



Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 31 October 2022

by Patrick Whelan BA(Hons) Dip Arch MA MSc ARB RIBA RTPi

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 23 January 2023

Appeal 'A' Ref: APP/L5240/W/21/3285398

Outside 32-34 High Street, Croydon CR7 8LE

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr James Browne, BT Telecommunications PLC, against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Croydon.
 - The application Ref 21/03253/FUL, dated 1 June 2021, was refused by notice dated 31 August 2021.
 - The development proposed is 1no. new BT street hub, incorporating 75" LCD advert screens plus the removal of associated BT kiosk(s).
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Appeal 'B' Ref: APP/L5240/H/21/3285399

Outside 32-34 High Street, Croydon CR7 8LE

- The appeal is made under Regulation 17 of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 against a refusal to grant express consent.
 - The appeal is made by Mr James Browne, BT Telecommunications PLC against the decision of the Council of the London Borough of Croydon.
 - The application Ref 21/03254/ADV, dated 1 June 2021, was refused by notice dated 3 September 2021.
 - The advertisements proposed are 2no. digital 75" LCD display screens, one on each side of the street hub unit.
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Decisions

Appeal 'A' Ref: APP/L5240/W/21/3285398

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for 1no. new BT street hub, incorporating 75" LCD advert screens plus the removal of associated BT kiosks, outside 32-34 High Street, Croydon CR7 8LE, in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 21/03253/FUL, dated 1 June 2021, and the plans submitted with it, subject to the conditions in the schedule at the end of this decision.

Appeal 'B' Ref: APP/L5240/H/21/3285399

2. The appeal is allowed and express consent is granted for 2no. digital 75" LCD display screens, one on each side of the street hub unit. The consent is for five years from the date of this decision and is subject to the five standard conditions set out in the Regulations and the additional conditions in the schedule at the end of these decisions.
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Procedural matters

3. The two appeals concern the same proposal on the same site. Appeal 'A' concerns the refusal of planning permission to erect a BT street hub. Appeal 'B' concerns the refusal of express consent to display advertisements on the street hub. I have considered each on its individual merits, however, as they raise similar issues, I have combined both decisions into a single decisions letter.
4. The Advertisements Regulations stipulate that control may be exercised only in the interests of amenity and public safety. In determining the advertisement appeal, the development plan policies are not determinative, but I have taken them into account in determining the appeal against the refusal of planning permission.

Main issues

5. The main issues are, in appeal 'A', the effect of the proposed development on:
 - the character and appearance of the area, including the surrounding townscape and public realm;
 - pedestrian movement; and,
 - highway and crime safety;and, in appeal 'B', the effect of the proposed advertisements on:
 - visual amenity; and,
 - highway and crime safety.

Reasons

Character and appearance of the area and visual amenity

6. Reflecting its designations in the Thornton Heath District Centre as a Main Retail Frontage in a Primary Shopping Area the street has a busy commercial character from the shops which enclose it. At the time of my site visit, this section was busy with road traffic, and the footways even busier with people shopping, or passing along the street.
7. Its commercial character is characterised by shop advertisements including fascias, projecting signs and window signs. The phone box here proposed to be replaced by the BT street hub includes fly posters on its sides. At the time of my site visit it had been used as a toilet. It's dark-tinted sides and fly-postered wall give it a foreboding, neglected appearance. The footway here is broad, but it also holds road signage, a bus stop, lamp columns, bollards, and a parking meter. Some of the shops brought their displays onto the footway in front of their fronts, intensifying the colour and animation of the place. Given the already bustling, commercial nature of this section of the street, the proposal would not undermine its character as a place to live in, to work in, or to visit. Removing the potential for the anti-social use inside the phone box which I encountered, as well as its forlorn appearance, would enhance the character of this section of the street.

