



Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 1 July 2025

by J Heppell BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 14 July 2025

Appeal A Ref: APP/D3640/W/25/3361972

Footpath outside 12-18 High Street, Camberley GU15 3SX

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Simon Warner of BT Group Plc against the decision of Surrey Heath Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 24/1149/FFU.
 - The development proposed is the installation of 1No. BT street hub unit and associated advertisement panels on either side of the unit.
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Appeal B Ref: APP/D3640/H/25/3361974

Footpath outside 12-18 High Street, Camberley GU15 3SX

- 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 Simon Warner of BT Group Plc against the decision of Surrey Heath Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 24/1150/ADV.
 - The development proposed is the installation of 1No. BT street hub unit and associated advertisement panels on either side of the unit.
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Decision

1. Appeal A is dismissed.
2. Appeal B is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

3. The two appeals relate to the same site and to each other. I have considered each on its individual merits, but as they are intrinsically linked and raise similar issues, I have combined these cases in a single decision letter.
4. In accordance with the Regulations for the control of advertisements, I have limited my consideration of Appeal B to matters of amenity and have had regard to the development plan only insofar as it is relevant to my consideration of those matters. There was no objection raised on the grounds of public safety and I find no reason to take a different view on that matter.
5. I have afforded limited weight to policies DH1 and DH6 of the Pre-Submission Surrey Heath Local Plan (2019-2038): (Regulation 19) July 2024, since whilst they are consistent with currently adopted policies, there may be unresolved objections pending the plan's examination by an independent Inspector

Main Issues

6. The main issue for Appeal A is the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area.
7. The main issue for Appeal B is the effect of the advertisement on amenity.

Reasons

8. The appeal site is located on the pavement outside the former British Heart Foundation Home Store on High Street, close to its junction with Obelisk Way. The proposed street hub unit would replace a BT telephone box in this location and a BT telephone box outside 121 London Road.
9. High Street is an attractive shopping street which contains a mix of Victorian and Edwardian buildings, generally two storeys high, along with modern buildings which are often taller. The appeal site has not benefitted from the public realm improvements which have been made to other parts of the High Street. It lies outside the High Street Character Area identified in the Camberley Town Centre Area Action Plan 2011-2028 Adopted July 2014 (AAP), meaning that Policy TC12, which seeks to protect the integrity of the High Street Character Area, is not engaged.
10. The appeal site is located adjacent to a postwar building of no particular architectural merit, at a point where the pavement narrows to accommodate on street parking bays. The existing telephone box forms part of a cluster of street furniture which includes a post box, a litter bin, two signposts and a pair of bollards. The resultant clutter is unattractive and forces pedestrians to utilise a relatively narrow gap between the street furniture and the store front, beneath the canopy of the store, where the telephone box creates a pinch point for pedestrians.
11. The second telephone box which is proposed to be removed is located at the junction of London Road and High Street, to the north of the appeal site. It is prominently located amongst a cluster of street furniture which includes a lamp post, a CCTV camera, a litter bin, a utilities cabinet, two bollards, a bus stop and a sign post. The telephone box, like the one on the appeal site, is not itself objectionable in visual terms.
12. Whilst there would be visual benefits in removing both telephone boxes, the proposal would result in an appreciably taller and also wider hub unit, whose large pair of advertisement panels would, notwithstanding the slim profile of the unit, dominate its appearance at the expense of its other functions. The top of the unit would be level with the underside of the shop front canopy which would, in conjunction with the further narrowing of the gap between the proposed hub and the shop front, make an already narrow pedestrian route even less inviting. The result would be to reinforce the appearance of clutter in this part of the High Street.
13. I recognise that the demand for public telephone boxes has significantly declined and that in many cases they need to be removed. I acknowledge the benefits offered by street hub units, which include ultrafast public and encrypted wi-fi, access to public services, multiple accessibility options, secure power-only USB ports for rapid device charging, free phone calls, a direct emergency call button, community and emergency awareness messaging, environmental sensors to measure air quality, noise and traffic, improved 4G and 5G coverage to local

communities through the installation of small cell mobile connectivity providing faster and more reliable connection for calls and internet access, and free council advertising.

