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## Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 13 August 2025

by A Knight BA PG Dip MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 09 September 2025

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### Appeal A Ref: APP/D3640/W/25/3361979

#### Footpath outside The Atrium, Park Street, Camberley, Surrey GU15 3GP

- 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 BT Group PLC against the decision of Surrey Heath Borough Council.
  - The application Ref is 24/1141/FFU.
  - The development proposed is 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/25/3361980

#### Footpath outside The Atrium, Park Street, Camberley, Surrey GU15 3GP

- The appeal is made under Regulation 17 of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) against a refusal to grant express consent.
  - The appeal is made by BT Group PLC against the decision of Surrey Heath Borough Council.
  - The application Ref is 24/1142/ADV.
  - The advertisement proposed is 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 appeal site and to each other. Appeal A relates to the refusal of planning permission for a freestanding street hub unit (the development). Appeal B relates to the refusal of advertisement consent for two digital display screens (the advertisements) which would be integral to the development. I have determined both appeals on their merits but, to avoid duplication, dealt with the two together below.
4. The description of the proposed advertisement in the banner heading above is that used in the application form. I note that, in its decision notice, the Council used the description 'Application for advertisement consent for a display of two digital 75 inch LCD display screens, one on each side of the Street Hub unit'. In the appeal form, a detailed list of technical specifications is provided by way of a description. It does not contradict that used in the decision notice, and the nature of the proposed advertisement is clear.
5. In respect of Appeal B, Regulation 17 of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 and the National Planning Policy

Framework (the Framework) state that advertisements should be subject to control only in the interests of amenity and public safety.

6. The decision notices cite policies from Surrey Heath's emerging Local Plan (2019 - 2038). I am informed this was submitted for examination on 10 December 2024 but, otherwise, I have little information as to its status and I have not been provided with copies of these policies. The notices also cite conflict with policies from the Camberley Town Centre Area Action Plan (2014). Again, I have little information as to the status of this plan and have not been provided with any of the cited policies. As a result, I have assessed the development and advertisement against the policies of the Surrey Heath Core Strategy and Development Management Policies (2012) (the CSDMP).

## **Main Issues**

7. For Appeal A, the main issues are the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area and on pedestrian movement.
8. For Appeal B, the main issues are the effects of the advertisement on visual amenity and on public safety.

## **Reasons**

### *Character and appearance and visual amenity*

9. The appeal site (the site) is near the western edge of Camberley town centre, where commercial and residential developments are in proximity. The site is a section of pavement on the eastern side of Charles Street, near the entrance to The Atrium, a shopping complex (the complex).
10. The complex dominates the eastern side of the street. Parts of its upper floors overhang, necessitating a series of two-pronged vertical supports that dissect the pavement. Between these are raised planters. To one side of the entrance is found a single, continuous post supporting an overhanging roof; to the other, a bus stop and shelter.
11. Though it is comprised of a series of forms and shapes, the complex is immediately recognisable as one coherent building of which the supports and post are a part. A relatively narrow pallet of external materials is repeated throughout. The two-pronged supports have a strong architectural presence, whilst the overhang and roofs reach out over the pavement such as to make it look and function, to a degree, as the forecourt to the complex. These elements combine to tie the eastern side of Charles Street, including the appeal site, to the complex, and to give a strongly formal, planned feel to the relationship between them.
12. The planters are branded uniformly in accordance with the complex and are set out in line with the supports. The bus stop is positioned closely enough to the entrance to indicate that it directly serves the complex but offset from it sufficiently that it does not obscure the entrance from view or compete with it for prominence. In these ways, the planters and bus stop adhere to the planned character described above.
13. Consistent with its commercial function, the elevation of the complex contains a range of advertisements. These, however, are displayed within or above defined shopfronts and entrance points, are arranged within or in line with the sectional

external panelling of the building and relate to the offerings with the complex. As a result, they adhere to and reinforce the planned character. The exception to this is the advertisements displayed within the bus stop, a matter I shall return to.

14. The development would be a freestanding hub unit some 2.9m tall and 1.2m wide, with an LCD display screen on either side. Whilst it would be relatively slim in profile, it would be positioned at a right angle to the road and so be prominent upon approach from either direction. Given the external materials used in the body of the hub, which would have little relation to those used in the complex, and its position within the pavement, where it would be offset to the supports and planters, the hub would have very little connection to the complex. Instead, it would appear as an incongruous, unrelated addition that would disrupt and erode the considered relationship between the complex and the pavement. This would be exacerbated by the display of advertisements on the hub that were unrelated to the complex.
15. An existing phone box outside 403 London Road would be removed as part of the proposal. That phone box is a considerable distance away, and its removal would not negate the effect of the proposed development on the site.
16. I recognise that the bus stop displays advertisements unrelated to the complex. Whilst these are somewhat at odds with the setting described above, such integral advertising is a familiar sight as part of modern bus shelters, including in the surrounding area at London Road and Pembroke Broadway. As such, the bus stop overall does not appear unusual and given, as I have described above, that the bus stop itself appears as part of the planned arrangement across the pavement and the complex, overall, the advertisements at the bus stop do not undermine the character of the area in the way the proposed development and advertisements would.
17. I have been provided with excerpts from other appeal decisions<sup>1</sup>, but see little evidence that any of them pertain to settings directly comparable to those at the appeal site. As a result, they carry minimal weight in my determination.
18. Regarding Appeal A, I find that the development would cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the area. It would be contrary to Policy DM9 of the CSDMP where it requires that development respect and enhance local character.
19. Regarding Appeal B, for the reasons given, I find that the advertisement would cause harm to the visual amenity of the area. In accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007, the provisions of the development plan, insofar as they are relevant, have been considered. As I have concluded that the advertisement harms the amenity of the area, the scheme does not meet with the aims of Policy DM9 of the CSDMP, given its objectives as described above. For the same reason, the proposal would also be contrary to the provisions of paragraph 141 of the Framework which states, amongst other things, that the quality and character of places can suffer when advertisements are poorly sited.