8. The removal of the metal and plastic BT phone box would not harm the townscape of the street or the attractiveness of the public realm. I appreciate that the street hub would be taller and broader than the phone box which it would replace. However, it would be narrower. It would have more slender proportions, a plainer form, slicker detailing, and a restrained, dark monotone colour, giving it a more neutral, background character in the street than the more corporately identified phone box. It would appear less bulky and less conspicuous than the phone box it would replace.
9. I appreciate that advertisements attached to phone boxes may not be illuminated, whereas the street hub advertisements would be. However, the only advertisements on the phone box at the time of my visit were fly posters and stickers. Nonetheless, from what I saw on similar phone boxes in this area, in terms of appearance, there is a world of difference between paper or vinyl advertisements pasted over the glazed panels of a phone box and its rail, and the purposed-designed, well-detailed street hub containing LCD screens. In my view, replacing this phone box with the street hub, whether the advertisements on the hub be illuminated or unilluminated, would improve the visual and townscape qualities of the street scene.
10. Given the already bustling, commercial aspect in this section, and subject to conditions to control their illumination at night, I can see no harm to visual amenity from the size, positions and method of illumination of the advertisements on the street hub.
11. I conclude on this issue that, given the condition of the phone box in this location which would be removed, subject to conditions, the proposal would not harm the character and appearance of the area, including the surrounding townscape and public realm. There would be no harm to visual amenity. There would be no conflict with London Plan 2021 (LP) policies D3 and D8, nor with Croydon Local Plan 2018 (CLP) policy SP4. These seek development that encourages active travel with inclusive pedestrian routes, and require development to ensure that the public realm is attractive and related to the local context, to respond to local distinctiveness, and to contribute positively to public realm and townscape.

Pedestrian movement

12. The area has a high footfall. Given the amount of clear passage that would remain between the closest building and the street hub in this wide section of the footway, I can see no potential obstruction to the footway, even if there were to be some informal frontage display to the shop opposite.
13. I appreciate that the Council's public realm design guidance¹ suggests that street clutter should be avoided and that only furniture that is either needed or improves the user experience should be added to the public realm. While the street hub would be another item of street furniture, given that it would replace a phone box in the same location standing a similar distance from the shop fronts, and noting the clear width of footway which would remain in this wide

¹ Croydon's Public Realm Design Guide 2019, Council of the London Borough of Croydon

section, I can see no conflict with the use of the footway or access to the buildings on this side.

14. There would be no conflict with LP policy D8, nor with CLP policy SP4 which require development to contribute positively to the public realm, to provide for its movement and place functions, and which indicate that applications that introduce unnecessary street furniture should be refused.

Highway safety

15. The street hub would be orientated to face oncoming drivers and sited close to the kerb of the footway, in the drivers' sight lines, which would reduce the risk of drivers turning away from the road to look at the advertisements, in accordance with the guidance² of Transport for London. The street hub would be sited sufficiently distant from the bus stop behind it that there would be no material risk of distracting drivers approaching the stop or passing buses.
16. There is no substantive evidence, and nothing that I could see on-site, to suggest that there would be any significant conflict with signage, nor that the road geometry and layout is so complicated, nor that driving conditions are so demanding, that the proposal would present an unacceptable highway safety risk.
17. I conclude on this issue that there would be no material risk to highway safety from the proposal and no conflict with LP policy T4 and CLP policy DM29 which protect the safety of people using roads and footways.

Crime safety

18. I acknowledge the consultation response from the Metropolitan Police describing a severe crime risk in this street, and their recommending the suspension of the function of free phone calls, free Wi-Fi and free phone charging. However, the Council has not recommended any such condition.
19. In these circumstances, and noting the provisions of the BT Street Hub Anti-social Behaviour Management Plan, which provides for call restrictions, the disabling of the USB port and, alongside its algorithm, the priority assigned to contact from the police, a planning condition would reduce the risk of the BT street hub being used for crime to an acceptable degree.
20. The phone box to be removed at this location has solid or dark-grey tinted glass. It already obscures some views down the street. The additional width and height of the BT street hub would not make a material difference to sight lines, in terms of natural surveillance.
21. I conclude on this issue that, subject to a condition to secure the management plan, there would be no unacceptable risk to crime safety from the proposal. There would be no conflict with LP policy D3 which requires measures to design out crime being integral to development proposals and opportunities for anti-social behaviour, criminal activities and terrorism to be reduced. Nor would the proposal run against the National Planning Policy Framework which requires in

² Guidance for Digital Roadside Advertising and Proposed Best Practice, Transport for London, 4 March 2013

paragraph 92 that decisions aim to achieve safe places and high-quality public space so that crime and the fear of crime do not undermine the quality of life.

Other matters

22. I note the intention to remove a second phone box, in Parchmore Road. There is no objection from the Council to this, and I have no reason to disagree with it. While the disposal of the second phone box may be considered a benefit to the public realm, given my conclusions above on the first phone box, the removal of the second box has not been a decisive factor in weighing the balance of this proposal.
23. I acknowledge that LP policy D8 requires lighting for advertisements to minimise intrusive infrastructure and reduce light pollution. However, in this proposal the lighting would be in-built. Given the location in a large city with streets lit by streetlights and buildings, I am not convinced that, subject to a condition controlling its illuminance, the proposal would result in a harmful increase in light pollution or disturbance to surrounding occupiers.
24. I have had regard to the risk of harm from the cumulative effect of similar installations in the same area as this proposal. However, on the evidence before me, and from what I saw in the area, I cannot identify any such risk.

