

### Design Guide for Signs Assessment

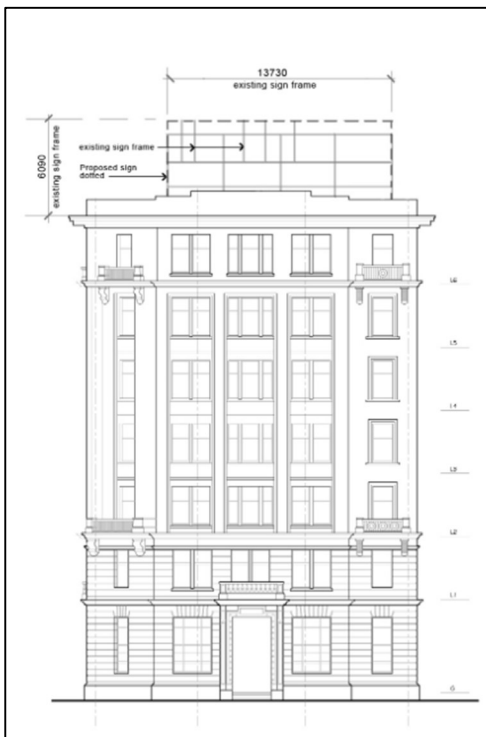
**Date:** 27/06/2022  
**Comments to:** Elliott Thornton, Consultant Planner  
**Comments from:** Sarah Duffell, Senior Urban Designer RMA  
**Plans/drawing set:** Appendix 3: Signage and Appendix 4: Photomontages supplied with application

#### Description of the proposal:

This proposal is to erect a digital billboard sign on top of the Huddart Parker building, which is a listed heritage building in the District Plan and located within the Post Office Square Heritage Area.

An existing structure on the rooftop that previously held a neon/electronic sign is proposed to support the new billboard. The dimensions of the proposed billboard are 15 metres long by 4 metres high, making a total size of 54m<sup>2</sup>.

The proposed content would include third party advertising, with an additional component of time/temperature included as a nod to a feature of the previous sign. The application does not specify whether the time/temperature content is included in all signage displayed, but the photomontages suggest it would not be displayed all the time.



There is currently no sign in place on the building, although the frame for the previous sign is still in place.

- The proposed sign contravenes many of the rules for signs. It
- Projects above the building's parapet
- Would display third party advertising in a Heritage Area
- Is larger than the permitted size for a sign on a heritage building

This report is a preliminary Urban Design assessment to assist the planner in making a notification decision.

*Note: The applicant considers the sign a 'reinstatement' however this view is not shared by Urban Design. The previous sign was of a different type and nature – it was a static display of large illuminated letters, with adjacent time and temperature information. The third-party aspect of the sign was large illuminated non-changing letters. Urban Design does not consider the proposed sign to be a 'reinstatement', it is installation of a different type of sign in the same location.*

**Intention of the DGS:**

*“To provide objectives and guidelines to assist the design and assessment of signage and to help professionals in interpreting terms used in the District Plan Provisions.”*

**ASSESSMENT**

The application includes an AEE. In respect to the Design Guide for Signs, the application only contains detailed assessment against the sections for 'signs and heritage' and 'illuminated/animated signs'.

**SCALE AND LOCATION**

*Objective 1.1 To ensure that new signs are well integrated with the building or site to which they are attached, and are compatible with the scale, design, and visual character of that building or site.*

**Relevant Guidelines: G1.1, G1.2, G1.3, G1.4**

The applicant's assessment of the scale and location of signs should be read in conjunction with the additional comments below.

- The sign is not entirely out of scale with the building to which it is attached, however it is located above the parapet on the rooftop. It does not have a specific relationship with any architectural features of the building.
- The sign will not complement the location within which it is sited, as it will introduce a distracting visual element into a heritage setting.
- The scale and location of the sign is not considered to achieve a satisfactory response

**Comments**

*These guidelines would not be satisfactorily met.*

**RELATIONSHIP TO SURROUNDING CONTEXT**

*Objective 2.1 To ensure that new signs fit with the character of the surrounding area and acknowledge the wider city context.*

**Relevant Guidelines: G2.1, G2.2, G2.3, G2.4**

The applicant's assessment of the relationship to the surrounding context should be read in conjunction with the additional comments below.

