

**LOCATION:** CHOBHAM COMMON, STAPLE HILL ROAD, CHOBHAM, WOKING

**PROPOSAL:** Application for Advertisement consent for the erection of one non-illuminated car park sign on each of the six car parks serving Chobham Common (retrospective).

**TYPE:** Advert - (Non-Illuminated)

**APPLICANT:** Mr Steve Mitchell  
Surrey County Council

**OFFICER:** Patricia Terceiro

**This application would normally be determined under the Council's Scheme of Delegation. However, it is being reported to the Planning Applications Committee at the request of Cllrs Tedder and Wheeler, due to the inappropriate nature of advertising within the Green Belt.**

**RECOMMENDATION: GRANT subject to conditions**

**1.0 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 Advertisement consent is sought for the retrospective erection of one non illuminated car park sign on each of the six car parks serving Chobham Common.
- 1.2 Overall, it is considered that the proposed signs are of an appropriate size for the purpose of assisting the access into the car parks by visitors. It is further noted that the signs are not illuminated, and therefore do not cause any light pollution within this nature conservation area. By virtue of their colour palette, modest size and siting next to the entrance of each car park, it is not considered that the proposed signs harm the visual amenities of their surroundings. The current proposal is not considered to conflict with the nature conservation value and openness in this Green Belt location, residential amenity and highway safety and is therefore recommended for approval.

**2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION**

- 2.1 Chobham Common is a lowland heath area designated for nature conservation purposes as a National Nature Reserve, Special Protection Area, Special Area of Conservation and Site of Special Scientific Interest. The area forms one of the most ancient and characteristics British landscapes, originally created by prehistoric farmers. For over 200 generations rural communities have carefully managed this open countryside area, creating a wildlife rich patchwork of mini-habitats. The area also falls within Green Belt land.
- 2.2 The recreational area is open to the public and is served by 6 no car parks. The area offers an extensive network of footpaths and bridleways.

**3.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

- 3.1 There is no planning history relevant to the proposed development.

#### 4.0 THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 Advertisement consent is sought for the retrospective erection of one non illuminated car park sign on each of the six car parks serving Chobham Common.
- 4.2 The proposed freestanding signs measure 1.8m in height, 1.7m in width and 0.15m in depth. The signs are externally finished in timber and painted with a graphic image of trees, grassland and a butterfly in green and brown. They bear both Surrey and Surrey Wildlife Trust logos and display 'Welcome to Chobham Common'. The parking symbol and the name of the car park are displayed underneath.
- 4.3 According to the applicant, the purpose of this larger signage is to help attract new visitors to Chobham Common.

#### 5.0 CONSULTATION RESPONSES

- 5.1 Surrey County Highway Authority No objections
- 5.2 Chobham Parish Council Objects to the proposal on the following grounds:
- The proposal would be out of keeping with the character of the area, creating prominent and incongruous additions harmful to visual amenity;
  - The size, design and materials of the signage (which are not natural in appearance) have an urbanising and commercialising effect upon the openness of the Green Belt and character of the area, failing to conserve and enhance the historic environment of Chobham Common;
  - The signs are oversized for informative functional advertisements by public bodies;
  - The Inspector's decision and comments in respect of the commercial intrusion of roundabout sponsorship at Chobham Common and the reasons for Surrey Heath Borough Council's refusal of permission under application 17/0995 (Coworth Flexlands School) should be treated as material considerations in this case.
- 5.3 Environmental Health No objections

#### 6.0 REPRESENTATION

- 6.1 At the time of preparation of this report 21 no written objections have been received which raise the following issues:
- The proposed signs are oversized, intrusive, urban in appearance and not in keeping with their surrounding environment [*see Section 7.4*];
  - The size of the signs is contrary to the openness of the Green Belt [*see Section 7.4*];

