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## Inspector's Report PL91.248425

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<b>Development</b>	Retention of illuminated shop front signage and window graphics.
<b>Location</b>	Unit No.7 Bedford Row & Henry Street, Limerick
<b>Planning Authority</b>	Limerick City and County Council
<b>Planning Authority Reg. Ref.</b>	17/126
<b>Applicant</b>	Poundland t/a Dealz
<b>Type of Application</b>	Retention permission
<b>Planning Authority Decision</b>	Refuse
<b>Type of Appeal</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> Party v. Refusal
<b>Appellant</b>	Poundland t/a Dealz
<b>Observer(s)</b>	None
<b>Date of Site Inspection</b>	07/07/17
<b>Inspector</b>	Pauline Fitzpatrick

## **1.0 Site Location and Description**

- 1.1. The site in question constitutes the corner unit at the junction of Bedford Row and Henry Street in Limerick city centre. It is occupied by Dealz over two floors. The block consists of retail/commercial units at ground floor level with between 4 and 8 storeys of residential units over.
- 1.2. Henry Street bounding the site to the north-west facilitates one-way vehicular traffic with Harvey's Quay Shopping Centre opposite the site. Bedford Row is pedestrianised.

## **2.0 Proposed Development**

- 2.1. Retention permission is sought for illuminated shop front signage and 2.8 metre vinyl graphics (signs) on the two street elevations onto Bedford Row and Henry Street in addition to illuminated signage over the entrance door. The stated purpose of the vinyls on the windows is so as to disguise the rear of shelving. It is also stated that internally illuminated signage and fascias have already been permitted under planning ref. 08/770340.

## **3.0 Planning Authority Decision**

### **3.1. Decision**

Refuse retention permission for two reasons;

1. The signage to be retained is unduly prominent and has a negative impact on the quality of the streetscape and would therefore be contrary to the provisions of the City Development Plan. It would set an undesirable precedent.
2. The proposal materially contravenes condition number 2 attached to ref. 07/770376.

### **3.2. Planning Authority Reports**

#### **3.2.1. Planning Reports**

The planning report notes that the site is in the city centre shopping core in an area where significant works have been carried out in relation to the improvement of the public realm to achieve a high quality urban design. The manner in which shop fronts and signage is treated is central to maintaining the high quality public realm. In this context the signage to be retained is considered excessive and not sympathetic in design and colour to the building and surrounding buildings. It is considered to have a negative impact on the quality of the streetscape and is not proportionate to its scale. It provides for unnecessary repetition and results in a domineering impact on the streetscape. It would set an undesirable precedent. It fails to meet the City development standards for signage. It greatly exceeds the requirements of condition attached to 07/770376.

#### 3.2.2. Other Technical Reports

None

#### 3.3. **Prescribed Bodies**

None

#### 3.4. **Third Party Observations**

None

### 4.0 **Planning History**

Reference is made in the planning report on file to:

07/770376 – permission granted for provision of external signs (some of which are illuminated) on the signage zoned of the previously approved 7 no. retail units

08/770340 - retention permission granted for internally illuminated external tenant signs and associated elevational changes including the provision of 2 no. metal backing panels.

## 5.0 Policy Context

### 5.1. Limerick City Development Plan 2010

#### Advertising on Buildings

In general advertising on buildings should conform with the following:

- Be sympathetic in design and colour both to the building on which the signage will be displayed and the surrounding buildings etc.
- Not obscure architectural features such as cornices or window openings.
- Illuminated signs or other advertising structure will not be allowed above the eaves or parapet level on buildings in any part of the City.
- Shop front advertising should be designed as an integral part of the shop front and not left as an afterthought.
- Applications for new, or a change of use of commercial units, will be required to indicate what type of signage is proposed.

#### Fascia signage/Illuminative/Projecting Signs

The Planning Authority's objective is to improve the quality of advertisement and shop front design.

As a general principle fascia signs and projecting signs should be simple in design, not excessive in illumination or size.

The following basic guidelines will be applied in assessing planning applications:

- Plastic derived fascias with product advertising will not be permitted.
- Projecting signs should be of 2.4m clearance above street level.
- Internally illuminated fascias will not be permitted.
- Internally illuminated signs shall be restricted.
- Overall illumination of fascia signage or shop fronts or distinctive architectural features should be discreet and limited to spot-lighting, up lighting or disguised minimalist strip lighting.

- The use of banners, flags, billboards and other forms of commercial and cultural advertising will be strictly controlled in the City Centre and essentially restricted to those outlets of a cultural/entertainment activity.
- Product advertising on canopies will not be permitted.
- An over-riding principle is the avoidance of visual clutter and an improvement in the quality of the commercial character of the city.

