

Planning Committee

10am, Thursday, 27 February 2014

Digital Advertising

Item number	5.6
Report number	
Wards	City-wide

Links

Coalition pledges	P40
Council outcomes	CO19
Single Outcome Agreement	SO4

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Executive summary

Digital Advertising

Summary

This report responds to a request by the Committee following its consideration of revised Edinburgh Planning Guidance on Advertising, Sponsorship and City Dressing at its meeting of 5 December 2013. The Committee asked that the following matters be considered and a report prepared that:

- summarises the current guidelines on digital advertising and the procedures of the application process;
- specifies the number of applications submitted to and approved for digital adverts in the City;
- provides information from appropriate health professionals on the effect of digital advert screens could have on the eyesight of people, especially young people; and,
- service procedures and guidance adopted in other cities.

Legislation and guidance at national and local level does not address digital advertising *per se*; it is treated as part of general advertising. The revised Edinburgh Planning Guidance on Advertising, Sponsorship and City Dressing does however acknowledge its acceptance in principle in town and commercial centres and at established advertising locations, although within the World Heritage Site digital advertising is restricted to small format displays integral to bus shelters. The process for assessing an express advertisement consent application that proposes digital forms of advertising does not differ from that to assess a non-digital proposal.

Since the beginning of 2013 the Council has received four applications proposing the installation of digital advert display units into existing large format hoardings; three of these have been granted consent and one has yet to be determined.

NHS Public Health consultants are not aware of any research or empirical data that confirms whether or not exposure to digital forms of advertising can have a detrimental effect on a person's eyesight, young or old.

The introduction of digital advertising displays containing movement and motion is not widespread in the UK. There are locations in London, in particular Piccadilly Circus, where full motion advertisements have been allowed, and other major urban centres where digital advertising has been introduced, however for the most part digital advertising to date is in a small format (6-sheet) that is integral to items of street furniture, principally bus shelters.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee:

1. Notes the contents of this report, in particular that, through a trial of small format digital advertising units, a process is in place to assess the impacts of digital advertising on amenity and public safety.

Measures of success

- The protection of Edinburgh's amenity from inappropriate large and small format digital advertisements;
- The maintenance of public safety by ensuring that digital advertisement proposals are appropriately sited and conform to the terms of their consent and industry standards.

Financial impact

There are no financial impacts arising from this report.

Equalities impact

The purpose of this report is to describe planning regulations relating to digital advertisements and to identify relevant research and experiences of assessing digital advertisement applications elsewhere in the UK. The report does not introduce new policy considerations or procedures and as such will not result in any infringement of rights.

Sustainability impact

This report does not introduce new policy considerations or procedures in the assessment of express advertisement consent applications. The impacts of such will be assessed through the formal applications process.

Consultation and engagement

The purpose of this report is to respond to specific issues raised by the Committee on aspects of digital advertising. No formal consultation or engagement exercise has been undertaken in responding to the issues raised. Council officers have liaised informally with the NHS public health consultants and with those conducting a trial of small format digital advertising display units in Edinburgh. Their responses are discussed in the main body of this report.

Background reading / external references

- Report to the Planning Committee dated 5 December 2013 Edinburgh Planning Guidance: [Advertisements Sponsorship & City Dressing](#);
- [Minute of the Planning Committee of 5 December 2013 - item 5](#);
- [Digital Large Format Roadside Code](#) dated January 2011: Outdoor Media Centre;
- Investigating Driver Distraction: Transport Research Laboratory dated 12 May 2010 (available on request).