<sup>1</sup> Appeal Refs: APP/Z5630/H/3209488; APP/N5660/Z/22/3295689; APP/J2373/W/22/3304941; APP/J2373/W/22/3305075.

### *Pedestrian movement and safety*

20. Policy CP11 of the CSDMP states that the Council will work with the highway authority to seek improvements to, and better integration of, walking and cycling routes and facilities. Surrey County Council's Healthy Streets for Surrey guidance advises that high streets or those with high activity should have a pavement width of 3m. I have little information as to the status or age of this guidance.
21. The Council's submissions, including the consultation response from Surrey County Council, refer to the proposed development reducing the width of the pavement to 2.5m when in fact it would reduce it to 2.835m, only very slightly less than the advisory 3m.
22. The Council contends that the development would obstruct pedestrian desire lines. There is a section of pavement on the western side of Charles Street, connecting to Southern Road and serving a bus stop (the far bus stop). Those emerging from Southern Road would be likely to use the pedestrian crossing provided at that point. Passengers disembarking from the bus may, if headed to the complex, cross the road directly rather than using the crossing. The development would be located on or near a straight line from the far bus stop to the complex entrance, but I see no reason why pedestrians would walk such a line, rather than simply crossing the road at the shortest point.
23. On the eastern side of Charles Street each of the supports, planters, post, and bus stop described above are positioned near the centre of the pavement and, as a result, obstruct the free flow of pedestrian movement to some degree. Whilst this arrangement may result from a different, previous policy approach, it is nevertheless an established feature of the setting. Pedestrians using the pavement will, by the time they reach the proposed development, already have navigated the existing features, and are unlikely to find the proposed development unusual, unexpected, or problematic.
24. Taking all of the above into account, regarding Appeal A, the development would not compromise pedestrian movement and not conflict with Policy CP11 of the CSDMP.
25. The second reason for refusal of application 24/1142/ADV, which has resulted in Appeal B, effectively repeats that found in the refusal of application 24/1141/FFU, which has resulted in Appeal A, except that it states it is the proposed advertisement which would restrict the width of the footway. That is a characteristic of the development, rather than of the advertisement and, in the absence of any other objections from the Council on this point, I find the advertisement would not have a harmful effect on public safety.

### **Other Considerations**

26. I have been invited to consider this appeal in the context of a series of other, similar proposals made recently in the local area. However, I do not know the outcome of those proposals and, as such, cannot form a view on any cumulative harms or benefits associated with a wider programme. I have assessed the proposal before me on its individual merits.

## Planning Balance

27. The development would make use of renewable energy to provide a range of services, including 4G and 5G coverage, Wi-Fi connection, free phone calls to emergency services, and USB ports for rapid device charging. I do not doubt that it would be well-maintained. These are public benefits, and would contribute towards advanced, high quality and reliable communications infrastructure, which the Framework states is essential for economic growth and social well-being. Furthermore, the hub would be a facility from which other technologies may be deployed to capture environmental data and measure air quality.
28. It would be possible to display public messages on the screens, including from the Council. Whilst I acknowledge the benefits listed above, I have little to demonstrate unmet local need for any of the services that would be supplied, or to show that similar facilities could not be provided without the proposed development.
29. I do not doubt that many small businesses feel they would benefit from advertising, and that the proposed screens may be able to provide it. That said, I have little to show me that businesses around the appeal site have either the need, or any arrangement in place, to use the proposed development. An initiative on the part of BT to gift advertising space is cited but appears out of date now. I attach minimal weight to these aspects.

## Conclusion

30. For the reasons given above, the proposals under Appeal A and Appeal B would harm the character and appearance and visual amenity of the area. Whilst I have found the development and advertisement would not harm pedestrian movement or public safety, and recognise that the proposals would offer public benefits, these would not outweigh the harms identified.
31. Accordingly, I conclude that Appeals A and B are dismissed.

*A Knight*

INSPECTOR

## Appendix 1

List of those who have appealed

| Reference | Case Reference         | Appellant    |
|-----------|------------------------|--------------|
| Appeal A  | APP/D3640/W/25/3361979 | BT GROUP PLC |
| Appeal B  | APP/D3640/H/25/3361980 | BT GROUP PLC |