

Apology issued for “technical issues” at Picardy Place

An advertising company which installed a “horrendously bright” advertising screen at Picardy Place has apologised for emitting “unacceptable levels of brightness” and said this was caused by “technical issues”.

Locals took to social media to discuss the digital display on the front of the Omni Centre – said to be the biggest in Scotland – when it was turned on last week and lit up the area.

A council investigation has been launched to determine if what has been put in place matches the original plans.

However GEM Display, which was granted advertising consent last year, said it “experienced technical issues which meant that the light sensor monitoring and adjusting brightness in line with ambient conditions did not perform as it should have”.

They added: “This meant the screen was operating at unacceptable levels of brightness and frankly being a nuisance. We are very sorry that this happened, and this has been remedied.

“We have been in communication with the Edinburgh Council’s planning team during this period.”

One resident who lives in the area complained it had been “waved through” by planners and joked it was so bright the Picardy Place roundabout could be turned into ‘a perfectly illuminated five-a-side football pitch’.

He added: “Do we become the Trafalgar Square of Edinburgh and people come to see the Omni Centre lights?”

Cllr Joanna Mowat said many of her constituents had been in touch about it and she has now formally asked the authority’s planning enforcement team to investigate.

Concerns were raised by New Town and Broughton Community Council (NTBCC) about “what was proposed in the planning application vs. the reality” as an image submitted with proposals appeared to show a significantly less bright design.

Planning officers will look into ‘non-compliance with application drawing,’ according to the council’s website.

The bid for advertising consent was lodged by GEM Display last year and given the green light, who concluded the 166 metre squared LED screen “will adequately respect the character of the surrounding area” and “would be congruous to the modern aesthetic of the application site”.

They set aside an objection from The Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland (AHSS) who said there appeared to have been “little investigation into the light impact of such a large illuminated billboard during dark evenings”.

Some have contrasted the approval of planning consent with a recent decision by the council to order Edinburgh Street Food at the Omni Centre to remove a illuminated neon pink ‘ESF’ sign.



Omni Centre PHOTO ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter

The new advertising screen at the Omni is horrendously bright. Not sure how it's been allowed, especially after [@EdiStreetFood](#) had issues for their teeny tiny sign that didn't make it feel like it's daylight! [@Edinburgh_CC](#) [#Edinburgh](#) [@edinburghpaper](#) [@EdinburghLive](#) pic.twitter.com/chyS0s59tw

– Wee Stevie C (he/him) (@SuperStevie268) [October 14, 2023](#)

Edinburgh resident Steve wrote on Twitter: “The new advertising screen at the Omni is horrendously bright. Not sure how it's been allowed, especially after [Edinburgh Street Food] had issues for their teeny tiny sign that didn't make it feel like it's daylight!”

Keith Cowan, who lives beside the Omni Centre, said: “How does a huge illuminated sign get approved and a wee neon sign that says ‘ESF’ gets the Kai-Bosch?”

He added: "The council look like a complete joke to ban the street food sign but allow that.

"It seems to be what they should have done with the Picardy Place roundabout is make it a five-a-side football pitch. It would be perfectly illuminated at no cost to the council.

"How out of touch are they and how disrespectful are they to the people trying to sleep in the hotel opposite.

"The two issues for me are that seeing the way that this application was waved through by the council, it causes me to be concerned about the ability of the council to protect the environment in general terms from this kind of development. My general confidence in the council is diminished by it.

"In terms of the impact it has on the local area, I'm concerned about traffic issues – will it be a distraction for people? do we become the Trafalgar Square of Edinburgh and people come to see the Omni Centre lights?"

NTBCC wrote on Twitter: "There does seem to be an issue with what was proposed in the planning application vs. the reality."

The group's planning convener Richard Price told the LDRS: "First of all the council's report of handling is lacking in lots of detail and has some quite surprising statements about being congruous with the area.

"The good thing is the technology does have – I think – the possibility of turning it down. It just seems unbelievably bright."

He suggested the screen had been "set on max" to "see what they can get away with".

He added: "I would accept that this is probably one of the two or three areas in Edinburgh where something like this is probably more acceptable than most, but even so it just seems

the whole thing needs toning down a bit.

“It’s a really rushed through, brief planning application. I think the council will be reliant a little bit on the good will of the applicant. It’ll be interesting to see what the council will do.”

SNP city centre councillor Finlay McFarlane posted a picture of the display on Twitter on Tuesday and speculated whether it has been “turned down”.

GEM Display’s website boasted the ‘unmissable’ digital advertising spot was “Scotland’s largest”.

It said: “It is the first large format digital display within Edinburgh’s World Heritage zone in the city centre where OOH advertising opportunities are notoriously rare and sought after.”

Edinburgh City Council and Nuveen the owners of the Omni Centre were contacted for comment.

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter



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