



Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 16 September 2025

by **N Bowden BA(Hons) Dip TP MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 24 SEPTEMBER 2025

Appeal A Ref: APP/Y1945/W/25/3367613

Footpath outside Charter House, Charter Place, Watford WD17 2RU

- 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 (BT Group PLC) against the decision of Watford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 25/00201/FUL.
 - 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/Y1945/H/25/3367614

Footpath outside Charter House, Charter Place, Watford WD17 2RU

- 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 Simon Warner (BT Group PLC) against the decision of Watford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 25/00202/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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Appeal C Ref: APP/Y1945/W/25/3367618

Footpath outside Exchange House, 60 Exchange Road, Watford WD18 0JJ

- 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 (BT Group PLC) against the decision of Watford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 25/00207/FUL.
 - 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 D Ref: APP/Y1945/H/25/3367619

Footpath outside Exchange House, 60 Exchange Road, Watford WD18 0JJ

- 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 Simon Warner (BT Group PLC) against the decision of Watford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 25/00208/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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Decisions

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

3. Appeal C is allowed and planning permission is granted for the installation of 1No. BT Street Hub Unit and associated advertisement panels on either side of the unit at footpath outside Exchange House, 60 Exchange Road, Watford WD18 0JJ in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 25/00207/FUL, subject to the conditions in the attached schedule.
4. Appeal D is allowed and express consent is granted for the installation of 1No. BT Street Hub Unit and associated advertisement panels on either side of the unit at footpath outside Exchange House, 60 Exchange Road, Watford WD18 0JJ in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 25/00208/FUL, subject to the five standard conditions set out in Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) and the additional conditions in the attached schedule.

Preliminary Matters

5. The four appeals relate to the same proposal on two nearby sites. Appeals A and C concern the refusal of planning permission to erect a street hub unit (the hub(s)). Appeals B and D concern the refusal of express consent for advertisement panels on either side of the hubs. I have considered each appeal on its individual merits, however, as they raise similar issues, I have combined the decisions into a single decision letter.
6. In respect of Appeals B and D, the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 (the Regulations) require that decisions are made only in the interest of amenity and public safety. Therefore, whilst I have taken account of the policies of the development plan that the Council considers to be relevant, these have not been decisive in my determination.
7. There was a discrepancy on the appeal form for Appeal D which gave the Council reference number as 25/00209/ADV. However, as the remainder of the appeal material including plan reference numbers clearly relates to 25/00208/ADV, I have taken this to be a typographical error.

Main Issues

8. The main issues in respect of all the appeals are the effect of the proposals on the character, appearance and amenity of the area and upon highway safety.

Reasons

Character, appearance and amenity (appeals A, B, C and D)

9. Both sites are set along the ring road that loops around the town centre of Watford. This comprises a vehicle one-way system of two to four lanes in width around its overall circumference. The area is heavily characterised by a mix of commercial, office, entertainment and hotel uses together with car parks. Buildings are commonly tall, ranging from two to around ten storeys in height but averaging around five to six storeys. There is a wide variety of signage and other street furniture in the area, from signs on businesses, bus shelters, advertising hoardings and street signs. It is not at all untypical for a modern town centre environment.
10. On both sites the proposed hubs would be set on the footpath with the one on Exchange Road being positioned on a small, landscaped strip and the one on Charter Place along a wide section of the public highway. The proposals would

comprise a rectangular black box approximately 3 metres tall and 1 metre wide incorporating large digital screens on each side.

11. Given the bustling, commercial aspect of this area, the proposed hubs, with advertisement panels, would not appear incongruous, either on their own or in combination with other nearby street furniture, signage and advertisements. I do not therefore consider the proposed hubs would result in an over proliferation in this commercial setting. Their modern design would not jar with the nature of the surrounding area.
12. They would remain fairly small features in the busy town centre environment and in the context of the ring road and commercial premises. Indeed, the proposal at Exchange Road would result in the removal of existing phone boxes thus resulting in no net increase in terms of visual clutter. A condition can be imposed to secure this. The relatively small hubs would be easily dwarfed in scale and prominence by the large buildings, dominance of the ring road with busy passing traffic and the overall scale of surrounding buildings.
13. Accordingly, I find both proposals to have an acceptable impact upon the character, appearance and amenity of the area and, insofar as the policies are relevant, in accordance with policies QD6.2 and QD6.4 of the Watford Local Plan 2021 – 2038 (WLP) and provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). This is due to the proposals relating well to the local context.

Public safety (appeals A and B)

14. The hub would be sited towards the edge of the footpath and in quite close proximity to the main carriageway. At this section of the ring road, the carriageway is four lanes wide with multiple junctions, entrances and exits including a bus filter lane. It is invariably a complex and challenging environment for vehicle users to navigate due to its width and the potential for entering traffic and lane changes.
15. The hub would be positioned near the exit to Charter Place multi-storey car park and, although details of the visibility splay were not provided with the appeal, would clearly obstruct part of this splay. This would not be assisted by the illuminated nature of the hub and potential moving displays could prove confusing when judging approaching vehicles when exiting the car park. This may be especially the case during darker hours or at nighttime when glare from the display could add an extra level of ambiguity or confusion.
16. Accordingly, I conclude that the proposal would be detrimental to highway safety contrary to Policy QD6.2 of the WLP, the Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan 2018 (HLTP) and provisions of the Framework insofar as it would not make a positive contribution to movement and connectivity.