- The proposal impacts on the visual amenities of the area [see Section 7.4];
- The previous signs had been in place for many years, they were small, rustic, in keeping with their surroundings and simply served their purpose in discreetly identifying each individual car park [see para 7.4.3];
- The signs would amount to brand advertising, which would overlap into commercial activity [see paras 7.4.3 and 7.4.4];
- Consideration should be afforded to previously refused application 17/0995 in respect of signage, including that on the Roundabout car park [see para 7.6.2];
- Consideration should be afforded to previous applications 07/0030-07/0043 to display advertising signs on various roundabouts, including Chobham Common roundabout which were refused and subsequently dismissed at appeal [see para 7.6.3];
- The size is larger than the recommendations from the Department for Communities and Local Government guidelines for outdoor advertisements [see paras 7.6.4 and 7.6.5];
- Retrospective nature of signage [Officer note: the current proposal seeks to address this].

6.2 The following matters have also been raised, however they would not constitute material planning considerations and therefore weight has not been afforded to the following:

- Neither the Parish Council, Chobham Society or the Preservation Committee were consulted prior to the erection of signs;
- Various matters not related to planning.

## 7.0 PLANNING ISSUES

7.1 The application site is located within Green Belt land, as set out in the Proposals Map of the Surrey Heath Core Strategy and Development Management Policies 2012 (CSDMP). In this case, consideration is given to Policies DM9, DM11 and CP14 of the CSDMP. The proposal is also considered against the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Para. 132 of the NPPF states that poorly placed advertisements can have a negative impact on the appearance of the built and natural environment. Advertisements which will clearly have an appreciable impact on a building or on their surroundings should be subject to the LPA's detailed assessment. Advertisements should be subject to control only in the interests of amenity and public safety, taking into account cumulative impacts.

7.2 Therefore, the main issues to be considered with this application are:

- Impact on amenity; and
- Impact on public safety.

## **7.4 Impact on amenity**

- 7.4.1 Regulation 3 of the Town and Planning Country Act (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 states that applications for advert consent should be assessed in respect of factors relevant to amenity, which include the general characteristics of the locality. Policy DM9 of the Surrey Heath Core Strategy and Development Management Policies Document (CSDMP) 2012 promotes high quality design. Development should respect and enhance the character of the local environment and be appropriate in scale, materials, massing, bulk and density. Policy CP14 seeks to protect the features of interest for biodiversity within designated nature conservation sites with ecological value. Para 133 of the NPPF states that the essential characteristics of the Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.
- 7.4.2 Para 79 Reference ID: 18b-079-20140306 of the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) notes that the definition of amenity includes both visual and aural aspects. The PPG advises that, in assessing amenity, a Local Planning Authority should consider the local characteristics of the neighbourhood, such as scenic, historical or cultural features, as well as whether the advert is in scale and in keeping with these features. If the advertisement makes a noise, aural amenity should also be taken into account.
- 7.4.3 The signs replace previous signage, which were smaller in size. The applicant has advised that, although this is for regular visitors this would not have been an issue, the larger signs help attract new visitors to Chobham Common. Overall, it is considered that the proposed signs are of an appropriate size for the purpose of assisting the access into the car parks by visitors. It is further noted that the signs are not illuminated, and therefore do not cause any light pollution within this nature conservation area. Concerns have been raised that the signs amount to brand advertising and although the signs bear corporate logos, these refer to the entities responsible for site and therefore are considered to be for information purposes, which is acceptable.
- 7.4.4 It is also considered that, by virtue of their colour palette, modest scale and siting next to the entrance of each car park, none of the signs harm the visual amenities of their surroundings. In fact, it is considered that the neutral colours of the signs with the graphs finished in green and brown with white lettering positively aids to integrate them with their rural surroundings. It is not uncommon for recreational grounds to display signage by their access points and it is considered the signs provide direction and the graphic image they display fully relates to the nature conservation status of the site, which offers to the public opportunities to visit and explore habitats and learn about local wildlife.
- 7.4.5 Monument Car Park is located in the north-western area of Chobham Common and is accessed off Chobham Road which, in the site's vicinity, is bounded by vegetation on both sides. The sign is placed on the northern side of the vehicular entrance to the car park and is set back of the highway verge. It is seen against the surrounding vegetation which is higher and this is considered to limit its prominence.
- 7.4.6 Roundabout Car Park is located towards the north of the roundabout that links Chobham Road with Chertsey Road and Windsor Road. The car park is accessed off Chobham Road and the sign has been placed on the southern side of its vehicular entrance. Towards the north of the car park entrance there is little vegetation, however to the south there is dense vegetation, against which the sign is seen. Furthermore, this car park already contains an amount of associated paraphernalia, also by way of large concrete blocks which limit speed when entering the car park. The sign is also seen in the same context as these and, given its modest size, it is not considered that it forms such a significant addition to the existing paraphernalia as to significantly harm the visual amenities of the area.

