



Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 3 February 2026

by **J Bowyer BSc(Hons) MSc MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 6th February 2026

Appeal A Ref: APP/Y1945/W/25/3368417

Footpath Outside 89 High Street, Watford WD17 2DQ

- 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 Mr Simon Warner, BT Group PLC against the decision of Watford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 25/00203/FUL.
 - 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/Y1945/H/25/3368419

Footpath Outside 89 High Street, Watford WD17 2DQ

- 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 Mr Simon Warner, BT Group PLC against the decision of Watford Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 25/00204/ADV.
 - The advertisement proposed is 'two digital 75 inch LCD display screens, one on each side of the Street Hub Unit'.
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Decisions

Appeal A

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for 'installation of 1No. BT Street Hub Unit and associated advertisement panels on either side of the unit' at Footpath Outside 89 High Street, Watford WD17 2DQ in accordance with the terms of the application Ref 25/00203/FUL subject to the conditions in the attached Schedule 1: Appeal A Conditions.

Appeal B

2. The appeal is allowed and express consent is granted for the display of 'two digital 75 inch LCD display screens, one on each side of the Street Hub Unit' at Footpath Outside 89 High Street, Watford WD17 2DQ in accordance with the terms of the application Ref 25/00204/ADV. The consent is for five years from the date of this decision and is 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 2: Appeal B conditions.

Preliminary Matters

3. As set out above, Appeal A relates to the refusal of planning permission for a street hub unit ('the Hub') while Appeal B relates to the refusal of advertisement consent

for LCD display screens which would be an integral part of the Hub. I have considered each proposal on its individual merits. To avoid duplication however, I have dealt with the two schemes together, except where otherwise indicated.

4. In respect of appeal B, the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) ('the Regulations') and the National Planning Policy Framework ('the Framework') indicate that advertisements should be subject to control only in the interests of amenity and public safety, taking into account cumulative impacts. I have considered Appeal B on this basis and having regard to the provisions of the development plan, so far as they are material.

Main Issues

5. The main issues in Appeal A are the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area and the effect of the proposal on the safety and convenience of pedestrians, cyclists and other highway users.
6. The main issues in Appeal B are the effect of the proposal on visual amenity and the effect of the proposal on public safety in respect of pedestrians, cyclists and other highway users.

Reasons

Character and Appearance and Visual Amenity

7. The appeal site is located within the town centre and includes a section of footway to the High Street as it runs between buildings with mixed commercial uses at ground floor level. The building line, and consequently the footway width, along this part of the street varies and the site is within a wider section of footway to the front of 89 High Street where there is existing street furniture including an advertising display board, bench, bin, lighting column, cycle stands, phone box, street cabinet and bollards. Other street features in the wider vicinity include post boxes, a bus shelter with advertising, information boards, sculptures and further phone boxes and advertising displays.
8. The appellant indicates that the proposed Hub would replace an existing phone box to the front of No 89. The Hub would be taller and wider than the phone box and its display panels would be illuminated. Noting the commercial character of the street and the presence of other diverse street features including a variety of illuminated signage and advertising displays nearby however, it would not in itself be an uncharacteristic or unexpected feature in the town centre. I am also satisfied that the scale of the installation would be generally appropriate to its context. In itself, the proposal would not therefore be incongruous or visually dominant within its surroundings.
9. In addition, the removal of the existing phone box means that there would not be an overall increase in the number of features within the street, and while the Council suggests that disused phone boxes should be removed in any case, the proposal is intended to replace the existing facility which appeared to be operational.
10. Moreover, the plans indicate that the Hub would be positioned close to the edge of the footway, broadly in line with the bench, advertising display board, bin, cycle stands and lighting column that already sit to the front of No 89. It would therefore be seen together and against these features in contrast to the phone box which is offset significantly to a much more central position within the footway and which

consequently appears as a more discrete feature set apart from the majority of street furniture here save for a cabinet of very modest scale. This context would notably reduce the overall prominence of the Hub in comparison to the existing phone box and despite its greater height, width and illumination, I find that it would be a less conspicuous and intrusive element in views along the street overall.

