



Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 22 August 2025

by **R Gravett BA(Hons) DipTP MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 10th September 2025

Appeal A Ref: APP/V4250/W/25/3366997

Footpath outside 39 Standishgate, Wigan WN1 1UP

- 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 Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is A/25/098369/FULL.
 - The development proposed is installation of 1No. BT Street Hub Unit and associated advertisement panels on either side of the unit.
-

Appeal B Ref: APP/V4250/H/25/3366998

Footpath Outside 39 Standishgate, Wigan WN1 1UP

- 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 Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is A/25/098370/ADV.
 - The advertisement proposed is installation of 1No. BT Street Hub Unit and associated advertisement panels on either side of the unit.
-

Decision

1. Appeal A and Appeal B are dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. Appeal A relates to the refusal of planning permission for the proposed communications hub ('the Street Hub'). Appeal B relates to the refusal of advertisement consent for the two digital illuminated advertisement screens which would be an integral part of the hub proposed in Appeal A. I have combined the appeals into a single decision letter as they are intrinsically linked and raise similar issues, however I have considered each on its individual merits.
3. In respect of both appeals, the statutory duty set out in Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires special attention to be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area.
4. The Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 stipulate that control may be exercised only in the interests of amenity and public safety. Therefore, whilst I have taken into account the development plan policies referred to by the Council, they have not been determinative in respect of Appeal B.

Main Issues

5. The main issue in respect of Appeal A is whether the proposal would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Wigan Town Centre Conservation Area.
6. The Council has not suggested the proposal would affect public safety, and based on the submissions and my site visit, I have no reason to form a different view. Therefore, the main issue in respect of Appeal B is the effect of the proposal on amenity.

Reasons

7. The appeal site is within the Wigan Town Centre Conservation Area ('the CA'). The CA covers a large area of Wigan's historic centre and incorporates some of the main thoroughfares in the town, including Standishgate. The 'Wigan Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal' (2010) (CAA) identifies that the significance of the CA is derived from its late C18th to early C19th buildings with varied architecture, strong building lines and the use of traditional materials, such as red brick, stone and slate.
8. The proposed Street Hub would occupy an area of pavement on the eastern side of Standishgate outside a row of shops at the ground floor of a three-storey building, which returns the corner of Crompton Street. Although the shopfronts are modern, the building is built in the characteristic red brick, with stone detailing, and it contributes positively to the CA on this prominent corner.
9. Along this short section of Standishgate, and on the corner, the pavement is reasonably wide, and street furniture is limited to road and directional signage, traffic signals and equipment cabinets. Since the appeal, a communications hub has also been installed in this location which includes a digital advertisement display on one side and a defibrillator on the other. Nevertheless, the immediate locality has an uncluttered feel and benefits from a long vista south along Standishgate towards Market Place, which is identified as a key view in the CAA.
10. The proposed Street Hub would have a modern design and slimline profile, but it would be reasonably wide and high and would have a large digital display screen on each side. Although it would be prominent, it would not be at odds with the strong commercial character of the area, where shops front Standishgate on both sides, featuring shopfronts with illuminated signage and display windows with internal lighting. It would also be broadly comparable in appearance and dimensions to others in the area, notably the two Street Hubs further along Standishgate. Therefore, in isolation, the proposal would not cause harm to the character or appearance of the area.
11. However, although slightly closer to the edge of the pavement, the proposed Street Hub would be sited next to the recently installed communications hub. Together, they would appear unduly dominant and visually intrusive, when viewed close by and in the longer, key view towards Market Place. Although advertisements and illuminated signage are not uncommon in commercial areas, the proposal would lead to a proliferation and clutter of communications hubs in a street scene where such installations are generally well spaced. A slight amendment to the position of the proposed hub would not alleviate this harm.

12. The proposal forms part of the appellant's upgrade of their existing estate with new modern digital units. Consequently, it is stated that the proposal would lead to the removal of two existing BT payphones, one of which I observed has been converted to a cash machine. Although the Street Hub would have a more slimline profile than these payphones, they are not particularly prominent, located together further along Standishgate on the opposite side of the road and outside of the CA. As a result of their distance, the removal of these payphones would not improve the visual amenity of the immediate locality of the appeal site, or mitigate the harm I have found to the character and appearance of the CA.
13. In view of its size, and the limited scale of the proposal, I find the harm to the CA to be at the lower end of the scale of less than substantial. Paragraph 215 of the Framework requires that where a development proposal would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
14. The proposal would represent investment in the high-street and there is no question that there is a need for the Street Hub. It would contribute to meeting demand for digital connectivity and services, such as free ultra-fast Wi-Fi, 5G mobile connectivity and free mobile device charging, access to emergency services, charity helplines and wayfinding. Further, the Street Hub would offer the community, the Council and small businesses access to local digital advertising space. It has been designed to avoid anti-social behaviour, could be fitted with air quality CO2 sensors and would be powered by renewable carbon-free energy.
15. However, even acknowledging the support in the Framework for high quality communications and next generation mobile technology, these public benefits would be very modest, particularly as there are other, similar Street Hubs close by on Standishgate. Consequently, the identified benefits would fail to outweigh the low level of less than substantial harm to the designated heritage asset.

Other Matters

16. I have been directed in the appellant's evidence to several decisions for similar communications hubs. I have very limited details in relation to these cases, beyond the cited extracts and addresses, which all appear to be for different towns or cities. Matters relating to the effect of a proposal upon the character and appearance of an area, are by definition site specific matters of planning judgement, and it has not been shown that the circumstances of these cases are wholly comparable to the case which is now before me. Accordingly, none of the cited decisions lead me to reach a different conclusion in respect of the main issues.

Conclusions

17. I conclude that in respect of Appeal A, the proposal would fail to preserve the character or appearance of the CA.
18. In respect of Appeal B, I conclude that the proposal would have an unacceptable and harmful effect on amenity.
19. Consequently, although not determinative in respect of Appeal B, it would conflict with policies JP-P1 and JP-P2 of the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan Document (2024), policies CP10 and CP11 of the Wigan Local Plan Core Strategy (2013) and saved Policy EV4A of the Wigan Replacement Unitary Development

Plan (2005). Together, these require the design of new development to improve the built environment and integrate effectively with its surroundings, conserving and enhancing heritage assets.

20. For these reasons, I conclude that both Appeal A and Appeal B are dismissed.

R Gravett

INSPECTOR