Conditions

25. I have considered the conditions suggested by the Council against the advice in the Planning Practice Guidance, and amended them where necessary. In appeal 'A, in addition to the statutory time condition [1], a condition [2] listing the approved drawings is needed to ensure clarity on what has been permitted.
26. The appellant's product statement describes the facing materials as powder-coated aluminium and glass, and the renders show the metal in a very dark monotone. There is no necessity for details of facing materials or finishes to be approved. However, in the interests of appearance and visual amenity it is necessary for the specification to be followed, so I have applied condition [3].
27. It is also necessary, in order to reduce the risk of street crime and anti-social behaviour in the outer London borough with the highest crime rate, that a condition be applied to ensure that the street hub is effectively managed. I have therefore applied a condition [4] for its management to be in accordance with the BT Street Hub Anti-social Behaviour Management Plan April 2021.
28. The street hub could be erected without the phone box being removed. This would make this section overly commercial by the concentration of advertisements in the public realm. The combined effect of the siting of the existing phone box and the BT street hub would also form a surveillance blind-spot in an area of severe crime risk. A condition to ensure the phone box is removed would overcome these effects.
29. I appreciate that the phone box may not be on land in the control of the appellant. However, there is no objection from the Council or the relevant highways authority to its removal. In these circumstances, and given the status of the appellant as a statutory undertaker, I am assured that there

- would be no unacceptable uncertainty and that there would be every prospect of its removal.
30. I acknowledge the appellant's suggested condition in this respect which sought the removal of the phone boxes within three months of the development commencing. However, this would permit this phone box and street hub to be in place for three months. Given the risks identified, the street hub should not be erected until the phone box has been removed. I have therefore applied a condition [5] which would secure this, while allowing any groundworks to be completed in advance of erection.
31. In appeal 'B', to prevent visual intrusion and distraction to road users, it is necessary to apply a condition [1] to control the illuminance of the advertisements so that they do not stand out significantly from the background illumination in the street, during darkness. The proposal is for the advertisements to have internal illumination of 2,500cd/m². It is unclear how the Council has determined that the level should be no greater than 300cd/m². However, the lighting guidance³ suggests that in urban areas, such as this, the maximum level could be up to 600cd/m². Given the location of the proposal, the commercial and lit character of the street, the visual contrast of the surroundings, and the size of the street hub's screens, I consider that 600cd/m² is a reasonable upper limit.
32. To avoid the risk of distraction to drivers, it is also necessary for conditions to avoid, special effects, moving or sequenced images [2], to ensure a minimum display time [2], and to reduce the rate of change of images to instantaneous [3].

Conclusion

33. For the reasons given above, and taking into account all matters raised, the appeals are allowed.

Patrick Whelan

INSPECTOR

³ Professional Lighting Guide 05, The Brightness Of Illuminated Advertisements, 2015, Institution of Lighting Professionals

SCHEDULES OF CONDITIONS

Appeal 'A' Ref: APP/L5240/W/21/3285398

- 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than 3 years from the date of this decision.
- 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: 1A SITE LOCATION MAPS; 2A PROPOSED SITE PLAN; 3A EXISTING AND PROPOSED ELEVATIONS.
- 3) The external surfaces of the development shall be constructed using the materials, finishes, and colours as described in the BT Street Hubs Product Statement v1.0 February 2021 and as shown on the BT Street Hub Proposal Renders 2021.
- 4) The BT street hub, including its electronic features, shall be managed in accordance with the BT Street Hub Anti-Social Behaviour Management Plan, April 2021, for the lifetime of the development.
- 5) Before the BT street hub hereby approved is erected, the phone box indicated for removal, as shown on drawing 2A PROPOSED SITE PLAN, shall be removed and the street surface made good to match the adjoining footway surface materials.

Appeal 'B' Ref: APP/L5240/H/21/3285399

In addition to the five standard conditions in the Regulations:

- 1) The intensity of the illumination of the advertisements permitted by this consent shall be no greater than 600 cd/m² between dusk and dawn, consistent with guidance set out in the Institute of Lighting Professionals (ILP) publication: "The Brightness of Illuminated Advertisements" (PLG05, January 2015).
- 2) The minimum display time for each advertisement shall be 10 seconds. There shall be no special effects that include noise, smell, flashing, or smoke. Full-motion video is not permitted.
- 3) The interval between successive displays shall be instantaneous and the complete display screen shall change without visual effects (including fading, swiping or other animated transition methods) between each advertisement.

END OF SCHEDULES OF CONDITIONS