

BILLBOARDS AND SIGNS

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Approved by Planning Authority Board on 1st April, 1993

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The display of outdoor advertisements is becoming an increasingly-common feature of modern commercial activity. Outdoor advertising can take many forms including billboards, posters and placards. All these various forms of advertising demand attention and seek to stand out from their surroundings. A balance needs to be struck between the advertisers' commercial interest to publicise their products and activities, and legitimate concerns to protect the environment and to seek to assimilate new development into its surroundings.

1.2 All outdoor advertisements affect the appearance of the building, structure or place where they are displayed. They are designed to communicate information or a message to passers-by and modern advertisements often seek to attract attention and to catch the eye by the use of bright colours and materials, large scale and illumination. Frequently they are sited in highly visible, prominent locations. These features may create a visual conflict with the environment in which advertisements are displayed, particularly in urban environments of architectural or historic importance, residential areas and the open countryside.

Advertisements can add colour and vitality to an uninteresting scene, or screen an unsightly view. In general, however, they can only enhance a street scene or the environment in which they are situated if they are sympathetically designed and do not dominate their surroundings. Particular difficulties arise when advertisements are sited on or close to buildings. The appearance of a building can easily be spoiled by a choice of advertisement materials, colour, proportion or illumination which is alien to the building's design or fabric, so that the advertisement appears brash, over-dominant or incongruous. Poorly sited advertisements may also have an adverse impact on road safety by distracting drivers, interrupting visibility or giving confusing messages.

2. DEFINITIONS

2.1 "Advertisement" is defined in Part 1 of the Development Planning Act 1992 as:

any word, letter, model, sign, placard, board, notice, device or representation, whether illuminated or not, in the nature of and employed wholly or in part for the purposes of advertisement, announcement or direction, including any boarding or similar structure used or adapted for use for the display of advertisements.

This policy guidance deals with all forms of Billboards, Signs and outdoor advertising, except fascia signs on shops and commercial premises. This is the subject of a separate guidance note.

3. THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

- 3.1** In recent years in Malta there has been a proliferation of Billboards and other forms of outdoor advertising to the detriment of visual amenity. Poster sizes generally fall into two categories; either the smaller portrait panel - measuring 1.2m x 1.8m high - or the larger 3 x 6 metre landscape panel. Both forms of advertisement may have a considerable visual impact, particularly if prominently sited or illuminated. The Planning Authority is concerned to introduce a coherent policy framework for dealing with this form of advertisement and for rationalising the present disorderly situation.

4. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- 4.1** In assessing whether any particular site is suitable for the display of Billboards the general considerations to be borne in mind are the land use of the area, the scale and massing of existing buildings and whether there are any features of environmental, architectural or historic interest in the vicinity. The siting of billboards on very prominent sites - for example on the skyline or on the roof of buildings or in places where an important or interesting view would be interrupted - will not normally be allowed. Likewise, bright illumination is generally not acceptable. Advertisements can sometimes be successfully employed to temporarily screen building sites, which tend to be unsightly. In these cases it is important to ensure that the building works are not unnecessarily protracted just to provide a means for the display of advertisements and a temporary permit will probably be appropriate.

- In view of the likely impact on visual amenities and the environment in general, billboards will not normally be allowed in the following locations:**
- In Urban Conservation Areas. Smaller sizes of advertising panels may be acceptable in predominantly shopping or business districts within Urban Conservation Areas, but particular attention to a high standard of detail and design will be required. Illuminated billboards will not normally be acceptable in Urban Conservation Areas and will be strictly controlled.
- On Grade 1 or 2 Listed Buildings.
- In the open countryside or outside the limits of development of towns and villages. Businesses in the countryside may be expected to want to advertise their whereabouts, particularly if they are set back off the road. Simple direction signs may be appropriate in these situations, which should be as unobtrusive as possible. Opportunities should be taken for businesses in the same location to combine their essential advertising needs to avoid a proliferation of signs. Advertisements fixed to rubble stone walls or to trees will not be acceptable.
- On or adjacent to Scheduled Properties.
- Within or adjacent to existing or proposed residential areas. In mixed areas where residential development is interspersed with shops or commercial uses, some poster advertising may be acceptable if it is carefully related to the scale of surrounding buildings and does not detract from residential amenities.
- Within landscaped areas and public open space. Large poster panels are inappropriate immediately adjacent to the coastline where they would intrude upon views of the open sea. Advertising associated with kiosks on sea front promenades and at water polo and bocci clubs can be very intrusive because these facilities are

often sited in locations where other forms of development would not normally be allowed. These forms of advertisement will be strictly controlled.

- 4.3** Free-standing roadside panels will only be allowed in urban areas where the environment is of poor quality or where they may assist in screening an unsightly building or area of land. They must be sited with particular care to ensure their effect on pedestrians and on their surroundings in general is not overwhelming.