Digital Advertising

1. Background

- 1.1 Outdoor media companies are exploring the use of digital advertising in a variety of forms in a number of cities in the UK, principally London and Edinburgh. In time, the industry expects the use of static and moving digital images to promote goods, services and events to become the norm. The use of digital advertising allows adverts to be displayed that are relevant to their location, time specific, frequently changed and managed remotely. In Edinburgh, a trial of small format digital advertising is taking place in two locations on bus shelters in Princes Street and at a third location in Morningside. The trial is assessing the impact of frequently changing adverts, the use of moving images at a varying speeds and the promotion of public service information on visual amenity and public safety. The trial is due to run until autumn 2014.
- 1.2 In addition, a number of large format digital advert panels have recently been erected or installed into existing structures, one of which has recently displayed adverts containing moving imagery utilising an intense level of illumination contrary to the terms of its consent and industry protocols. In so doing the operation of this particular advert panel has given rise to concerns that, if not appropriately regulated, digital adverts could have an adverse effect on visual amenity, public safety and potentially be harmful to people's eyesight.
- 1.3 This report provides an update on the findings of the digital advertising trial, describes the background to the granting of planning permission and express advertisement consent to large format digital adverts in the City and considers in general terms the impact of digital adverts on public safety, including the eyesight of people, especially young people.

2. Main report

The Control of Digital Forms of Advertising

- 2.1 The Town & Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (Scotland) Regulations 1984, and subsequent amendments, do not make reference to digital forms of advertising. All advertisement proposals, including digital formats, are assessed on their individual merits and considered for their impact on visual amenity and public safety, including road safety. Local authorities cannot exercise control over the content of advertisements; this is a matter for the Advertising Standards Agency. Local authorities do however have the ability to control the intensity and colours of illumination used in all adverts and have

powers under the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 to instruct that adverts be removed or in the case of digital adverts switched off if they are considered to be hazardous to road users.

2.2 At its meeting of 5 December 2013, the Committee approved revised Edinburgh Planning Guidance on Advertisements, Sponsorship and City Dressing. The full decision of the Committee is attached at Appendix 1. The guidance addressed for the first time the introduction of digital forms of advertising in the City. The guidance notes that conventional means of advertising is acceptable in principle in defined town centres, other commercial centres and at established advertising locations, provided that there will be no adverse impact on visual amenity and public safety, and, inasmuch that the regulations do not differentiate between digital and non-digital forms of advertising, it too will be acceptable in principle. In addition, and worthy of note, the guidance states that digital advertising within the World Heritage Site will normally only be acceptable as an integral part of City's street furniture, principally bus shelters.

2.3 In addition to the Control of Advertisement regulations and the Council's guidance, the Outdoor Media Centre (OMC), the trade and marketing body for the outdoor advertising industry (formerly the Outdoor Advertising Association), has in place a [voluntary code for digital large format roadside advertising](#) (published in January 2011). The code reflects planning regulations in place throughout the UK and states that:

- there shall be no moving images, animation, video or full motion images displayed unless consent has been granted for such displays;
- digital roadside billboards/hoardings shall not change more frequently than every 5 seconds unless consent has been granted for such displays;
- the luminance level of a digital roadside billboards shall comply with the Institute of Lighting Engineers Technical Report No's 5 (2003);
- Roadside digital displays will [in Scotland] conform to the 5 'Standard Conditions' specified in Schedule 1 of the Town & Country Planning (Control of Advertisements)(Scotland) Regulations 1984.¹

Digital Adverts in Edinburgh

2.4 Since the beginning of 2013 the Council has received four applications for the erection of large format digital advertising hoardings, including the modification of existing hoardings to incorporate digital display panels. The advertising sites are located at:

1. **Gorgie Road:** the hoarding is situated between 341 Gorgie Road and a railway bridge to the west of Robertson Avenue (ref: 13/00110/ADV). The application proposed the replacement of an existing 'paper and paste'

¹ The standard conditions address: the maintenance and safety of an advertising site, the removal of the advert at the expiry of a consent, securing the consent of the landowner before works commence and ensuring that adverts do not obscure road traffic, or any other, signs so as to render hazardous the use of any road, rail, waterway or airfield. Without prejudice to the power of planning authorities to impose conditions the standard conditions apply without notice to the display of all advertisements.

hoarding to a digital unit and received consent in February 2013. The advert is operated by Primesight Ltd.

