of the urban area of Waltham Abbey with residential properties to the east and car parks to the south.

Location 8. Roundabout: Epping New Road/Woodriven Hill. 5 signs type A. This is a relatively rural Green Belt location within Epping Forest land, adjacent to the Wake Arms.

Location 9. Roundabout: The Talbot/A414. 4 signs type A. The site is within the Green Belt, although there is built development on three sides, including a pub and an employment site.

Location 10. Roundabout: Four Wantz/A414. 4 signs type A. The site is within the Metropolitan Green Belt and adjacent to a Conservation Area, Grade II listed Wantz farm and locally listed development at Bowes House.

Location 11. Roundabout: London Road A113/A1112. 3 signs type B. The site is a rural location within the Green Belt. There are no adjacent properties.

Location 12. Roundabout: Ongar Road, Stapleford Aerodrome. 3 Signs type A. The site is a rural location within the Green belt; there are no immediate neighbours.

Location 13. Roundabout: Rayley Lane North/ A414. 3 signs type A. This is a rural Green Belt Location with no immediate neighbours.

Location 14. Roundabout: Rayley Lane South/Vicarage Lane. 3 signs type A. This is a rural Green Belt location and again there are no immediate neighbours.

Location 15. Central Reservation: Chigwell Lane, opposite exit from M11. 2-4 signs type B. The site is the narrow central reservation of Chigwell Lane. The site is within the Metropolitan Green Belt but is dominated by road infrastructure including the M11 and slip roads. There are no properties immediately adjacent to the site.

Site plans for each location are attached.

Relevant History

4. EPF/1814/08 Sponsorship and information signs 15 sites, - Withdrawn to enable safety audit to be carried out.

Policies Applied

5. National guidance states that the factors to be taken into account in determining advertisement applications are visual amenity and public safety; additionally the following policies are relevant.

Adopted Local Plan and Local Plan Alterations
DBE13 advertisements
CP2 Quality of Rural and Built Environment
GB7a Conspicuous Development
HC6 Character and Appearance Within Conservation Areas
LL2 Inappropriate Rural development
ST4 Road Safety

Issues and Considerations.

6. This is an application by the District Council for consent for sponsorship signage at various sites in the District. The principle of sponsorship of roundabouts in Key locations in the District is in order to generate income to the Council to enhance the visual appearance of these locations and to support expenditure streams and was agreed by council some time ago. The County Council run an Essex-wide scheme of sponsorship and any proposed signage must meet their safety standards.

7. In planning terms the only considerations are visual amenity and public safety.

Visual Amenity.

8. In determining this application consideration must be given to the visual impact of the proposed signage on the street scene and the locality in general. Whilst proliferation of signage is generally not considered to enhance visual amenity, the signs proposed here are of limited size and simple design, and they are located actually on the roundabouts, so are by definition surrounded by roads and highway paraphernalia.

9. Each of the proposed sites has been considered and although some of the sites are relatively rural in character they are all on important distributor roads, not minor rural roads and it is not considered, given their highway setting, that the signage proposed would be visually harmful to the character or amenity of the area. The signs are not illuminated and are of a type that it is not unusual to see on roundabouts in other areas. The design incorporates both the Essex County Council Logo and the Epping Forest District Council Logo, which helps to instil a sense of identity and place for drivers as they travel the District.

10. Additionally, it should be remembered that the reason for the signage is to gain an income stream, which will be used for general visual enhancement of these areas, and it is considered that this will outweigh any small harm that may arise from the siting of the signs themselves.

11. Whilst some concern has been raised regarding the impact of the proposal on the Green Belt, Policy GB2a which restricts development in the Green belt refers to buildings and uses of land and not to adverts, which as stated previously can only be determined on visual amenity and public safety. It is not considered that the signage will adversely impact on openness of the Green Belt.

Public Safety

12. Each of the proposed sites has been the subject of a safety audit carried out by the County Council and the sizing and design details highlighted in that report have been adopted in the revised application. Whilst some of the roundabouts have seen traffic accidents in recent years it is not considered that the installation of the sponsorship signs will lead to additional traffic Hazard. The size of the signs is such that they will be easily read and should not cause undue distraction as they are to be sited so as to be easily read during the approach to the roundabout not while negotiating the turn itself. They are clearly designed not to look like traffic information signs so that they will not cause confusion. Additionally the County sets the size and design of the signs with safety being a major consideration.

13. Whilst concerns have been raised by Parish Councils and interest groups with regard to safety, it is not considered that the proposed roundabout signage will cause harm to highway safety. However, the proposed signage on the central reservation of Chigwell Lane was considered in the safety audit to be unacceptable on safety grounds. It is considered that southbound traffic frequently approaches the M11 Slip at inappropriate speed, which leads to heavy braking as they enter the on-slip. It is felt that any distraction to drivers in this position may result in earlier braking, which following vehicles may not anticipate and this may well result in nose to tail collisions. On the basis of this safety audit conclusion County Highways have objected to any signage in this location. It is therefore considered that the proposed signage at site 15 would have potential to cause hazard to highway safety contrary DBE13 and policy ST4 of the adopted Local Plan and Local Plan Alterations.

