

Area West Committee – 19th September 2012

Officer Report On Planning Application: 12/02390/ADV

Proposal:	Display on 2 No. non illuminated directional signs (GR 329565/113258)
Site Address:	Land At Ham Farm Ham Farm Lane Combe St Nicholas
Parish:	Combe St Nicholas
BLACKDOWN Ward (SSDC Member)	Mrs R Roderigo (Cllr)
Recommending Case Officer:	John Millar Tel: (01935) 462465 Email: john.millar@southsomerset.gov.uk
Target date:	27th August 2012
Applicant:	Mr Ivor Hutchings
Agent: (no agent if blank)	
Application Type:	Other Advertisement

REASON(S) FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE

The application is to be considered by Area West Committee at the request of the Ward Member, with the agreement of the Area Chair. It is felt that the application should be given further consideration by members, to consider the potential impact on highway safety and local amenity.

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL



The proposal is made to erect two advertisements on land to the side of the A303 for the purposes of advertising bed and breakfast accommodation at Ham Farm. Ham Farm is located along Ham Farm Lane, approximately 185m from the junction with the A303.

The two advertisements are directional signs and proposed to be provided on land within the ownership of Ham Farm. One sign (Advertisement 1) is proposed to be sited approximately 250m in advance of Ham Farm Lane and measure 625mm by 570mm and the other (Advertisement 2) is proposed on the junction itself, measuring 620mm by 160mm. Both signs are to be of timber construction with green text on a white background. The sign referred to as 'Advertisement 1' has already been erected on site.

The site is in open countryside and outside any defined development limits.

HISTORY

No relevant history

POLICY

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 repeats the duty imposed under S54A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and requires that decision must be made in accordance with relevant Development Plan Documents unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Relevant Development Plan Documents

Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan:
STR1 - Sustainable Development
Policy 5 - Landscape Character
Policy 51 - Road Hierarchy

South Somerset Local Plan 2006:
ST5 - General Principles of Development
ST6 - The Quality of Development
EC3 - Landscape Character
MS7 - Control of Advertisements

Policy-related Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework:
Chapter 7 - Requiring Good Design
Chapter 11 - Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment

Planning Circular 03/2007 - Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007

South Somerset Sustainable Community Strategy (2008-2026):
Goal 5 - High Performance Local Economy: A competitive, high performing economy that is diverse, adaptable and resource efficient.
Goal 11 - Environment: Protection and enhancement of our material environment and biodiversity.

CONSULTATIONS

Parish Council: No objections.

SSDC Technical Services: No comment.

Highway Agency: The signs will not be prominent from the A303. The Highway Agency has no objections to this proposal.

County Highway Authority: 26th July: I refer to the above mentioned planning application received on 9th July 2012 and following a site visit on the same day I have the following observations on the highway and transportation aspects of this proposal.

The proposal relates to the display of two non-illuminated signs.

As you will no doubt be aware, the positions where the signs will be located will be on or in close proximity to highway which is the responsibility of Somerset County Council, in addition to the A303 whereby the Highway Agency is responsible as such I would recommend that they are consulted with regard to this application.

The A303 is designated as a Trunk Road and is noted under Policy 51 of the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan as a National Primary Route and carries a significant volume of traffic on a daily basis. The signs will also be located in close proximity to the junction Ham Farm Lane, which has a history of road traffic accidents on and around the junction. Therefore this is not a location where the Highway Authority would welcome non-highway related signage that could distract drivers and also set a precedent for further applications in this location for additional (unnecessary) signage.

I therefore raise objection to this proposal for the following reason.

The proposed signs are considered to be prejudicial to highway safety by virtue that it would be likely to distract, or confuse road users because of its size detailing and proximity to the public highway and the nearby junction.

28th August 2012: In terms of the accident records these would need to be obtained from a separate department as there is a charge. However I had a look again this morning and there are four accidents in total (three slight and one serious, which is further down from the site) of course these are the reported incidents and does not include 'near misses' etc.

The main concern from the Highway Authority was that by advertising this site the adverts would not only distract drivers on the A303, which potentially cause an incident but also if the site is advertised then it has the potential to increase the use of the existing junction onto the A303. This again has the potential to cause on incident with vehicles on the A303.

I know that you consulted the Highway Agency on this one and I don't think they raised objection. To be honest if it had been a direct access off the A303 to a property or farm we wouldn't have commented. But as there is an element of highway that comes under our control I had to put our concerns in writing.

SSDC Landscape Architect: I note the application for signage on land alongside the A303 near Ham Farm Lane.

There is national concern over increased amounts of signage in both town and country, and a drive coming from government to 'de-clutter' the environment. Official Highway signage along rural roads is unavoidable and accepted, though that is not to say that such signage could not be reduced, but that is a discussion for another day with County Highways and the Highways Agency.

In this instance, whilst neither large-scale nor illuminated, when combined with highways signs along this route corridor, these private signs would add to the visual clutter by the roadside. I view such signage as a negative element in this deeply rural setting. I do acknowledge that the impact is not significant, yet that does not provide a basis for landscape support.

REPRESENTATIONS

The application has been advertised by site notice for the requisite period. No comments have been received.