- The sign would introduce an over-sized, solid illuminated panel of third-party advertising into a setting that includes not only buildings and landscapes of heritage value, but is included in long views southwards along Customhouse Quay and also towards the waterfront along Grey Street. These views currently do not include illuminated LED signs.
- The visual quality of the pedestrian route along Grey Street to the waterfront is particularly good and includes an appreciation of heritage buildings and high quality landscaping (see image below). Introducing a large LED sign into his quality environment would not be supported due to the potential to detract from the visual quality of this route.



- The design and placement of the sign has a scale, location and level of detail that acknowledges where it will be viewed from, and it is designed to be highly visible within a long and wide viewing range. However, its legibility would not over-ride the concerns about the suitability of placement.
- The sign will disrupt and visually dominate important characteristics of the surroundings, which in this case includes prominent original buildings and a landscaped setting at a principal point of access between the waterfront and the city area.

#### Comments

*These guidelines would not be satisfactorily met.*

#### **VISUAL OBTRUSIVENESS**

*Objective 3.0 To protect the significant characteristics of buildings, streetscapes, vistas and the city skyline from obtrusive signage.*

**Relevant Guidelines: G3.1, G3.2, G3.3, G3.4, G3.5, G3.6**

The applicant's assessment of visual obtrusiveness should be read in conjunction with the additional comments below.

- The sign would be readily visible from a range of distances for both road and footpath users, and visible to those in the open spaces of Post Office Square and the waterfront. However, it appears the sign would not have a visual impact on any Residential Areas.
- The sign is within an identified viewshaft (V15). Further comment on this can be supplied after an additional site visit to the origin of the viewpoint, however if visible the sign would appear in the distance/cityscape context from the top of the Cable Car.

- Notwithstanding that the sign would be outside the margins of the catchment identified in Viewpoint 9 of the District Plan, it is considered that the sign would be visually obtrusive in the elevated view from The Terrace along Grey Street to the waterfront. (See image to the right, from District Plan.)
- The sign detracts from the character of the building to which it is attached.
- With third party content shown, images will not integrate content with the host building or setting in a complementary way.
- The sign is located on the upper part of the building and dominates the skyline in both facing and oblique views.
- The sign would not help with wayfinding and although there may be some sentimentality attached to the previous sign in this location in terms of the collective image or past days of the city, this does not over-ride the sign being unsuitable for the context.
- The sign is a large flat panel that is at odds with the complexity of this building façade and others within the immediate context.



#### Comments

*These guidelines would not be satisfactorily met.*

#### VISUAL CLUTTER

*Objective 4.0 To manage the number, design and location of new signs in a way that supports the aesthetic coherence of buildings and streetscapes and avoid visual clutter.*

**Relevant Guideline: G4.1.**

The applicant's assessment of visual clutter should be read in conjunction with the additional comments below.

- The sign is not well scaled, located and positioned relative to existing features on the host building nor does it complement the skyline of this building and others in the location.
- There are few other signs (apart from interpretive and road direction information) in this location. Upper-level signs on nearby buildings are limited to name signs.
- The sign would introduce an element of third-party advertising into a location where signs of this sort are not seen and the visual quality of the setting is valued. Put simply, the sign is not necessary within this context and for this reason it is considered to introduce visual clutter.

#### Comments

*These guidelines would not be satisfactorily met.*

#### SIGNS AND ROAD SAFETY

*Objective 5.0 To ensure that new signs do not have a detrimental effect on traffic or pedestrian safety.*

**Relevant Guidelines: G5.1**

The applicant's assessment of the road safety should be read in conjunction with the additional comments below.

- The location of the sign would most likely not compromise pedestrian movement.

**Comments**

*The application includes a Traffic Engineering Report prepared by Stantec (Appendix 7). On the matter of road safety, the views of Traffic Report and the advice of the WCC Traffic Advisor should be preferred.*

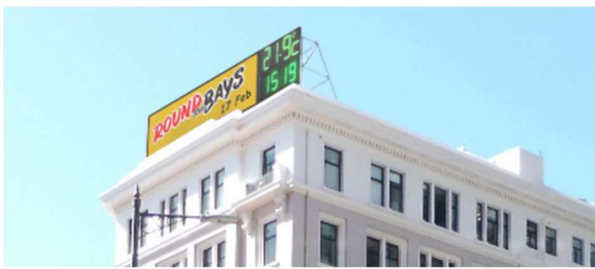
**DESIGN QUALITY**

*Objective 6.0 To encourage visually interesting signs that provide a legible and clear message through the use of high-quality materials and graphic design.*

**Relevant Guidelines: G6.1, G6.2**

The applicant’s assessment of design quality should be read in conjunction with the additional comments below.