2. **Wheatfield Road:** the 'letter box' hoarding is situated adjacent to a Sainsbury's supermarket car park (ref: 13/00583/ADV). The application proposed the replacement of an existing 'paper and paste' hoarding with a digital advert panel of the same size and received consent in April 2013. The advert is operated by the Forrest Group.
3. **Croall Place, Leith Walk:** the 'portrait' hoarding sits immediately adjacent to the gable end of a tenement building close to the Shrub Place development opportunity site (ref: 13/00692/ADV). The application proposed the installation of a digital advert panel within the existing frame of the hoarding and received consent in April 2013. The advert is operated by the Forrest Group.
4. **Seafield Road:** the Forrest Group proposes to replace an existing 'paper and paste' 'portrait' hoarding with a digital advert panel (ref: 13/04703/ADV). The existing hoarding sits immediately adjacent the gable end of a tenement building overlooking a retail warehouse car park. The application has yet to be determined. The present advert hoarding is operated by the Forrest Group.

In addition, advertisement consent was granted at 80b George Street, occupied by Hollister, in December 2011, to install video screens immediately behind the shop window. The screens stream live pictures from California. Despite concerns that the display of images containing movement and motion may cause road safety problems this has not been the case and the display has become part of the active streetscene.

- 2.5 The digital advert hoardings at Gorgie Road and Wheatfield Road have operated without complaint or concern since their installation. The adverts displayed have been static and the intensity of illumination used has been in accordance with industry standards set out in the OMC voluntary code. The operation of the digital advert panel at Croall Place however has given rise to complaints from members of the public and is of concern to both the Planning and Transport services, principally due to its impacts on visual amenity and road safety. Until recently the screen was operating beyond the hours approved, i.e. after 11.00pm and did not comply with the OMC voluntary code in terms of the intensity of illumination being used and the display of adverts containing movement and motion. These issues were brought to the attention of the screen's operator, following which the screen is now being operated in accordance with its consent. The intensity of illumination has also been reduced and adverts incorporating movement and motion have been withdrawn to accord with the OMC voluntary code.
- 2.6 The installation of digital adverts panels is becoming increasingly popular with outdoor media companies and those wishing to advertise. To date, the digital panels have for the most part displayed static adverts, notwithstanding their

ability to display moving imagery. None of the applications referred to above specifically sought, or seek, consent for the display adverts containing movement and motion. The OMC voluntary code is clear that there should be no moving images, etc. unless consent has been granted for such. In general where an advert hoarding currently exists there is no objection in principle in planning terms to its replacement with a digital advertising panel. The introduction of such is unlikely to be any more visually intrusive than a conventional 'paper and paste' hoarding. Indeed in most circumstances the appearance of digital panels will be an improvement on that of a conventional hoarding given the finishes employed, the absence of external light fittings and poorly maintain posters. The important issue, as demonstrated by the Croall Place advert, is for digital panels to be operated within the terms of their consent and in accordance with industry standards. In circumstances where this is not the case, the Council, as roads authority, has a range of powers at its disposal to ensure that adverts are not hazardous to road users.

Large Format Digital Advertising

2.7 Roadside advertising is a common sight on urban roads. Research² suggests the presence of advertising increases mental workload and changes the profile of eye fixations, drawing attention away from the driving task. The Transport Research Laboratory conducted a study in 2010 using a driving simulator and integrated eye-tracking system to compare driving behaviour across a number of experimental advertising conditions. 48 participants took part in a trial through which three factors were examined: advert type, position of adverts and exposure duration to adverts. The results indicated that when passing advert positions:

- drivers spent longer looking at video adverts;
- glanced at video adverts more frequently;
- tended to show greater variation in lateral lane position with video adverts;
- braked harder on approach to video adverts; and
- drove more slowly past video adverts.

The findings of the trial indicate that video adverts caused significantly greater impairment to driving performance when compared to static adverts.

Trial of Small Format (6-sheet) Digital Advertising

2.8 With Clear Channel, the provider of the City's bus shelters, the Council has been undertaking a trial of 6-sheet (small format) digital advertising. The advert panels form part of two bus shelters on Princes Street, located outside Jenners and Debenhams's department stores, and a third outside Marks & Spencer food store on Morningside Road. The adverts displayed have contained a variety of

² Investigating Driver Distraction: the effects of video and static advertising. Transport Research Laboratory 12.05.2010. Authors: Chattington, Reed, Basaick, Flint & Parkes / ISBN No's: 978-1-84608-867-4

commercial images containing movement and motion at varying speeds. Within each one minute cycle the Council has had the opportunity to display public service information, e.g. the Council's 'Be prepared for Winter' campaign and promotion of Christmas and Hogmanay celebrations. The intention of the trial is to assess the acceptability of digital advertising from a planning and transport perspective, to convey public information in a new and innovative ways, and to inform the award of a new advertising contract later in the year. The Council is seeking to appoint an advertising partner through which it will secure new bus shelters, a number of which are expected to incorporate digital advertising display units, and a pedestrian wayfinding system.