CONSIDERATIONS

Principle of Development

The application relates to the provision of two advance directional signs to advertise bed and breakfast facilities at the nearby Ham Farm. Ham Farm is a working dairy farm, with tourist accommodation comprising two bedrooms within the house and further accommodation in a static caravan, which does not benefit from the express grant of planning permission. The proposed signs are both outside any defined development areas and in open countryside. They are also proposed on land adjacent to the A303, which is a trunk road.

Saved Local Plan policy ST6 states that development should *"preserve and complement the key characteristics of the location and should not cause unavoidable harm to the natural and built environment of the locality and the broader landscape."* Similarly, saved policy EC3 states that *"development outside development areas, which is otherwise acceptable, should not cause unacceptable harm to the distinctive character and quality of the local landscape."* Saved policy MS7 states that *"permission for the display of advertisements will be permitted where they are in keeping with the character of the surrounding area in terms of siting, design, materials, illumination and scale,"* as well as where they *"do not prejudice public safety."* In respect to applications for advertisements outside development areas, this saved policy specifically states that *"permission will only be granted in exceptional circumstances."* The policy highlights exceptional circumstances as when it is necessary in terms of highway safety to give advance warning to motorists. When considering such applications, the officer's decision should be made in the interests of 'amenity' and 'public safety'. Paragraph 67 (chapter 7) of the National Planning Policy Framework, also recognises the negative impact that poorly placed advertisements can have on the built and natural environment. However, this guidance supports control of advertisements only they would *"clearly have an appreciable impact on their surroundings."* The need to consider the interests of 'amenity' and 'public safety' is repeated.

Guidance within paragraph 153 of Circular 03/2007 does recognise that advanced signs for local tourist facilities, such as bed and breakfast facilities, can be a vital way of attracting potential customers, thus benefiting the local economy. If refused, this should be done on grounds of 'amenity' and 'public safety'. Paragraph 148 of this circular does however acknowledge that there are road safety issues in displaying advertisements alongside motorways and other trunk roads. The Highway Agency is the usual consultee

and it is stated that they are unlikely to support any application for an advertisement which could distract drivers. It is further stated that *"the road safety and amenity issues raised by these advertisements mean that it is unlikely that express consent to display them would be given."*

Amenity

In regard to amenity, it is noted that the site is very rural in nature, being an isolated location largely devoid of adverts, other than official highway signage, which is prevalent along the A303, particularly around the proposed siting of 'Advertisement 2'. The Council's Landscape Architect has raised the issue of national concern regarding increased amounts of signage on roads and associated drives to de-clutter the environment. It is acknowledged that these adverts aren't particularly large in scale and aren't illuminated but it is considered that the cumulative impact of the proposed signs, along with existing highway signs along the A303, will have a negative impact on local amenity by way of impact on the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

Public Safety

No information has been provided to offer any support for the proposal in terms of need for the advertisements or to indicate that they may be necessary for highway safety purposes, as required by saved policy MS7.

The Highway Agency have responded, raising no objection to the adverts, as they conclude that they will not be prominent from the A303. In contrast however, the County Highway Authority have raised a specific objection to the provision of these signs. The Highway Authority highlight the location of the proposed sign in close proximity to the junction of Ham Farm Lane and the A303, where they indicate that there is a record of road traffic accidents, on and around this junction. For this reason, it is recommended that the proposal be refused on the basis that non-official highway related signage could distract drivers and also set a precedent for further unnecessary signage in this location.

The Highway Authority's concerns have been questioned, particularly in regard to the accidents at the site. This has however been clarified and the Highway Authority still maintain their objection in regard to the potential impact on public safety at this point. It is acknowledged that the Highway Agency are the main consultee in relation to development affecting a trunk road but the County Highway Authority concerns are mainly in respect to the Ham Farm Lane, which meets the A303 at this point and is under the County Council's control.

Conclusion

While signage for local tourist accommodation may in some circumstances be encouraged, there is no justification for the proposed signs in terms of need for highway safety purposes. In fact, their siting in this location on a trunk road, close to a junction with a history of road traffic accidents, is considered to be prejudicial to highway safety. Furthermore, the cumulative impact of the proposed advertisements, together with existing official highway related signage, along the A303 signs is considered to have a negative impact on the character and appearance of the local landscape to the detriment of local amenity. As such, the recommendation to Members is to refuse planning permission.

RECOMMENDATION

Refuse.

SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING:

01. The signs are located outside any development areas, in open countryside where it is the Council's policy to restrict roadside advertisements in the interests of protecting the character and visual amenities of the area. In this case, it also considered that the cumulative impact of the proposed advertisements, together with existing official highway related signage along the A303, would have a negative impact on the character and appearance of the local landscape, to the detriment of local amenity. As such, the proposed development is contrary to the aims and objectives of policies STR1 and 5 of the Somerset and Exmoor National Joint Structure Plan Review, saved policies ST5, ST6, EC3 and MS7 of the South Somerset Local Plan, the provisions of chapter 7 of the National Planning Policy Framework and guidance contained within Planning Circular 03/2007.

 02. The proposed signs are considered to be prejudicial to highway safety by virtue that it would be likely to distract, or confuse road users because of its size, detailing and proximity to the public highway (A303) and the nearby junction with Ham Farm Lane. As such, the proposed development is contrary to the aims and objectives of saved policy MS7 of the South Somerset Local Plan, the provisions of chapter 7 of the National Planning Policy Framework and guidance contained within Planning Circular 03/2007.
-