14. I note that the hubs would be powered by 100% renewable carbon-free energy and that a maintenance regime would be put in place. I also note the appellant's view that the proposed unit could assist in encouraging shoppers to return to the town centre. However, none of these benefits are sufficient to outweigh the harm I have identified from the proposal. Furthermore, it is unclear the extent to which a duplication of such hubs dilutes their public benefits.
15. The appellant has provided a sample of appeal decisions where the smaller footprint and slender profile of kiosks compared with telephone boxes was found not to be visually intrusive or create clutter. I recognise that there will be situations where such hubs are appropriate in visual terms, but I do not have enough information to determine whether any of the sites referred to had the same characteristics as the appeal site, and consequently these decisions do not alter the conclusion I have come to regarding the harm that the proposal would cause.
16. It has been indicated by the appellant that the proposal forms part of a package of five street hubs proposed in the Camberley area. The Council has drawn attention to a total of twelve applications by various operators for kiosks and digital advertisement applications in Camberley town centre, all of which have been refused and half of which have been appealed. Five kiosks have been proposed in High Street, three of them within the High Street Character Area. Of the two which are outside the Character Area, one is located at the other end of High Street, and the other is the subject of this appeal. As I am dismissing the appeal, I do not need to consider the potential ramifications of additional hubs in the High Street or elsewhere.
17. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) offer broad support for telecommunications infrastructure and advises that strategic policies should be flexible enough to accommodate needs not anticipated in the plan. Along with the Planning Practice Guidance, it draws attention to the desirability of having well designed and sited advertisements which respect the scale of the surroundings. Given my conclusions above, the proposal does not achieve the Framework's aspiration for well sited advertisements.
18. I therefore conclude that the benefits of the proposal, which include the removal of two telephone boxes and a range of public benefits, would not outweigh the proposal's adverse effect on the character and appearance of the area. Consequently, whilst not determinative in relation to Appeal B, the proposal would conflict with Policy DM9 of the Core Strategy & Development Management Policies 2011-2028 adopted February 2012 (CS) and policies TC1, TC11 and TC13 of the AAP. Together these policies promote high quality design that improves the quality of the public realm, including through new street furniture.
19. Whilst similarly not determinative in relation to Appeal B, the proposal would conflict with policies DH1 and DH6 of the Pre-Submission Surrey Heath Local Plan (2019-2038): (Regulation 19) July 2024, which together promote a high standard of design and require, amongst other things, that the location and scale of advertisements respect the character and appearance of the area.

20. I have not found conflict with policies CP11 and CP12 of the CS, which deal respectively with movement, and infrastructure delivery and implementation, and neither have I found conflict with Policy TC12 of the AP, the aims of which I have outlined above.

Other Matters

21. Interested parties have raised a number of matters. It is suggested that such advertisements risk creating sensory overload and damaging eyesight; however, government advice is supportive of appropriately designed and sited advertisements, and there is no evidence before me that the proposal would have such adverse effects.
22. It is argued that the proposal would impede pedestrians, particularly the disabled; however, I am satisfied that the proposal, although it may contribute to unnecessary clutter, would not physically pedestrians.
23. The risk of distracting drivers and the consequent impact on road safety has been raised, but I note that the local highway authority, Surrey County Council, has no concerns in this regard. This appears to be a lightly trafficked road where drivers are generally travelling at low speeds, and as such the implications for road safety are not significant.
24. The need for hub units such as this is queried, given that most people have mobile phones, but local and national policies do not require the appellant to demonstrate a need for the proposal. Likewise local and national policies do not require operators to demonstrate that alternative options have been considered.
25. In light of the fact that the proposal includes small cell technology, the lack of an accompanying ICNIRP Certificate relating to non-ionising protection has been raised. As I am dismissing the appeal, however, the lack of a Certificate is not determinative in this instance.
26. The scheme's compliance with the Code of Best Practice on Mobile Network Development in England, dated March 2022, is not a determinative factor in relation to this appeal.
27. The impact on wildlife from high frequencies and light emissions has been queried. Given the location of the appeal site in a town centre, I agree with the Council impacts on wildlife are expected to be low.

Conclusion

28. Appeal A would conflict with the development plan taken as a whole and there are no other material considerations to suggest that the decision should be made other than in accordance with it. Appeal B would harm the visual amenity of the area. Therefore, for the reasons given above, both appeals should be dismissed.

J Heppell

INSPECTOR