- 2.9 In December 2013, Clear Channel commissioned an independent road safety study to consider the impacts of small format digital advertising containing movement and motion at the sites referred to above. Clear Channel has made the study available to the Council and is happy for its general conclusions to be brought to the attention of the Committee. The study notes and concludes:

Background

- advertising with motion has been in existence for a long time, e.g. Piccadilly Circus since the 1960's;
- 'distraction' on public roads has long been accepted e.g. Blackpool Illuminations, external Christmas lighting;
- in Edinburgh, advertising sites have incorporated changing images via rotating prisms or conveyor e.g. West Approach Road to the rear of Fountain Park;
- research / studies agree that while roadside digital display advertising does create an environment where driver distraction can occur, there does not appear to be any evidence, at present, that it has a statistically significant effect on road accidents.

Princes Street

- use of the street is restricted and is mostly used by drivers of buses and taxis. Given these circumstances it is considered that most drivers will be regular users and familiar with the route, as such the level of distraction by the digital display units is minimal.

Morningside Road

- the volumes of road and pedestrian traffic using the street are such that the digital advert display unit was often partially obscured to southbound traffic by opposing northbound traffic and that there did not appear to be any adverse effect on driver or pedestrian behaviour.

General Observations

- some adverts contained within the advertising cycle only included small and subtle elements of animation that would most likely only be noticed by pedestrians;

- display units at the trial sites contained adverts on a 10 second cycle. Based on an approach speed of 30mph (13m/s) and allowing for a stopping sight distance of 90m, a driver has approximately 8 seconds from identifying the sign to passing it. Therefore the amount of animation contained within that timeframe may be minimal and would allow for one transition from one advert to another to be observed;
- given the degrees at which movement and motion can be set within each unit, a decision could be made at individual sites as to which adverts would be suitable e.g. close to junctions a lower level of movement and motion could be used than that used at 'mid-block' locations.

Conclusions

- features on or close to the road network that are not related directly to the management of traffic have the potential to distract all road users – the more unusual the feature the greater the potential for driver distraction;
- advertising and driver distraction has been the subject of research for many years ... while the concept of driver distraction is widely acknowledged, the links between the two and the role advertising plays in traffic accidents and road safety in general is inconclusive;
- limited studies into the effects of digital display advertising show no statistically significant link between advertising and road traffic accidents. In the absence of clear evidence there is no specific reason not to install roadside digital display units;
- a review of the trial sites in Edinburgh indicates that the level of distraction observed on site was relatively low, especially within a busy city centre context;
- even when the level of movement and motion was at its highest, the small format advertising displays did not present an overly conspicuous roadside feature to passing drivers and that with an appropriate choice of adverts and range of movement and motion within each cycle would most likely have little or no impact of passing traffic;
- the findings of the study in relation to road safety only relate to small format displays at city centre locations;
- similarly, findings and conclusions from the Edinburgh trial do not necessarily apply to large format roadside digital displays which by virtue of their size would introduce a range of issues that would require further and careful consideration;
- in order to assess the suitability of individual sites to carry digital forms of advertising a formalised assessment / audit process should be undertaken.

2.10 As part of the study commission a Small Format Roadside Digital Display Unit Assessment Checklist has been developed to allow Clear Channel and transport specialists to assess the suitability of candidate digital advertising sites. A copy of the checklist has been provided and is presently being considered by the Head of Transport, although it is not intended that further sites be added to the trial at the present time.