## 6.0 The Appeal

### 6.1. Grounds of Appeal

The submission from Tony Bamford Planning on behalf of the applicant against the planning authority's notification of decision to refuse permission can be summarised as follows:

- The purpose of the full height vinyls on the windows is to mitigate the visual impact of shelving which would otherwise be visible to the exterior.
- With a substantial mass of glass the building is more than capable of absorbing more signage than in other locations.
- The facades are usually in the shade with a substantial overhang south of the store along Henry Street. The store is almost always in shadow increasing the need for illumination and increased signage.
- There is precedent set in the signage on the adjacent Dunnes anchored development.
- It should be considered in the context of signage variety on New Row.
- Subject to proposed alterations as set out in Appendix 2 the signage is considered to accord with development plan requirements. The purpose of the changes is to create greater symmetry in the overall signage wherein the two main display windows close to the entrance would be omitted such that views would be available into the store from each street removing dead frontage. The removal of the name 'Dealz' from fascia B will also mean there is the same number of words on New Row and Henry Street fascias.

- Internally illuminated fascia has already been permitted on the unit. This is being retained as an established permitted right. Internal illumination of the fascia is already used on New Row.
- The fascia signage covers an area which was previously permitted for Pamela Scott and its dimensions are the same as signage along Bedford Row. Pamela Scott was allowed to advertise its corporate pallet and this should be allowed in this instance.
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> reason for refusal is not relevant. The application is for the retention of a specific format of signage, not compliance with a historic condition.

## 6.2. Planning Authority Response

None

## 6.3. Observations

None

## 7.0 Assessment

7.1. The site in question at the corner of Henry Street and Bedford Row is at a prominent location especially viewed from the north along Henry Street within Limerick City's retail core. One of the aims of the development plan is to provide for a more careful and sensitive approach to the design of new shopfronts and advertising structures so as to assist in the objective of achieving a high quality urban design. I consider the requirements to be reasonable. The role of signage on a retail street is very important in projecting an image for that street and in this regard the objective should be for quality design and materials.

7.2. Whilst the building, of which the site forms the pivotal corner unit, is modern in design and execution and allows for a certain latitude in terms of signage design, I would not concur with the view that the substantial extent of glazing allows for the absorption of more signage than in other locations. Nor do I accept the defence that as the facades are usually in the shade with a substantial overhang that there the need for illumination and increased signage. I acknowledge that there is a mix of

signage along both Bedford Row and Henry Street. In my view, some are more successful than others.

- 7.3. I submit that the sheer number and duplication of signage across two floors in the bright livery of the company creates a visually obtrusive feature in the streetscape at such a prominent corner and amounts to visual clutter. No other unit in the vicinity can be considered to be comparable.
- 7.4. Whilst I acknowledge that the purpose of the full height vinyls on the windows is to mitigate the visual impact of shelving which would otherwise be visible to the exterior they create dead frontage onto the street which is contrary to best practice. Alternative design solutions including alterations to internal store layout which does not involve such dominant signage should be fully explored.
- 7.5. The applicant has availed of the opportunity in the grounds of appeal to submit suggested amendments to the signage, the material change being the omission of the first floor vinyl graphics to each elevation and the replacement of one of the graphics at ground floor level fronting Henry Street to match the arrangement on Bedford Row. Whilst a significant improvement I consider that should the Board be disposed to a favourable decision that the omission of all the ground floor vinyl graphics be required. Alterations are also proposed to the fascia along Bedford Row so as to match that onto Henry Street.
- 7.6. In terms of the fascia the fact that the unit has extensive frontage has an influence in terms of impact on the streetscape. It is contended that internally illuminated signage was previously permitted on the building and the current proposal is in accordance with same. Although requested from the planning authority details of the planning history on the site remain outstanding. The Board is advised that the wording of condition 2 attached to 07/770376 referred to in the planning authority's notification of decision is replicated in the Planner's report on file. Notwithstanding, I note that each application must be judged on its own merits and in accordance with the pertinent policy framework that is current at the time of decision.
- 7.7. The current development plan is quite explicit in its requirements that internally illuminated fascias will not be permitted. The signage to be retained has, by reason of its use of the corporate livery, has none of the subtlety of the signage of the previous occupant of the unit or of the units in the vicinity which also have such

internally illuminated signage. I consider that the corporate image can be preserved whilst adhering to the development plan requirements. That as proposed to be retained is considered to be contrary to the best practice and the requirements of the Limerick City Development Plan in that it fails to adhere to many of the basic guidelines and therefore I recommend a refusal of permission.

#### *AA – Screening*

- 7.8. Having regard to the location of the site and the nature and scale of the proposed development no Appropriate Assessment issues arise and it is not considered that the proposed development would be likely to have a significant effect individually or in combination with other plans or projects on a European site.

## **8.0 Recommendation**

Having regard to the foregoing I recommend that permission for the above described development be refused for the following reasons and considerations.

### **Reasons and Considerations**

Having regard to the nature and scale of the development proposed for retention, the provisions in relation to shopfronts and advertisements as set out in the Limerick City Development Plan 2010, the nature and scale of the building at a prominent location at the junction of Henry Street and Bedford Row and the pattern of development in the area, it is considered that the signage as erected on the building by reason of its scale, design and quantum on the building frontage is excessive in terms of visual clutter and that the retention of such signage would seriously injure the visual amenities of the area. The development proposed for retention would, therefore, be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

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**Pauline Fitzpatrick**

**Senior Planning Inspector**

**July, 2017**