



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 21 January 2026

by **G Sibley MPLAN MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 12 February 2026

Appeal A Ref: 6001658

Footpath outside Unit 4, Code Student Building, Fairfax Street, Coventry CV1 5RQ

- 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 Verity Cheyne of BT Group PLC against the decision of Coventry City Council.
 - The application Ref is PL/2025/0001679/FUL.
 - The development proposed is installation of 1No. BT Street Hub Unit and associated display of advertisement panels to either side of the unit.
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Appeal B Ref: APP/U4610/Z/25/3375739

Footpath outside Unit 4, Code Student Building, Fairfax Street Coventry CV1 5RQ

The appeal is made under Regulation 17 of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) (the Regulations) against a refusal to grant express consent.

- The appeal is made by Verity Cheyne of BT Group PLC against the decision of Coventry City Council.
 - The application Ref is PL/2025/0001678/ADV.
 - The advertisement proposed is installation of 1No. BT Street Hub Unit and associated display of advertisement panels to either side of the unit.
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Decision

1. Appeal A and Appeal B are dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The two appeals relate to the same proposal on the same site. Appeal A concerns the refusal of planning permission for installation of 1No. BT Street Hub Unit and associated display of advertisement panels to either side of the unit. Appeal B concerns the refusal of express consent regarding the installation of 1No. BT Street Hub Unit and associated display of advertisement panels to either side of the unit. I have considered each on its merits, however, as they raise similar issues, I have combined both decisions into a single decision letter.
3. The Regulations require that decisions are made only in the interests of amenity and public safety, taking account of any material factors. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and the Planning Practice Guidance (the PPG) confirm this approach. I have taken account of the provisions of the development plan insofar as they are material to Appeal B.

Main Issues

4. The main issues relevant to Appeal A are the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, and the effect of the proposal on highway safety.

5. The main issues relevant to Appeal B are the effect of the proposal on visual amenity, and the effect of the proposal on public safety.

Reasons

Character and Appearance, including Visual Amenity

6. The appeal site is located on a section of pavement in front of a large, modern high-rise building, comprising commercial units at ground floor level with residential accommodation above. Fascia advertisements are present above the commercial units. On the opposite side of the carriageway there is an existing communications hub of a similar design to that proposed, incorporating digital advertisements. Other than this and advertising associated with the nearby leisure centre, advertisements in the immediate vicinity are limited. The area is characterised by buildings of substantial scale, with further development ongoing at the time of my site visit. Based on my observations and the information before me, I consider the Code Student Building to be a recent development, and the pavement in front of it appears to have been designed to be mostly uncluttered. Street trees, streetlights, bollards and traffic signage are spaced at regular intervals and are generally narrow in form, leaving a significant proportion of the pavement free of built development. The design and siting of these elements create an attractive frontage and contribute positively to the quality of the public realm.
7. The proposed Street Hub (the hub) would be considerably bulkier than the existing elements within this section of public realm and would occupy a greater proportion of the pavement than the surrounding structures. It would not reflect the apparent organised layout of street furniture in front of the building, which is generally positioned at a consistent distance from the building line and more centrally within the public space. While bollards and traffic signage are located closer to the carriageway, their siting is functionally necessary, and their limited scale minimises their visual impact. By contrast, the hub would be larger in scale, solid in form, irregularly positioned, and would therefore appear incongruous within this otherwise orderly and uncluttered section of pavement.
8. On the opposite side of the road, a similarly designed hub is located close to a bus shelter and is generally aligned with it, resulting in a more coherent relationship with the neighbouring street furniture than what is proposed. While the area has a mix of commercial and residential uses and is defined by large-scale buildings, when viewed as part of the street scene the scale, design and siting of the proposed hub would detract from the uncluttered and well-designed public realm. Accordingly, the hub and its associated advertisements would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area.
9. Reference has been made to a number of appeal decisions relating to communications hubs with associated advertisements similar to the appeal proposal¹ as well as other applications approved by the Council. However, many cited locations lie within commercial shopping streets, where illuminated advertising is prevalent. Others are located against dense urban backdrops with larger and more varied street furniture. None appear to exhibit the same open,

¹ Appeal References: APP/Z5630/W/18/3209582 & APP/Z5630/H/18/3209488; APP/N5090/Z/22/3296138; APP/J2373/H/22/3305026 & APP/J2373/W/22/3305028; APP/J2373/W/22/3304941; APP/J2373/H/3305072 & APP/J2373/W/22/3305075; APP/Q4245/W/25/3363934; APP/Q42445/W/25/3363942 & APP/Q4245/H/25/3363943; ADA-180-2017; APP/J2373/H/22/3305072; and APP/C3105/W/25/3366449 & APP/C3105/H/25/3366450.

deliberately uncluttered public realm present here. Furthermore, none of them were located near the appeal site on Fairfax Street.