Experience Elsewhere

- 2.11 The findings and conclusions described above reflect guidance and best practice prepared by Transport for London (TfL) in 2013. The guidance states that digital roadside advertising is not inherently unsafe but should be operationally managed in accordance with the site specific constraints. The use of a consistent method of assessment is advocated to assess the appropriateness of a location and the level of risk in a methodical rather than subjective manner. Control over digital roadside advertising across the TfL estate is secured by special condition, with more careful management in higher risk locations. As a minimum, the OMC roadside digital code must be complied with. Finally, the guidance states that not all sites will be appropriate for advertising, but with appropriate controls, digital advertising should be no more or less acceptable than traditional forms of advertising e.g. backlit panels, paper and paste, vinyl, etc.

Effects of Digital Advertising on Eyesight

- 2.12 While there has been considerable research into the impact of traditional forms of roadside advertising on road safety, there is little research or empirical data available on the impact of advertising on a person's eyesight, even less in respect of digital forms of advertising. The research that does exist has almost exclusively been undertaken from the perspective of an advertiser and methods that can be employed to secure the attention of passing motorists and in so doing extend the reach of the message or product to a wider audience. In general and as one would expect, transport specialists and researchers acknowledge that the presence of advertising increases mental workload and changes the profile of eye fixations, drawing attention away from the driving task.

Conclusions

- 2.13 As noted in the OMC voluntary code, the advent of relatively affordable digital technology is changing the delivery of information in a variety of formats; cameras, phones, televisions, radios, newspapers, etc. The appearance of digital advertisements in a variety of formats throughout the country's urban areas is simply the latest manifestation of this technology. Digital advertising will be one of the main growth areas for outdoor media companies over the next few years as the industry seeks to adapt traditional hoardings for the digital era.
- 2.14 Research indicates that video adverts cause significantly greater impairment to driving performance when compared to static adverts. In Edinburgh, experience of digital advertising has been limited to a small number of large format hoardings and a trial of small format display units on bus shelters in established advertising locations. Apart from one large format hoarding at Croall Place these have operated without complaint or concern to the Planning and Transport

services. Action has been taken to ensure that the advertising hoarding at Croall Place operates within the terms of its consent and industry standards.

- 2.15 With regard to the small format digital advertising trial, a study has been undertaken to assess the impact of digital adverts containing movement and motion on driver and pedestrian behaviour. The study has concluded that with an appropriate choice of adverts and a range of movement and motion within each cycle of advertisements these would most likely have little or no impact of passing motorists or pedestrians. The study, assessment checklist and research undertaken by TfL, provides the Council with a body of information that will be invaluable in assessing the acceptability digital advertising proposals throughout the city.
- 2.16 It has not been possible to identify research or empirical data that confirms a link between digital forms of advertising and poor eyesight, although it is generally acknowledged that the presence of advertising increases mental workload and changes the profile of eye fixations, drawing attention away from the driving task.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Committee:
 1. Notes the contents of this report, in particular that, through a trial of small format digital advertising units, a process is in place to assess the impacts of digital advertising on amenity and public safety.

Mark Turley

Director Services for Communities

Links

Coalition pledges	P40 - Work with Edinburgh World Heritage and other stakeholders to conserve the city's built heritage.
Council outcomes	CO19 - Attractive places and well maintained – Edinburgh remains an attractive city through the development of high quality buildings and places and the delivery of high standards in the maintenance of infrastructure and public realm.
Single Outcome Agreement	SO4 - Edinburgh's communities are safer and have improved physical and social fabric.
Appendices	1. Edinburgh Planning Guidance: Advertisements Sponsorship and City Dressing – Minute of the Planning Committee 5 th December 2013

Appendix 1: Edinburgh Planning Guidance: Advertisements Sponsorship and City Dressing – Minute of the Planning Committee 5th December 2013

Approval was sought for the revised Edinburgh Planning Guidance: Advertisements, Sponsorship and City Dressing.

Decision

1) To approve the revised Edinburgh Planning Guidance: Advertisements, Sponsorship and City Dressing.

2) The Director of Services for Communities to Further report on digital advertising to the February meeting of the Committee, the report to include:

- The current guidelines for digital advertising and the procedures of the application process
- The number of applications submitted and the number granted
- Information from appropriate health professionals on the effect the screens for this type of advertising could have peoples eyesight especially young persons
- Procedures and guidance adopted by other cities