- The application commits to a high standard of design.
- It does not appear that the rear of the sign would be readily visible from any nearby or significant public viewpoint.
- The support structure is existing, and would not be readily visible once the sign is installed except in side views – see pictures below (from application). It is relatively lightweight in appearance.



View from Grey Street



View from waterfront

- The support structure is in existence now but it doesn’t logically follow that it should be used just because it’s there. It appears as a scaffold on the top of the building, and although the applicant argues that this sign and its structure have sentimental value to Wellingtonians, given the ten-year lapse in a sign in this location many would not even know or remember what was there now that it’s gone. The visual quality of the top of the building – a listed heritage structure - would also be improved if the frame was removed rather than re-used.

**Comments**

*These guidelines would not be satisfactorily met.*

## MAINTENANCE

*Objective 7.0 To ensure signs are maintained to a high standard.*

**Relevant Guidelines: G7.1**

The applicant's assessment of maintenance of the sign should be read in conjunction with the additional comments below.

- Considering the investment made, most LED/digital signs have a corresponding maintenance commitment.
- Usual consent conditions requiring the sign to revert to full black/non-illuminated mode if malfunctioning would cover any disruption of the image.

### Comments

*These guidelines would most likely be able to be met.*

## GUIDELINES FOR SPECIFIC TYPES OF SIGNS

### SIGNS AND HERITAGE

*Objective 8.0 To ensure that new signs do not detract from the heritage context and significance of listed heritage items.*

**Relevant Guideline: G8.1**

The applicant's assessment of the heritage implications of the sign should be read in conjunction with the additional comments below.

- The sign is on an identified heritage building and within heritage area. It would not be:
  - Appropriately located on the building or for the site, nor of compatible type and style.
  - Useful in identifying and understanding the heritage item.
- The applicant considers inclusion of the time and temperature aspect of the digital display to be a nod to the previous sign, which could be considered to have been somewhat of a city landmark in the 1960s-1980s. Now that both cars and mobile phones usually display both time and temperature, inclusion of this could be argued to be only marginally useful as additional sign content, and not important enough in 2022 to over-ride the other heritage-related or visual considerations of this location.

### Comments

**The Heritage Team will provide more detailed/technical advice on agreement with heritage considerations.**

### ILLUMINATED/ANIMATED SIGNS

*Objective 9.0 To ensure that illuminated and animated signs are appropriate for their context and do not compromise the amenity of nearby Residential Areas, prominent public spaces, or areas of special character or heritage value.*

**Relevant Guidelines: G9.1, G9.2, G9.3**

The applicant's assessment of the illumination and/or animation of signs should be read in conjunction with the additional comments below.

- Illumination of the sign will be visible within the surrounding context, which includes the waterfront and the Post Office Square heritage area. This is not considered to be an appropriate setting for a LED/digital sign.
- Even an oblique view will be detrimental to the quality of the setting, particularly after dark when it would appear from many viewpoints (such as the waterfront or Grey Street) as a brightly lit partial image. This would contribute no visual value to the context.
- The sign would detract from the architecture or quality of the host building or site during daylight. After dark, the visual effects would be exacerbated, to the detriment of the quality of the setting.

**Comments**

*These guidelines would not be satisfactorily met.*

**CONCLUSION**

The sign is inconsistent with the Design Guide for Signs in several key areas:

- It is not integrated with the architecture of the building; rather it is placed separately on the rooftop of it. It does not achieve a relationship with the building below it in terms of scale or placement of façade elements. It detracts from the visual qualities of the host building.
- The placement on the rooftop alters the silhouette of the building. Appreciation of the architectural detail of the top of the building is diminished and the large flat panel display is at odds with the architectural and landscaping detailing of the wider context.
- The sign would be dominant in views along Customhouse Quay and Waterloo Quay for a considerable distance. The Huddart Parker building terminates south-facing views in these locations, and the addition of a large, illuminated sign would not enhance this in an environment that is generally devoid of other signs displaying advertising.
- The sign would also be obtrusively visible in the views between Grey Street and the waterfront.
- The sign would detract from the public space qualities of Post Office Square (a heritage area) and the waterfront (a public space of city-wide significance.)
- From several key public space viewpoints the image on the sign would not appear in full, detracting from these viewpoints with pointless additional visual distraction.

The sign is therefore considered to be inappropriate for this location and Urban Design would not support the application being approved.

The proposal does not have Urban Design support.