- 7.4.7 Longcross Car Park is located on the eastern edge of Chobham Common and is accessed off Staple Hill. Its surrounding context is open in nature, however the road network to the north-west of the car park entrance adds an urbanising element to the character. The sign is placed on the western side of the car park's entrance and, given its modest size and colour palette in combination with the surrounding context, it is not considered forms an intrusive feature to the detriment of the visual amenities of the area.
- 7.4.8 Staple Hill Car Park sits in the central area of Chobham Common. The park is accessed off Staple Hill and the land slopes up towards the back of the car park. The surrounding landscape is open in character and there is limited presence of built up features. The sign has been placed on the west side of the vehicular entrance to the car park and is seen against the height limit barrier above the entrance and the concrete blocks which are in place right after this. The land level changes aid in integrating the sign with its surroundings and, given the existing context, it is not considered that the sign is detrimental to the amenities of the area.
- 7.4.9 Jubilee Mount Car Park is also accessed off Staple Hill. The sign has been placed on the northern side of the vehicular entrance serving the park and is seen against the backdrop of higher vegetation that exists behind it. Given its modest size, it is considered that the visual impact on the amenities of the area is limited.
- 7.4.10 Fishpool Car Park is located on the southern area of Chobham Common and is accessed off Gracious Pond Road. The sign has been placed on the northern side of the entrance to the car park and is set back from the highway verge and it is considered that this limits the presence of this sign within the streetscene. The sign is therefore considered acceptable.
- 7.4.11 Given the signs modest size and relationship with the nearest properties, it is not considered that any of the signs are detrimental for the residential amenities currently enjoyed by the nearest residents.
- 7.4.12 As such, the proposal is not considered to adversely affect the character and appearance of the surrounding area nor the residential amenities of the neighbouring properties, in accordance with Policy DM9 of the CSDMP, the Town and Planning Country Act (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 and the NPPF.

## **7.5 Impact on public safety**

- 7.5.1 Regulation 3 of the Town and Planning Country Act (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 states that applications for advert consent should be assessed in respect of factors relevant to public safety, including if the display of the advertisement in question is likely to affect the ready interpretation of any traffic sign. Policy DM11 of the CSDMP 2012 states that development which would adversely impact the safe and efficient flow of traffic movement on the highway network will not be supported by the Council, unless it can be demonstrated that measures to reduce such impacts to acceptable levels can be implemented.
- 7.5.2 The County Highway Authority has raised no objection to the proposal considering that the signs do not have an adverse impact on public safety, with reasonable visibility maintained on the public highway. It is also noted that these signs improve visibility of the site access for road users.
- 7.5.3 As such, the proposal would not be considered to impact on public safety and would be in accordance with Policy DM11 of the CSDMP, the Town and Planning Country Act (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 and the NPPF.

