
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 20 May 2025

by **J Heppell BA (Hons) MA MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 22 July 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/Y1945/W/24/3357974

Pavement Outside 106 The Parade, High Street, Watford WD17 1AW

- 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 In Focus Network Limited against the decision of Watford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 24/00709/FUL.
 - The development proposed is the installation of a modern, multifunction hub unit featuring an integral advertisement display and defibrillator.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The appellant had jointly sought planning permission and consent to display an advertisement, both of which were refused, but has only appealed the refusal of planning permission. This is the basis on which I have dealt with the appeal.

Main Issues

3. The main issues in this appeal are:
 - the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, having particular regard to whether the proposal would preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Civic Core Conservation Area (CA) and preserve the setting of listed and locally listed buildings; and
 - the effect of the proposal on cycle parking.

Reasons

Character and appearance and heritage assets

4. The appeal site is situated within a pedestrianised section of Watford High Street known as The Parade, which is split by Watford Pond. The proposed hub would be located on the south side of The Parade, close to a row of trees interspersed with street furniture.
5. The site is located within the Civic Core Conservation Area and close to two Grade II listed buildings: Monmouth House (85-95 The Parade) and 151-153 The Parade. The site is also close to the locally listed 97-99 The Parade, 101-115 The Parade, 135 The Parade, 137-147 The Parade, 149 The Parade, 155-183 The Parade, 58-68 The Parade and Faircross House (116 The Parade).

6. Although the Council has not relied on harm to heritage assets in its reason for refusal, s72(1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a statutory duty on decision makers to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a Conservation Area. S66(1) of the Act places a statutory duty on decision makers to have special regard to preserving the setting of listed buildings.
7. The CA's significance derives from the linear development of the original medieval settlement which lay alongside a historically important road. It contains a number of listed buildings, some of which date back to the seventeenth century. The northern part of the conservation area contains the core of the borough's civic buildings, whilst the southern part is focussed on the High Street and the pond. The broad, linear form of The Parade is a key element of the setting of the listed and locally listed buildings close to the appeal site.
8. The Grade II listed Monmouth House dates from 1610 when it was constructed as a dower house by the Earl of Monmouth. In 1771 the building was split into two houses and significantly altered in the process. In 1927 both halves of the building were rebuilt as a three-storey building with four coped gables and a symmetrical arrangement of windows that is seen today.
9. The Grade II listed 151-153 The Parade was built between 1929 and 1930 for the Westminster Bank. It was designed by the notable architect Septimus Warwick. It is a three-storey building in a formal classical style in Portland stone, with simple yet monumental columns and entrances.
10. The locally listed 97-99 The Parade, 101-115 The Parade, 135 The Parade, 137-147 The Parade, 149 The Parade, 155-183 The Parade, 58-68 The Parade and Faircross House (116 The Parade) date from the period 1927-1938 (with the exception of 155-183 The Parade, which was built in 1956) and were constructed in red brick in a neo-classical style as purpose-built shops, offices and flats.
11. The Civic Core Conservation Area Character Appraisal (CACA) notes the prevalence of granite pavements and stone flags in the floorscape of The Parade, and the contribution made by the rows of semi-mature trees along it, which give structure to the street and add visual interest. The importance of key sequential views along the axial route of The Parade is highlighted, along with the amount of pedestrian activity on The Parade, both during the day and in the evenings.
12. The communication hub would be located on the south-western side of The Parade, in front of a row of shops and near to the pond. The pedestrian thoroughfare in this area is delineated by changes in surface material, with a raised area in front of the pond and a continuous row of pavements parallel with the shops. The appellant has explained that the highway on which the hub would be installed would afterwards be returned to its pre-installation state. Street furniture – including lamp posts, directional signs, surveillance cameras, benches, litter bins and cycle hoops – is located between the pavements and the shops.
13. Sitting forward of the trees and benches and close to the pond, the communications hub would be a prominent feature which would contribute to a sense of clutter, detracting from the appearance of The Parade and the sequential views along it. Although the dimensions of the proposed communication hub would be similar to an existing hub located outside 95 The Parade, the Council has confirmed that this hub replaced an earlier telephone box, and consequently the planning context was

different. Whilst The Parade has a number of well lit, active store frontages close to the appeal site, such frontages are an accepted part of historic streets, with a different character to the proposed hub, irrespective of the hub's build and design quality.

14. As a result, the proposal would have an adverse effect on the character and appearance of the CA, with resultant harm to the setting of the listed buildings. The proposal would result in moderate degree of less than substantial harm to the significance of each of the designated heritage assets affected, to which I attach considerable importance and weight. Paragraph 215 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that in such circumstances, the harm to designated heritage assets should be weighed against the public benefits. I further consider that the hub would harm the significance of the locally listed buildings by impacting on the openness of their setting.
15. The proposal would provide a range of services, including free ultrafast wi-fi, free phone calls to landlines and charities, a defibrillator, wayfinding, device charging, rapid connection to emergency services, public messaging capabilities, and a platform for other technologies to capture environmental data. It would provide CCTV and air quality monitoring, backed by renewable energy. The appellant has explained the contribution that hubs can make to preventing crime and tackling homelessness and has provided a management plan for the hub.
16. However, the public benefit of these services is moderate, given that the Council has pointed out that some of these facilities, such as free wi-fi and defibrillators, are already available in the town centre. Moreover, it has not been explained why the hub could not be located in a less prominent location whilst still providing the same benefits. Overall, I consider that the harm to designated heritage assets outweighs the benefits.
17. I therefore conclude that the proposal would fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the CA and would not preserve the setting of the listed and locally listed buildings. For these reasons the proposal would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area and the historic environment. As a result, the proposal would be contrary to policies HE7.1, HE7.2 and HE7.3 of the Watford Local Plan 2021-2038 entitled "A Sustainable Town" (WLP), which together seek to enhance and protect the historic environment including designated and non-designated heritage assets. The proposal would also be contrary to policies QD6.2 and QD6.4 of the WLP, which require new development to be well designed and to make a positive contribution to place-making.

Cycle parking

18. The hub would be positioned 1.4 metres in front of the end hoop of a row of four cycle hoops. Whilst the hoops are designed so that bicycles are secured adjacent to the hoops rather than in front of them, there is nevertheless a requirement for space in front and behind the hoops to manoeuvre bicycles in and out. The communications hub would create a perception that the end hoop in particular would be difficult to access.
19. The appellant has pointed out that an existing tree and bench are located closer to the cycle hoops than the proposed hub; however, they are positioned to the side of the hoops, and therefore do not obstruct them, whereas the hub would be positioned partly in front of them. The appellant has not explained why the hub

could not be positioned further away from the hoops so that there would be no risk of conflict occurring.

20. As such, the proposal poses an additional obstacle to cyclists looking to access to the cycle hoops, which would be inconvenient and contrary to Policy QD6.2 of the WLP, which espouses high quality design and place-making, including designing streets to support all users, and prioritising non-vehicular travel by making streets efficient, convenient, legible and permeable.

Conclusion

21. I therefore conclude that the proposal conflicts with the development plan taken as a whole, and there are no material considerations of such strength or significance as to justify a decision otherwise than in accordance with the development plan. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

J Heppell

INSPECTOR