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## Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 8 September 2025

by **A Knight BA PG Dip MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2025

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### **Appeal A Ref: APP/Q3630/W/25/3366402**

#### **Footpath outside Gem House, Station Road, Egham TW20 9FG**

- 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 Runnymede Borough Council.
  - The application Ref is RU.24/1610.
  - 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/Q3630/H/25/3366403**

#### **Footpath outside Gem House, Station Road, Egham TW20 9FG**

- 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 Runnymede Borough Council.
  - The application Ref is RU.24/1649.
  - 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 appeals determined hereafter relate to the same appeal site and to each other. Appeal A follows 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 an integral part of the development. I have determined both appeals on their own merits but dealt with both together below to avoid duplication.
4. The appeal site address is given as 'Footpath Outside Gem House, Station Road House' on the application forms. Notwithstanding my description of the site below, I have used the address from the appeal forms as that appears to correct a misdescription.
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. I proceed accordingly.

6. The decision notices refer to Policy EE4 of the Local Plan, and to Sections 72 and 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act). Notwithstanding that I undertake my own assessment below, the reasons for refusal do not cite harm related to a listed building and so neither the policy nor s66 of the Act are relevant. S72 of the Act pertains to development within a conservation area, not to that affecting its setting; it too is therefore irrelevant.
7. I am the appointed Inspector for other appeals concerning directly comparable proposals by the same appellant, both in the borough of Runnymede and in other Local Authority areas near it. Given the similarity of the proposals, the issues involved, and the extent of repetition in the submissions, my decisions will inevitably appear similar. Each proposal has, however, been assessed on its individual merits.

## **Main Issues**

8. For Appeal A, the main issues are (firstly) the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the area including the setting of Egham Conservation Area (the CA) and (secondly) the effect on highway safety.
9. For Appeal B, the main issues are (firstly) the effect of the advertisement on visual amenity, including on the setting of the CA and (secondly) the effect on public safety.

## **Reasons**

### *Character and appearance and visual amenity*

10. The appeal site is a section of pavement on Church Road, the B388. It is adjacent to the southern end of Station Road North, where two tall buildings enclose a pedestrianised area. This area (hereafter, the open space) includes paving, landscaping, and seating of a design replicated consistently along the road. It is flanked on either side by the glazed shopfronts of several commercial units, along with external tables and chairs related to them. The buildings are modern and contemporary, and the shopfronts display broadly uniform design and materials. Overall, the area has a strongly planned, coherent feel.
11. The CA is based around the town centre. There are a range of historic buildings throughout the CA interspersed between modern additions and replacements. A mixed architectural character results, illustrating the history of the town centre and its development over time. For the purposes of the appeals, this is the significance of the CA.
12. Save for a row of simple, low bike racks, the appeal site is open. This allows views from Church Road and Station Road over the open space into the CA. Whilst experienced in glimpses between and either side of the trees in the open space, these are notable views over an important route. The view includes 8 Station Road North, a Grade II listed building<sup>1</sup>, in the middle distance, the Old Bank building on the High Street as the backdrop, and the modern buildings on Station Road North connecting them. As per its name, the road is the route from the local train station into the town centre.

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<sup>1</sup> List Entry Number: 1379933.