## **7.6 Other matters**

- 7.6.1 Various comments received in respect of this application note previous refused applications and, in this regard, it is noted that each case is assessed on its own merits.
- 7.6.2 In any event, previously refused application 17/0995 was for an advert consent which included a sign to be placed on the roundabout close to Roundabout Car Park. However, it is noted that the context surrounding both signs is materially different. The refused sign was a directional sign rather than an entrance sign as the proposal under consideration. In addition, it would have been placed too far from the school it would advertise (approximately 740m) and therefore this sign was not considered necessary. As such, little weight is afforded to this application.
- 7.6.3 Turning into application 07/0039 (also for the display of signs on the roundabout following Roundabout Car Park) the 4 no freestanding signs would be displayed facing outwards towards the highway and, due to the lack of business premises at the site for which these adverts relate to, it was considered that they were not in any related to the application site and therefore not essential for identifying the business concerned. Due to their size and number, they were considered to create a visual clutter around the roundabout, harmful to the character of the area. The circumstances of this application are therefore materially different. As such, little weight is afforded to this application.
- 7.6.4 Comments received in respect of this application note that the proposed signs are larger in area than the 1.55m<sup>2</sup> permitted for adverts falling under Class 1 'Functional Advertisements by Public Bodies', as described in Schedule 3, Part 1 of the Town and Planning Country Act (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 (and as explained within the document 'Department for Communities and Local Government Outdoor advertisements and signs: a guide for advertisers').
- 7.6.5 Although this is acknowledged, the cited regulation refers to classes of advertisement benefiting from deemed consent and, for those signs which do not conform entirely to all the relevant provisions of their own Class, planning permission is therefore required.

## **8.0 POSITIVE/PROACTIVE WORKING**

In assessing this application, officers have worked with the applicant in a positive, creative and proactive manner consistent with the requirements of paragraphs 38 to 41 of the NPPF. This included 1 or more of the following:

- a) Provided feedback through the validation process including information on the website, to correct identified problems to ensure that the application was correct and could be registered.
- b) Have proactively communicated with the applicant through the process to advise progress, timescale or recommendation.

## 9.0 CONCLUSION

- 9.1 It is considered that the proposed development does not result in an adverse impact on the character and appearance of the surrounding area, nor on residential amenities or public safety. Therefore, the proposal is in accordance with Policies DM9, DM11 and CP14 of the CSDMP, the Town and Planning Country Act (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 and the NPPF and is recommended for conditional approval.

## 10.0 RECOMMENDATION

GRANT consent subject to the following conditions:-

1. (a) Any advertisements displayed, and any site used for the display of advertisements, shall be maintained in a clean and tidy condition to the reasonable satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority.  
  
(b) Any structure or hoarding erected or used principally for the purpose of displaying advertisements shall be maintained in a safe condition.  
  
(c) Where an advertisement is required under these Regulations to be removed, the removal shall be carried out to the reasonable satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority.  
  
(d) No advertisement is to be displayed without the permission of the owner of the site or any other person with an interest in the site entitled to grant permission.  
  
(e) No advertisement shall be sited or displayed so as to obscure, or hinder the ready interpretation of, any road traffic sign, railway signal or aid to navigation by water or air, or so as otherwise to render hazardous the use of any highway, railway, waterway (including any coastal waters) or aerodrome (civil or military).

Reason: To comply with the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 and the National Planning Policy Framework.

2. This consent shall be limited to a five year period from the date of the permission, when the advertisement hereby permitted shall be removed and the land reinstated to its former condition to the reasonable satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To accord with the requirements of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007.

3. The proposed development shall be retained in accordance with the following approved plans, unless the prior written approval has been obtained from the Local Planning Authority:
  - Proposed sign elevations, received 2 April 2019.
  - Car park location plan, received 10 April 2019.
  - Fishpool car park block plan, received 2 April 2019.
  - Jubilee Mount car park block plan, received 2 April 2019.
  - Longcross car park block plan, received 2 April 2019.
  - Monument car park block plan, received 2 April 2019.

- Roundabout car park block plan, received 2 April 2019.
- Staple Hill car park block plan, received 2 April 2019.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interest of proper planning and as advised in ID.17a of the Planning Practice Guidance.

Informative(s)

1. Decision Notice to be kept DS1.
2. The decision has been taken in compliance with paragraphs 38-41 of the NPPF to work with the applicant in a positive and proactive manner. Please see the Officer's Report for further details.