Other Issues.

City of London Concerns

14. The City of London Conservators of Epping Forest have raised concern about the impact of the three signs that are within the Forest, (Epping New Road/Earls Path, Epping New Road/Woodriven Hill and Honey Lane North of M25) on the Green Belt, on visual amenity and on the historic nature and wildlife value of Epping

Forest. Whilst the visual impact and Green Belt issues have been addressed above, it is not considered that the introduction of these non-illuminated signs on existing traffic roundabouts will have an adverse impact on the historic nature and wildlife value of the Forest.

15. Additionally the Conservators have stated that in order to install the signage on these three roundabouts on Epping Forest Land it would be necessary for appropriate wayleaves to be sought from the Conservators. The implication is that no such wayleave will be given. This is a matter separate from the advert application. Advertisement Consent can be granted, but unless the landowner gives consent the works can not be carried out. The need for a wayleave is not therefore grounds to refuse the advert application.

Installation and Maintenance.

16. Concern has been raised about the installation and maintenance of the proposed signage. The signs will not be installed or maintained by the sponsors but by the County Council or its agents.

Conclusion

17. In conclusion it is considered that the introduction of the proposed signage at sites 1-14 inclusive is in accordance with the adopted policies of the Local plan and Local plan alterations and will not cause harm to visual amenity or public safety and these signs are therefore recommended for approval. The signs proposed at site 15 however are considered likely to cause harm to Highway safety, contrary to the adopted policies DBE13 and ST4 of the adopted Local Plan and Local plan Alterations and are recommended for refusal.

Representations

CHIGWELL PARISH COUNCIL – No objection.

NORTH WEALD PARISH COUNCIL – Re Rayley Lane North/A414, Rayley Lane South/Vicarage Lane and The Talbot/A414. The Parish Council Objects to this application. Whilst the Council welcomes the sponsorship for maintenance of the roundabouts it has concern at the size of the adverts. Added to this there is no confirmation that the sponsors of the roundabouts would be the same people who maintained and beautified the roundabouts. There is also concern at the safety aspect of large signs on roundabouts, which may take drivers attention away from the road.

STAPLEFORD ABBOTTS PARISH COUNCIL – Refusal of this application was recommended, the proposed advertising is obtrusive and could be a distraction for motorists, and is out of keeping with a rural environment. The Parish Council also asked if it is proposed that the advertiser using the main panel of the advertisement board would maintain the roundabout? Councillors expressed surprise that the District Council should want to advertise a major airline. This does not seem to be in keeping with “going green”

LOUGHTON RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION – We suggest the committee consider adopting a set of suitable criteria for these applications, we do not consider such signs are suitable on sites in or on the edge of areas of natural beauty such as Epping Forest itself, which they would be visually intrusive. They are also visual distractions at busy or dangerous junctions.

While we support EFDC 's attempts to raise extra finance we object to: Epping New road/Earls Path, Epping New Road/Woodriven Hill due to visual impact on the forest and we object to Central reservation Chigwell Lane due to highway safety concerns. We note that the Road Safety Assessment recommends that signs should not be deployed at this location.

CITY OF LONDON EPPING FOREST OFFICE. - Object to the 3 sites in the Forest. All three are Green belt two are within the Epping Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest and the Special Area of Conservation. The signs are of an intrusive nature in respect of their siting and design within the forest setting and would be conspicuous development. The signs would also prejudice the historic nature and wildlife value of the Forest. Should permission be granted appropriate wayleaves would need to be sought from the Conservators on the Forest land that makes up the roundabouts. Epping Forest Transport Strategy working document seeks to reduce number of signs in the forest.

CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT RURAL ESSEX – It is inappropriate to place signs on those roundabouts within the special area of Epping Forest ie Epping New Road, at Earls Path and Woodriven Hill. They will detract from the rural feel and from the visual quality of the Forest. The central reservation Chigwell Lane should be kept free of obstruction for safety reasons. Any signs added to other roundabouts should be kept to the smallest size possible to minimise distractions to drivers

SCHOOL HOUSE, TAWNEY LANE – Object. Street signage is already polluting the countryside and these roundabout advertising boards are ugly. They will distract a driver when he should be concentrating on other traffic.

THE BARN, FOUR WANTZ - Object, particularly to those listed as being in the East Area. Signs will spoil the country feel on entry into the villages. Not appropriate to this area of beauty and conservation. Any adverts on the Four Wantz roundabout will result in loss of outlook from my barn and all the listed buildings surrounding and overlooking the roundabout. Harm to highway safety from interruption in concentration, installation and maintenance of the signs will cause disruption, illumination of the signs would cause further harm. There is a need for separate applications to fully consider each application.

Any other comments received will be reported orally at the meeting.