13. The separation of the modern buildings on either side of the open space serves not only to maintain the views and the route described above, but also to emphasise it. The planned character of the area strongly suggests that this is deliberate. Given its importance as an inward view of the town on an important route from the train station, the open space and the appeal site are part of the setting of the CA.
14. Advertisements near the appeal site are generally restricted to shopfronts, each promoting the goods and services on offer within. General advertising is not common. This adds to the planned, coherent feel of the area.
15. The development would be a freestanding hub unit some 2.9m tall and 1.2m wide, with an LCD display screen on either side. It would be relatively slim in profile but positioned at a right angle to Church Road and so be visually prominent when approached from the east or west. The introduction of advertisements unrelated to the units around the open space would harmfully undermine the planned, coherent feel described above. The erection of a tall, prominent structure and the addition of abstract visual stimulus would compete for primacy and attention with the existing views inwards towards the CA, undermining their importance in the townscape. The proposal would unacceptably detract from the character and appearance of the area and would detract from the setting and therefore the significance of the CA.
16. I have been made aware of a previous decision by the Council<sup>2</sup>, and of two previous appeals<sup>3</sup>. I have been provided with excerpts from these, rather than full details. In terms of the signage approved by the Council, I see little to suggest that it is comparable to the proposals before me, or that it conflicts with the planned nature of local advertising that I have identified. Regarding the previous appeals, I recognise that proposals of the type before me have been found acceptable in other settings, but each must be considered on its merits given the context of the host site. I have been given little evidence that either of the cited cases include settings directly comparable to that found at the appeal site. As a result, these previous decisions carry minimal weight in my determination.
17. Regarding Appeal A, I find that the development would cause unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the area. It would also detract from the setting and therefore the significance of the CA. As such, it conflicts with Policies EE1 and EE5 of the Runnymede 2030 Local Plan (2020) (the Local Plan) where they require development to create attractive places that contribute positively to townscape and the public realm, and protect, conserve, and wherever possible enhance, the special interest, character and appearance of conservation areas. Given that the effects would not be irreversible, I consider the harm to the heritage asset to be less than substantial.
18. Regarding Appeal B, for the reasons given, I find that the advertisement would cause harm to the visual amenity of the area and detract from the setting and therefore the significance of the CA. 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 Policies EE1 and EE5 of the Local Plan. For the

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<sup>2</sup> Application Ref: RU.22/0758.

<sup>3</sup> Appeal Refs: ADA-180-2017; APP/J2373/H/22/3305072;

same reasons, 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.

### *Highway and Public safety*

19. The development would be some 500mm from the kerb; I consider that close enough that pedestrians would be unlikely to walk between the two for fear of stepping into the road. The gap between the development and the nearby cycle racks would be some 1820mm, a distance which would reduce if a bicycle were left there. The Council cites Highway Authority guidance that this is a busy area where pavement widths should be at least 3m. I see no reason to question that this is a reasonable width for busy pedestrian routes.
20. The appellant argues that the appeal site does not see heavy footfall, and that most pedestrian movement follows a north-south line rather than east-west, such that the orientation of the development would allow ease of movement. However, very little evidence has been supplied to support either contention. Whilst I have identified the north-south route as a key one in townscape terms and, given it is the direct route from the train station to the town centre it may well be that most pedestrian movement is indeed on a north-south line, that does not necessarily mean that levels of pedestrian movement across the appeal site on an east-west line is low. Indeed, it is a town-centre location which has seen notable development, including a mix of commercial and residential uses. I see no reason to find or to presume that footfall levels on an east-west line would be low.
21. I recognise that existing street furniture to the east and west of the appeal site restricts the effective pavement width. Whilst I have little commentary from the Council on this point I do not find it evident that, as the appellant argues, existing highway apparatus would have been relocated if local pavement widths were problematic; It appears to me that there may be a necessity to locate much of the highway furniture in question, including traffic lights, road signs, and lampposts, precisely where they are, so as to ensure they serve their purpose. It is not clear that they could be moved.
22. Whilst I saw raised planters to the east and west of the appeal site, I have little evidence that these are on the highway rather than within the demise of the adjacent buildings. Overall, it is not evident that the Council or the Highway Authority have created or accepted pavement widths comparable to those in which the proposed development would result. I do not find that a pavement width of less than 3m would be appropriate.
23. In respect of Appeal A, the development would have a harmful effect on highway safety, contrary to Policy SD4 of the Local Plan which requires development to maintain or enhance the efficient and safe operation of the highway network.
24. The second reason for refusal of application RU.24/1649, which has resulted in Appeal B, repeats that found in the refusal of application RU.24/1610, which has resulted in Appeal A, in citing insufficient space to ensure highway safety. That is a characteristic of the development, rather than of the advertisement, and I do not find that the advertisement itself would have a harmful effect on public safety.