Public safety (appeals C and D)

17. The Council's concerns relating to public safety are due to the reduction in the footway due to the proposed hub. However, in this location, the hub would be set on an area occupied by a small landscape strip and would not result in a notable reduction in the width of the usable footway. Moreover, the proposal incorporates the removal of existing BT phone boxes which is set along the footway itself. As such, there would be an increase in the width of the pedestrian footway, subject to the removal of the phone box and a condition can be attached to this effect. As

such, I am unable to conclude that the proposal would be harmful to public safety in this regard.

18. I am mindful of the comments of the highway authority relating to the proximity of the site to the busy ring road and its visibility to drivers. The highway authority suggest a condition to ensure that the hub only displays static images and not video in order to minimise any potential distraction for drivers and this can be secured by way of condition on appeal D.
19. Accordingly, I conclude that the proposal would not be detrimental to public safety due to the increase in width of the footway and with a condition to control the display of adverts. The proposal therefore complies with policy QD6.2 of the WLP, the HLTP and provisions of the Framework.

Other Matters

20. In dismissing appeals A and B, I have been mindful of the benefits offered by the proposal in terms of offering free public wi-fi and improved 4G and 5G coverage, public service information, rapid device charging, a direct 999 call button and emergency police awareness messaging and environmental sensors. It could also be used for advertising by local businesses and would be powered by renewable energy and regularly cleaned and monitored. The proposed hub network is intended to replace the network of existing public phone boxes. Thus, there would be clear social, environmental and economic benefits and the proposals would support high quality telecommunications infrastructure as recognised in the Framework. However, these public benefits are insufficient to outweigh the harm I have identified to public safety.
21. My attention has been drawn to the proximity of the site at Charter Place to the grade II listed Beechen Grove Baptist Chapel. No objections were expressed by the Council in relation to the proximity of the proposal to this heritage asset and I concur with this assessment. Even so, it is a matter that I have factored into my decision making here having special regard to the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the desirability of preserving the building or its setting.

Conditions

22. Appeals A and B are to be dismissed and therefore no conditions are required.
23. The Council has provided a schedule of conditions for appeals C and D in the event the appeals are allowed which I have considered against paragraph 57 of the Framework, and the advice contained in the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). I have imposed these with modifications and edits to accord with paragraph 56 of the Framework and PPG.
24. A general time limit condition is imposed on appeal C to comply with the provisions of the Act, together with a plans condition for certainty, and a materials condition in the interests of the character and appearance of the area.
25. A condition requiring the removal of the existing BT phone boxes within three months of the commencement of development has been attached as this reflects the proposal as submitted and ensures there would be no excess clutter on the street. It would also ensure that the usable footpath is widened.

26. In Appeal D, all advertisements granted express consent are subject to the five standard conditions set out in the Regulations. In addition to these, to prevent visual intrusion it is necessary to apply a condition to control the illumination of the advertisements so they do not stand out significantly from the background illumination in the street, particularly during hours of darkness.
27. Conditions to ensure there are no moving images, the minimum display time is 10 seconds with the interval between successive displays being instantaneous and that the display will freeze or switch off in the event of a malfunction. These are all necessary to avoid the risk of distraction to users of the highway.

Conclusions

28. For the reasons given above, I conclude that appeals A and B should fail due to their effect on public safety, having particular regard to highway safety.
29. Appeals C and D are allowed.

N Bowden

INSPECTOR

Schedule of conditions

Appeal C: APP/Y1945/W/25/3367618

- 1) The development to which this permission relates shall be begun within a period of three years commencing on the date of this permission.
- 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the plans WFD-07 Rev B (4 pages).
- 3) All the external surfaces of the development shall be finished in the materials specified in the application.
- 4) Within three months of development commencing, the two existing BT phone boxes indicated for removal on plan ref: WFD-07 Rev B Proposed Site Plan, shall be removed in their entirety and the land made good to the same condition as the adjacent land.

Appeal D: APP/Y1945/W/25/3367619

In addition to the five standard conditions in the Regulations:

- 1) The digital display screens shall not display any moving, or apparently moving, images (including animation, flashing, scrolling three dimensional, intermittent or video elements).
- 2) The minimum display time for each piece of content on the digital display screens shall be 10 seconds. The interval between successive displays shall be instantaneous and the complete screen shall change with no visual effects (including swiping or other animated transition methods) between displays and the display will include a mechanism to freeze the image or switch off the screen in the event of a malfunction.
- 3) The illuminated signs hereby permitted shall be controlled a level that is within the values recommended by the Institution of Lighting Professionals in the publication Professional Lighting Guide 05: Brightness of Illuminated Advertisements (PLG05).

End of schedule