



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report ABP 304463-19

Development	Erection of 1 no. sign on the South Mall façade of the hotel
Location	The Maldron South Mall Hotel, 93-95 South Mall, 17-18 Parnell Square, (protected structures ref nos. PS822 & PS823) and Beasley Street, Cork
Planning Authority	Cork City Council
Planning Authority Reg. Ref.	19/38272
Applicant	Leevlan Ltd.
Type of Application	Permission
Planning Authority Decision	Refuse Permission
Type of Appeal	1 st Party v. refuse
Appellant	Leevlan Ltd.
Observer(s)	None
Date of Site Inspection	25/06/19
Inspector	Pauline Fitzpatrick

1.0 Site Location and Description

The 6 storey Maldron Hotel is a T shaped building with its main access from South Mall in Cork city centre. It is bounded by Beasley Street which is a narrow lane to the west and Parnell Place to the east. It currently has the benefit of signage over the main entrance from South Mall, on the Parnell Place elevation, in addition to horizontal signage on the south-western corner which is visible when travelling along South Mall. South Mall provides for one way vehicular movements, only, in a west to east direction.

2.0 Proposed Development

Permission is sought for a sign to be erected at 4th floor level on the left hand corner of the southern elevation fronting onto South Mall. The signage would be 1.020 metres in height and 6.181 metres in length comprising the corporate lettering and colours of the hotel group. White LEDs mounted within the letters is proposed.

The application is accompanied by a supporting covering letter and an Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment.

3.0 Planning Authority Decision

3.1. Decision

Refuse permission for one reason which can be summarised as follows:

The proposal, by reason of its location, massing, and scale would contribute to visual clutter in terms of signage and advertising on South Mall, would set a precedent for further similar signage at this location, would not be in keeping with the established pattern or character of the location, would be contrary to section 16.119 of the Cork City Development Plan in relation to signage and advertising and would have a negative impact on the visual amenity of the area.

3.2. Planning Authority Reports

3.2.1. Planning Reports

The Assistant Planner's report (endorsed by the Senior Executive Planner) notes that a previous application under ref. TP 18/38039 included a high level sign at a similar position on the South Mall façade which was omitted by condition. Recent decisions relating to high level signage in the vicinity noted. The existing sign above the entrance to the hotel at ground floor level is considered the appropriate location for signage at this location and any additional high level signs would set an undesirable precedent and would create visual clutter contrary to the over-riding principle seeking to avoid visual clutter and an improvement in the quality of the commercial character of the city. A refusal of permission for 1 reason recommended.

3.2.2. Other Technical Reports

Road Design has no objection.

3.3. Prescribed Bodies

None

3.4. Third Party Observations

None

4.0 Planning History

16/37224 – permission granted for redevelopment of existing permitted hotel building.

17/37660 – permission granted for modification to the development permitted under ref. 16/37224.

18/38039 – permission granted for 4 no. signs and external lighting. Condition 2 required the omission of the high level signs on the south and north elevations.

5.0 Policy Context

5.1. Cork City Development Plan 2015

The site is within an area zoned ZO 1 City Centre Retail Area the objective for which is to provide for the protection, upgrading and expansion of retailing, in particular higher order comparison retailing, as well as a range of other supporting uses.

17 and 18 Parnell Place are listed as protected structures.

Part H: Advertising & Security Signs

Advertising on Buildings

16.118 In general advertising on buildings should conform to the following:

- Be sympathetic in design and colouring both to the building on which they will be displayed and their surroundings;
- The City Council will aim to reduce visual clutter and control the number of signs & advertising that are displayed;
- Shop front advertising should be designed as an integral part of the shop front and not left as an afterthought;
- Not obscure architectural features such as cornices or window openings;
- Illuminated signs or other advertising structures will not be allowed above the eaves or parapet level on buildings in any part of the city.

Fascia Signage and Illuminative and Projecting Signs

16.119 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:

- The City Council will aim to reduce visual clutter and control the number of signs & advertising that are displayed;
- 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;
- The design of illuminated signage should be sympathetic to the building on which it is to be displayed;
- 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 daytime appearance when unlit will also be considered;
- 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.

5.2. **Natural Heritage Designations**

None in the vicinity.

6.0 **The Appeal**

6.1. **Grounds of Appeal**

The submission by Coakley O'Neill Town Planning on behalf of the 1st party appellant, which is accompanied by photomontages, can be summarised as follows:

- The proposed sign has been reduced in size and relocated on the building façade in response to the concerns raised on planning file TP18.38039 which required the omission of high level signage on the south elevation onto South Mall by way of condition.
- Signage helps businesses and organisations inform the public of their location. The Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment submitted with the application notes that there is a strong tradition within the city of incorporating

signage and lettering within the upper portion of commercial façades with examples along South Mall provided.