11. As a consequence and while I acknowledge the presence of advertising displays of similar appearance nearby, there would not in my judgement be an increase in visual clutter within the public realm, and I consider that the impression of openness along the street would in fact be increased.
12. In reaching this view, I have also noted the Council's reference to environmental improvement works to the town centre and future pedestrian, cycle route and wayfinding improvement projects. However, it has provided no firm details of any specific proposals that the appeals scheme would conflict with or undermine.
13. I find for these reasons that the proposal would assimilate sympathetically with its surroundings and I conclude that there would not be harm to the character or appearance of the area nor detriment to the visual amenity of the surroundings.
14. Policies QD6.2 and QD6.4 of the Watford Local Plan 2021-2038 include requirements broadly for well-designed buildings that are visually attractive, high quality street scenes and proposals that make a positive contribution to high quality design and place-making. Given my findings above, the Appeal A proposal would accord with these requirements, and insofar as they are material, the Appeal B proposal would also comply. Furthermore, I do not identify conflict with requirements in the Framework seeking development that is well designed and highlighting that the quality and character of places can suffer when advertisements are poorly sited and designed.

Safety and Pedestrian Convenience

15. Even on a weekday in poor weather conditions, I saw that the High Street around the appeal site was busy with pedestrians. The Hub would occupy part of the available footway. However, I have noted above that it would be positioned close to the kerb, broadly in alignment with a nearby bench, advertising display board, bin and cycle stands. These features would already form an obstruction within the footway that pedestrians would need to divert around. Given the close proximity and position of the Hub relative to these features, I find that the proposal would not result in meaningful additional obstruction or inconvenience to pedestrian flow. Indeed, the removal of the existing phone box which sits more centrally within the footway offset from most other street furniture in the vicinity would in my view reduce the spread of obstructions such that there would be an overall enhancement to pedestrian flow in this location.
16. Furthermore, I acknowledge that the Hub would be positioned fairly close to the kerb edge of a cycle lane which runs along this side of the High Street. However, the plans indicate that it would be set back 0.5m which I consider would offer pedestrians reasonable opportunity for clear views along the cycleway and highway beyond before they might seek to cross. Pedestrians close to the kerb edge looking to cross would also be visible to cyclists and vehicles and given the context of a busy High Street, crossing movements would not be unexpected. Noting too that advertisements are a common feature nearby and subject to appropriate levels of illumination and transition between displays which could be the subject of

conditions, there would be unlikely to be meaningful distraction to pedestrians looking to cross the road. Given these factors, I am not persuaded that the proposal would result in undue risk of conflict between pedestrians, cyclists and other highway users.

17. In addition, and notwithstanding the position marked on the submitted plans, I saw that the side of the existing advertising display board to the north west sits broadly level with bollards along the kerb edge, closer to the highway than the Hub now proposed. This display board is of broadly similar overall scale to the Hub and has advertising displays to both faces, but there is no substantive evidence that its scale or position has resulted in conflict between pedestrians, cyclists or other highway users before me. Nor to suggest that the appeals proposal would result in new or different effects, even when taken cumulatively with the existing display board.
18. The Highway Authority has not objected to the proposal, advising that it would not give rise to an unacceptable impact on the safety or operation of the surrounding highway. I give significant weight to its position as the relevant statutory consultee, and taking the above factors together, I find no compelling reason to depart from its view.
19. For these reasons, I conclude that the proposal would not cause unacceptable harm to public safety and, in respect of Appeal A, there would not be detriment to pedestrian convenience. The Appeal A proposal would therefore accord with requirements within Policy QD6.2 of the Local Plan for streets to be efficient, convenient and to support all users and prioritise non-vehicular travel, and insofar as they are material, the Appeal B proposal would also comply. I similarly find no conflict with the Framework insofar as it includes a requirement for development to create places that are safe and that minimise the scope for conflicts between pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles.