## Other Matters

25. There are two listed buildings reasonably near to the appeal site. No 8 Station Road North, and the Former Railway Public House<sup>4</sup>. The former was a house and is now a commercial premises, dating from around 1818. The latter is a mid C19 building. In both cases, the listings emphasise the architectural details of the buildings, particularly those on their main, front elevations which face out directly onto the pavement of a busy street.
26. Given the distance between the proposed development and these buildings, the orientation of the buildings, and the significance of intervening development, I am content that, whilst the view of No 8 Station Road North is part of the views of the CA described above, the development would not be in the setting of either listed building.

## Heritage Balance

27. Paragraph 212 of the Framework states that when considering the impact of the development on the significance of designated heritage assets, great weight should be given to their conservation. Paragraph 213 goes on to advise that significance can be harmed or lost through the alteration or destruction of those assets or from development within their setting and that this should have a clear and convincing justification. I have found the harm in this instance to be less than substantial. Under such circumstances paragraph 215 of the Framework advises that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
28. The process described above is not applicable to the advertisement, only to the development given the heritage-related consent regimes under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990<sup>5</sup>. That said, the screens are an integral part of the development, and I have assessed them as such.
29. The development would use renewable energy to provide 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 question 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.
30. The hub would also be a facility from which other technologies may be deployed to capture environmental data and measure air quality. Local notices and announcements could be displayed on the screens. 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.
31. Small businesses would doubtless benefit from advertising, and the proposed screens may provide it. However, I have little to show me that businesses around the appeal site have either the need, or any arrangement in place, to advertise through the proposed development. An initiative on the part of BT to gift advertising space is noted but appears out of date now. I attach minimal weight to these aspects.

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<sup>4</sup> List Entry Number: 1378022.

<sup>5</sup> Framework Footnote 74 refers.

32. Two existing telephone boxes would be removed from nearby locations as part of the appeal proposal. The first of these is on the pavement outside 27 Station Road. The appellant suggests this existing box may present a risk in terms of safety and crime and interfere with access to the adjacent flats. I have been provided with very little evidence in the form of, for instance, reported incidents or offences to support the first of these contentions. Whilst the box is near to an entrance to the flats, it is, as the appellant recognises, somewhat tucked away in a corner formed by the flank wall of the building and a projecting boundary wall. As such, it is not apparent that the box presents a notable obstruction on an otherwise open route. Moreover, the position of the existing box gives it a discreet presence in the street scene.
33. The second existing telephone box is on Manorcrofts Road, on the southern side of the train station. At the time of my visit, it was enclosed on three sides by greenery, a situation which, judging from the photograph in the appellant's statement of case, is not unusual. The box has a very discreet presence in the area as a result.
34. Overall, the removal of the existing boxes would be a very modest benefit of the scheme, and not one capable of outweighing the harms identified, particularly given that the Framework advises that, when considering the impact of a development on the significance of designated heritage assets, great weight should be given to their conservation.

### **Conclusion**

35. For the reasons given, the proposals under Appeal A and Appeal B would harm the character and appearance and visual amenity of the area, including the setting of the CA, a designated heritage asset, and also compromise highway and public safety. Whilst I recognise that the proposals would offer public benefits, these would not outweigh the harms identified.
36. I conclude that Appeals A and B are dismissed.

*A Knight*

INSPECTOR

## Appendix 1

List of those who have appealed

| <b>Reference</b> | <b>Case Reference</b>  | <b>Appellant</b> |
|------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| Appeal A         | APP/Q3630/W/25/3366402 | BT Group PLC     |
| Appeal B         | APP/Q3630/H/25/3366403 | BT Group PLC     |