5. ADVERTISEMENTS ON BUILDINGS

- 5.1** Separate guidance has been produced for fascia and other signs on shops. In other cases the display of advertisements and signage will only be allowed on buildings where the following conditions are met:
- The advertisement or signage must be in scale with the building and must not visually dominate it. It should be positioned and designed to appear as an integral feature of the building and should not project beyond the outline of the building.
 - It should not obscure any features or details of architectural or historic interest.
 - The materials must be sympathetic to those of the building.
 - Normally any advertisements should be sited in parallel with the building line rather than at an angle to it.
 - Advertisements and signage on or near the roof line will not be permitted in Urban Conservation Areas, on Grade 1 and 2 Listed Buildings, in prominent locations in the countryside or in the vicinity of Scheduled Properties.
 - Where more than one advertisement is displayed on the same building there should be a clear relationship between the different advertisements in terms of size and positioning. A mix of different sizes or a display which occupies an entire wall, will not normally be appropriate.

6. ILLUMINATION

- 6.1** Illuminated advertisements and signage will not normally be permitted in Urban Conservation Areas, in the open countryside and on Grade 1 and 2 Listed Buildings. In rare circumstances exceptions may be made if a proposal meets the following criteria:
- It must be discretely sited and designed to have only a very localised impact;
 - It must be sited on a commercial property which requires to attract passing trade;
 - It must be located in a predominantly commercial street where the architectural or historical interest has been compromised by unsympathetic modern development.

- 6.2** Billboards should be illuminated downwards. Laser-source lighting or other similar high-intensity lighting will not be allowed. Illumination should be controlled by timers to turn off lights at midnight.

7. LARGE-SCALE ADVERTISING

- 7.1** In predominantly commercial surroundings the scale and nature of the buildings may be sufficiently large to accommodate large-scale advertising without any adverse effects on visual amenity. Large poster hoardings will normally be acceptable in industrial and commercial areas, provided the following criteria are met::

- ❑ Advertisement panels should normally be sited on the flank walls of buildings, but they should not be unduly dominant, and should be so designed and positioned as to be seen as an integral feature of the building.
- ❑ Display panels should be in scale with the building on which they are sited and with adjacent buildings.

8. TRAFFIC SAFETY

- 8.1** All advertisements are intended to attract attention and hence present a potential traffic safety hazard. Particular care should be taken with proposals to site billboards at points where drivers need to pay special attention, e.g. at junctions, roundabouts or pedestrian crossings. Two small-scale sponsorship signs as approved by the Traffic Embellishment Committee will be allowed on roundabouts in appropriate circumstances. Elsewhere on traffic islands and central strips advertisements will not be allowed. The general principles for the location of advertisements described in paragraph 4 above will apply to advertisements fixed to pedestrian safety barriers. In all cases the following road safety criteria must be met:

- ❑ Advertisements will not be allowed within 15 metres of any roundabout on the Arterial or Distributor road network.
- ❑ Advertisements should not obstruct or impair sight lines at corners, bends, junctions or at any point of access to a highway, or block a view of the road or a traffic sign.
- ❑ Sufficient clearance must be left above or alongside the highway. The means of illumination from illuminated signs must not be visible from the highway.

- 8.2** Illuminated signs are likely to be unacceptable on traffic safety grounds if

- ❑ because of their colour they could be mistaken for a traffic light
- ❑ because of their size or brightness they could result in glare or dazzle on the road surface
- ❑ they resemble traffic signs

- they embody traffic or other directional elements which invite drivers to turn at dangerous locations

9. STANDARD CONDITIONS FOR ADVERTISEMENTS

9.1 In all cases the following conditions should be attached to permits to display advertisements:

- (a) The development hereby permitted shall commence within 12 months of the date of this permission, that is by (insert date)
- (b) The advertisement hereby permitted, and any site used for the display of such advertisement, shall be maintained in a clean and tidy condition to the reasonable satisfaction of the Planning Authority
- (c) Any structure or hoarding erected or used principally for the purpose of displaying the advertisement hereby permitted shall be maintained in a safe condition
- (d) Where an advertisement is required to be removed, the removal shall be to the reasonable satisfaction of the Planning Authority
- (e) The advertisement hereby permitted shall not be sited or displayed so as to obscure or hinder the ready interpretation of any road traffic sign, or aid to navigation by water or air, or so as to otherwise render hazardous the use of any means of travel
- (f) (applications for non-illuminated advertisements only) No form of illumination may be employed without the further consent of the Planning Authority.
- (g) (where appropriate for certain illuminated advertisements) The illumination hereby permitted shall be controlled by automatic timers to turn off at 12 midnight.

Reasons

- (a) As required by Section 33(4) of the Development Planning Act
- (b) - (G) To protect the amenities, safety and environment of the local area.