Other Matters

20. The main parties indicate that there are listed buildings in the vicinity of the appeal site at 'Church of St Mary' which is a Grade I listed building, and 'Shipton/Finch Tomb 5 Metres East of Chancel of Church of St Mary' which is a Grade II listed building. I am therefore mindful of the statutory duty under section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 which is relevant to Appeal A and which requires special regard to preserving the buildings, their setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest. In addition, I note that the boundary of the St Mary's Conservation Area ('the CA') runs to the opposite side of the High Street.
21. The list entry indicates that the Church of St Mary dates mainly to the 15th Century, but with parts which date to the 13th Century. It has a prominent broad tower with diagonal buttresses and a flint and stone dressing exterior. The Shipton/Finch tomb is a chest tomb dating to the early 18th Century sitting within the churchyard which provides the immediate setting to both listed buildings. Although the appeal site is close to the listed buildings, it forms part of the wider town centre setting which has a clearly commercial character including a variety of street furniture and advertisement displays in contrast to the open and somewhat verdant character of the churchyard. Within this existing context and having regard to my conclusions above that the proposals would not cause harm to the character, appearance or

visual amenity of the area, I am satisfied that the setting and significance of the listed buildings would be preserved.

22. In addition, the CA is largely enclosed by existing buildings and insofar as the proposal would not stand out within the High Street, I am similarly satisfied that it would not diminish any significance that the CA derives from this part of its setting.

Conditions

23. In respect of Appeal A, I have imposed the standard time limit condition and a condition specifying the approved plans which is necessary for the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of certainty. Having regard to the nature of the proposal and the details already shown on the plans, I consider a separate condition in respect of external materials would be unnecessary and restrictions on illumination of the advertisement displays would more appropriately relate to Appeal B. I have not therefore included these suggested conditions. I have however imposed a condition to require the removal of the existing phone box, which is necessary in the interests of the character and appearance of the area given my findings above. I have also imposed a condition to require the Hub to be managed in accordance with the submitted BT Street Hub Anti-Social Behaviour Management Plan which I consider would be necessary to reduce the risk of anti-social behaviour which could otherwise occur in a town centre location.
24. In respect of Appeal B and in addition to the standard conditions stipulated by the Regulations, I have imposed a condition to control the level of illumination which is necessary in the interests of visual amenity and public safety. To ensure suitable precision, I have however specified the illumination level referenced by the Highway Authority in their comments as part of the condition rather than referring to guidance which could be subject to change. I have additionally imposed a condition to require that displays are static and to control the transition between displays which is necessary to avoid distraction to drivers in the interests of public safety.

Conclusion

25. For the reasons given above, I conclude that both appeals should be allowed.

J Bowyer

INSPECTOR

Schedule 1: Appeal A Conditions

- 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than 3 years from the date of this decision.
- 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: Street Hub WFD-04 Rev B Existing Site Plan, Street Hub WFD-04 Rev B Proposed Site Plan, Street Hub WFD-04 Rev B Existing Site Elevation, Street Hub WFD-04 Rev B Proposed Site Elevation and BT Street Hub Unit Dimensions drawing.
- 3) Before the BT Street Hub Unit hereby permitted is erected, the phone box indicated for removal as shown on drawings Street Hub WFD-04 Rev B Proposed Site Plan and Street Hub WFD-04 Rev B Proposed Site Elevation

shall be removed and the street surface made good to match the adjoining footway surface materials.

- 4) The development hereby permitted shall be managed in accordance with the BT Street Hub Anti-Social Behaviour Management Plan, v3 April 2021 for the lifetime of the development.

Schedule 2: Appeal B Conditions

- 1) The intensity of the illumination of the digital display screens hereby permitted shall not exceed 600 candelas per square metre (cd/m²) between dusk and dawn.
- 2) The digital display screens hereby permitted shall not display any moving images or text (including animation, flashing or scrolling elements) at any time. The display screens shall not change more than once every 10 seconds and transitions between successive displays shall be instantaneous with no visual effects.