

Ms Petra Scarborough
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Your Ref: PS/MOH
Our Ref:
Date: 21 October 2013

Dear Ms Scarborough

TO LET/FOR SALE SIGNS IN BELFAST

I refer to your letter of 2 July 2013 in reference to the above and to my earlier response dated 26 April 2013. I apologise for the delay in responding to you and also that the Committee feels that the Department did not adequately address some of their earlier questions.

I advised you that the Advertisement Regulations allow for signs relating to the sale or letting of property to be displayed with deemed consent on condition that the advertisement is removed within 14 days after the sale is complete or the tenancy is granted. In addition, no more than one sign consisting of a single or 2 joined boards can be displayed on the host building. The advertisement should not exceed 2 square metres, or in the case of 2 joined boards together 2.5 square metres in total area and should not project more than one metre out from the face of the building.

Therefore, any advertising in excess of these dimensions or where there is more than one board on a property is unauthorized and requires planning consent or should be removed.

In our experience the majority of Estate Agents display for sale and to let boards within the parameters set out in the Regulations. However, difficulties arise, particularly, in areas where properties are in multiple occupation or in flats. In these situations signage can remain in place for a considerable period of time, as it does not have to be removed until 14 days after all units/rooms are let.

You refer in your letter to schemes being undertaken in other parts of the United Kingdom to control this type of advertising. Whilst there is scope within the legislation to restrict some types of advertisements, at this time, given the current economic downturn, the Department feels that to enact those provisions may be overly onerous on the market.

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You also make reference that the UK schemes allowed for signage to be placed inside the windows of properties. This provision exists within the Northern Ireland Regulations, and may be encouraged, however, it is the prerogative of Agents to use the full range of provisions available as set out above.

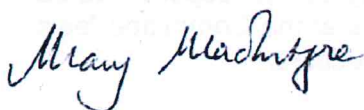
We are, however, fully aware that there is a proliferation of this type of signage in the University area and acknowledge that this can have a detrimental impact on amenity. In this respect as previously advised the Belfast Area Office wrote to almost 40 Estate Agents and property owners in April 2013, reminding them of the Regulations and advising them of their responsibilities to remove all signs which were in breach of Planning.

This resulted in 62 signs being removed, over 60% of those identified as actionable. However, due to the transitory nature of the area, 37 new signs were erected during the period between 24 April (2nd Survey) and 9 June (3rd Survey). Therefore overall there was a reduction of 25 signs. The fourth survey is currently underway and letters have issued again to Estate Agents and property owners to advise them of the Regulations.

Whilst this is a difficult area of planning control, the Department will continue to pursue the removal of those signs that are found to be in breach of the Regulations.

I have asked the Area Planning Manager for Belfast, Clifford McIlwaine, to provide you with an update on the progress of this area of work when the current survey is complete and the next round of action is undertaken. Clifford would also be willing to meet with Council officials at that time to explore what other actions might be possible for the City Council and DOE to act collaboratively.

Yours sincerely



MARY MacINTYRE
Chief Planner

