

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 7 May 2025
8th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

PE2090: Update the legislation granting permission for Digital Display Boards

Introduction

Petitioner Stephen Henson

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to update the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (Scotland) (Regulations) 1984 to require application for express consent to advertise using a digital display, including where a site has been upgraded from a traditional paper-based display.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2090>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 12 June 2024.](#) At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Heads of Planning Scotland, the Royal Town Planning Institute, and Outsmart.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received a new written submission from Outsmart which is set out in **Annexe C**.
4. The Heads of Planning Scotland responded to state that it does not have a confirmed position and deferred to the Scottish Government regarding the number of applications submitted for digital display boards.
5. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage.](#)
6. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
7. [The Scottish Government gave its initial response to the petition on 9 May 2024.](#)
8. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 46 signatures have been received on this petition.

Action

9. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

Clerks to the Committee

May 2025

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2090: Update the legislation granting permission for Digital Display Boards

Petitioner

Stephen Henson

Date Lodged

28 March 2024

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to update the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (Scotland) (Regulations) 1984 to require application for express consent to advertise using a digital display, including where a site has been upgraded from a traditional paper-based display.

Background information

The existing planning laws are not adequate and generally result in a default go ahead for any application covering an existing display site. These display boards are bright, intrusive and affect public amenity. Within 200 yards of my home, there are now four such displays, one in particular is very large and is positioned 20 feet in front of a small row of terraced houses. Another two face across the main road into a residential square, three sides of flatted accommodation. I mention these two examples, along with my own home, as being entirely residential on a street that is also largely residential apart from a short stretch owned by a company. The guidance for applications to upgrade existing display boards to Internally Illuminated Display boards does carry within a proviso that these would normally be granted where the existing boards were in an already busy commercial area. I think I have highlighted that the four around me are clearly not in a busy commercial area. There is no requirement for "neighbours" to be informed in order to object.

Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE2090 on 12 June 2024

The Convener: PE2090, lodged by Stephen Henson, is on updating the legislation on granting permission for digital display boards.

I see that some people are leaving the room—I gather that they were attending especially to hear consideration of the petition on national parks. I thank them for being with us this morning.

PE2090 calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to update the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (Scotland) (Regulations) 1984 to require application for express consent to advertise using a digital display, including where a site has been upgraded from a traditional paper-based display.

The SPICe briefing that we received notes that large digital display boards are very likely to fall into the “express consent” category of planning regulations, which means that permission must be obtained before they can be installed. It also notes that many local authorities already set limits on where digital advertising displays can be located.

In responding to the petition, the Scottish Government details the requirements for notification of a planning application for digital advertising, including the statutory requirement for a planning authority to notify in writing any neighbours whose property is within 20m of the site of the application. Therefore, the Scottish Government considers that the existing provisions are appropriate and that there is no requirement to amend them at this time.

We have also received a submission from the petitioner, which notes that many of the notification requirements mean that members of the public must be proactive, for example by checking online planning portals for submissions of new applications.

Do members have any comments or suggestions for action?

David Torrance: Given that it is a new petition, perhaps the committee could consider writing to Heads of Planning Scotland to seek its views on the action that is called for in the petition and information on the number of applications that are submitted for digital display boards, including on what proportion of applications are granted and what proportion are rejected, and to the Royal Town Planning Institute and Outsmart, which is the membership body for the outdoor advertising industry, to seek their views on the action that is called for in the petition.

The Convener: Do members have any other thoughts?

I quite like digital display boards. I have a few in my constituency. They tended to replace roller display boards, where the picture changed, or ones with slats that used to turn. Now, it is all modern tech.

We will keep the petition open, and we will seek to find out the views of the bodies concerned on digital display boards. It is perfectly possible that they could be located in much more intrusive locations, which could be of consequence to people locally.

Annexe C: Written submission

Outsmart written submission, 20 November 2024

PE2090/C: Update the legislation granting permission for Digital Display Boards

Thank you for your e-mail of 2 April 2024, on behalf of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee, seeking Outsmart's views of the legislation granting permission for Digital Display Boards.

Outsmart is the trade association for the Out-of-Home (OOH) advertising industry and represents over fifty OOH media owners i.e. companies that operate OOH displays.

Response:

- Applications for advertisement consent involve public consultation as a requirement
- The planning authority must take comments from the public into consideration
- Planning authorities determine applications on a case-by-case basis, referring to their own applicable guidance
- Outsmart considers these provisions to be proportionate and appropriate.

It may be of interest to the petitioner to note that OOH advertising - uniquely amongst the various types of advertising e.g. TV, Online, Radio, Print etc - [funds valuable public services](#) at no cost to the taxpayer. Furthermore the OOH industry consults with independent bodies to ensure, for example, the luminescence levels of screens are set within their guidance. See here for a [policy example](#).

As a responsible industry, aware of its relationship with the general public, Outsmart recognises occasional issues can arise with luminescence that require further investigation.

Should there be an issue with the luminescence of the digital advertising screens that affect the petitioner, OOH media owners can work with the relevant Local Authority to investigate and resolve the matter efficiently and promptly. If the petitioner is comfortable with sharing further location details with myself, I will assist in this matter.