- Signage is an essential element of the commercial character of the city and is an intrinsic part of the built environment in commercial areas. There should be some acknowledgement of the positive contribution signage can make to creating a sense of place and that the regulation of signage must be such that it continues to allow commercially zoned areas and the businesses therein, to function efficiently and effectively.
- The Board is asked to recognise the importance of hotel accommodation to the social and economic life of the city and to support well designed signs that enhance the quality of the city's tourism offer and enable visitors to find their accommodation.
- There is a need for the sign. The hotel's experience since its opening is that the ground floor signage is not sufficient. The high level sign will address this allowing the hotel to be identified from the south and east and from longer distances.
- The surface area of the South Mall elevation is in the region of 500 sq.m. the façade runs to 19 metres giving it a significant presence on the street. The proposed and existing signage will, in total, cover a surface area of less than 10 sq.m. The signage cannot be considered disproportionate to the scale and design of the building.
- The sign is not out of character with the building and is representative of the original design intent to introduce a contemporary feel to the presentation of the hotel onto the street.
- The Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment concluded that having regard to the nature, composition and scale of the proposal and the locational context and character of the permitted hotel, the sign can be successfully incorporated without injury to the character of the protected structure or the streetscape.

- It is queried whether the reason for refusal should refer to section 16.118 rather than 16.119 as the sign is not a fascia, projecting or internally illuminated sign.
- The sign meets the criteria set out in UK Planning Policy Statement 17.
- The sign cannot be found to have an impact on the safety of pedestrians or road users.

6.2. **Planning Authority Response**

No further comment

6.3. **Observations**

None

6.4. **Section 131 Notice**

In view of the proposal involving work to the curtilage of a protected structure certain prescribed bodies were invited to make an observation on the appeal.

No responses received.

7.0 **Assessment**

This effectively constitutes the second application for the erection of a high level sign on the south elevation of the existing Maldron Hotel onto South Mall. The planning authority in its decision under ref. 18/38039 required, by way of condition, the omission of high level signs on the south and north elevations of the hotel on the grounds of visual amenity (the application sought permission for four signs and external lighting). In the said application the sign on the South Mall elevation was to be 2.4 metres in height straddling the 4th and 5th floors with a length of 6.8 metres. The current proposal is for a sign at 4th floor level with a height of 1.020 metres and length of 6.181 metres. The corporate logo and livery of the hotel chain remains the same. The purpose of the signage is to allow for identification when viewed from a distance to the west and south. The hotel has the benefit of signage over the entrance at South Mall, on Parnell Place and at the corner of Beasley Street.

Whilst I acknowledge that signage is important to the identification and location of a premises and can contribute to the streetscape of the city, a balance must be struck between the commercial requirements of a business and the amenities of the streetscape in terms of protecting against visual clutter. This is explicitly required in the current City Development Plan guidance on signage as set out in Part H of Chapter 16 addressing development management.

I would accept that there is a tradition in the city of incorporating signage/lettering within the upper portion of commercial facades with the examples given in the Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment noted. In my opinion, however, the examples given are not comparable in that they comprise of lettering incorporated within the design of the buildings and are integral to the facades rather than having been retrospectively added.

Whilst South Mall is a busy commercial street where a certain level of signage would be expected I submit that the hotel already benefits from signage visible from the street including that at the corner on Beasley Street. The proposed high level sign entailing the corporate logo and livery of the hotel chain whilst recognisable is not, in my opinion, of a contemporary style or design which is of particular note. When viewed from the west along South Mall all three signs (2 existing and 1 proposed) would be visible and this, in my opinion, would not be proportionate to the size and scale of the building in the streetscape. I would also submit that in the context of the high level signage visible in views from the south, namely the signage to the side of the KPMG and Gardiner House buildings, the proposal will give rise to concerns in terms of visual clutter and I would also express serious reservations as to the undesirable precedent such a proposal would set should it be facilitated on the basis of the case made in its support.

I therefore concur with the planning authority's refusal of permission.

Appropriate Assessment

Having regard to the nature and scale of the proposed development and nature of the receiving environment 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 documentation on file, the grounds of appeal, a site inspection and the assessment above I recommend that permission for the above described development be refused for the following reasons and considerations.

9.0 Reasons and Considerations

Having regard to the existing signage on the hotel building which are visible from the west and south and to existing signage in the vicinity including high level signs, it is considered that the proposed high level sign would seriously injure the visual amenities of the streetscape and would give rise to visual clutter which would be contrary to the provisions of the current City Development Plan for the area in relation to signage, which provisions are considered to be reasonable. The proposed development would therefore be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

Pauline Fitzpatrick
Senior Planning Inspector

July, 2019