10. The Inspectors considered the proposals within the context of the surrounding street scene, and this is an approach I have followed. Limited substantive evidence has been provided to show meaningful comparisons can be drawn between the character of those areas and the site under consideration. The approval of other developments does not, in itself, demonstrate that a similar form of development would be appropriate in all locations.
11. Accordingly, there are material differences between those cases and the proposal before me. Each appeal must be determined on its own merits, and the site-specific circumstances of this case are a material consideration. It is for these reasons that I have reached a different conclusion on this issue from that of other decision makers.
12. Therefore, for the reasons given above, the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area. Consequently, with regard to Appeal A the proposal would not comply with Policies DE1, AC2 and AC4 of the Coventry Local Plan. These expect proposals, amongst other matters, to respect and enhance their surroundings and positively contribute towards the local identity and character of an area. With regard to Appeal B, the same considerations apply as those relating to the impact of the proposed hub on the character and appearance of the area, and the large, illuminated displays would add to the harm to the visual amenities of the area already identified above. For similar reasons it would conflict with the above development plan policies insofar as they are material.

Highway and Public Safety

13. The proposed hub would be located in close proximity to a pedestrian crossing point situated near the junction of Fairfax Street and Cox Street. On-street parking bays are also available next to the proposed location, with parking accommodated partly within the footway.
14. The pavement where the hub is proposed is substantially sized and the proposed location of the hub would retain a footway that is approximately 7.5 metres wide. This would be substantially wider than that recommended in the Department for Transport Manual for Streets to ensure two people in wheelchairs could pass each other. Given the substantial width of the mostly flat pavement to be retained the proposal would not unacceptably obstruct the flow of pedestrians.
15. The hub would be sited next to where vehicles may be parked and at a limited distance from parked vehicles. Given the solid form of the hub and its proximity, there would be limited space for vehicle occupants to open doors directly onto the footway when vehicles are parked alongside it. While the modest depth of the hub means that this situation would arise only if vehicles were parked in a particular way, the arrangement would nevertheless be impractical.
16. Of greater concern is the relationship between the proposed hub, the nearby pedestrian crossing, and the junction with Cox Street. The junction with Cox Street lies immediately next to the crossing and is located on a bend in the road, where vehicles may turn right both into and out of Cox Street. In this location, driver sightlines are partly constrained by the curvature of the road, nearby buildings, and other highway infrastructure. In addition, there are several pedestrian crossing

points in close proximity along this stretch of highway, likely resulting in frequent pedestrian movements and a concentration of vehicular manoeuvres. In these circumstances, the siting of a digital advertising panel with illuminated and changing images facing oncoming traffic would introduce a source of distraction at a location where multiple manoeuvres occur in quick succession. This would distract highway users and increase the risk of collision between them, including vulnerable ones such as pedestrians.

17. Although matters such as illumination levels and image transition speeds could be controlled by condition, having regard to the site-specific circumstances described above, I am not satisfied that such measures would adequately mitigate the identified distraction risk.
18. Many of the appeal decisions referred to earlier related to sites, as evidenced by the decisions, that were located in notably different areas with differing highway characteristics. Furthermore, none of them were located near to the appeal site on Fairfax Street. Limited substantive evidence has been provided to show meaningful comparisons can be drawn between the highway layout and thus the highway and public safety considerations of those areas and the site under consideration. These different site-specific circumstances have led me to come to a different conclusion in this instance.
19. Therefore, the proposed development would have an unacceptable impact on highway safety. Consequently, with regard to Appeal A the scheme would conflict with Policies DE1, AC2 and AC4 insofar as they expect proposals to ensure they do not cause highway safety problems. With regard to Appeal B, the same considerations apply as those relating to the impact of the proposed hub on highway safety and the advertisement would harm public safety. For similar reasons it would conflict with the above development plan policies insofar as they are material.

Planning Balance

20. The proposed hub would provide benefits including free interconnected Wi-Fi, free mobile device charging, emergency call buttons, charity helplines and local wayfinding, free advertising space for local businesses, promotion of community and municipal services, public information services, air quality sensors and indirect street lighting.
21. It is proposed that the scheme would result in the removal of existing phone boxes elsewhere. None of these phone boxes are on the appeal site, although one is located on Cox Street but there is the ring road and the Code Student Building between that phone box and this site which screens most views between them. The removal of this phone box may be a benefit to the character and appearance of that street scene, however given that it is not located where the hub is proposed means that it would not have to be removed for this scheme to be implemented.
22. The other phone box on Mercia Avenue is not within or near to the appeal site and thus its removal would have no impact on the character or appearance of this area. Additionally, no measures or mechanism have been provided to secure the removal of these other phone boxes. For these reasons, this limits the weight attributed to this matter in favour of the scheme.

23. The Framework identifies that a high quality and reliable communications infrastructure is essential for economic growth and social well-being and the scheme would support this. However, such considerations are not without regard to the Framework as a whole which advises that the quality and character of places can suffer when advertisements are poorly sited and designed. Whilst there are many benefits in favour of the proposal, they would not outweigh the identified harm.

Conclusion

24. The proposed development would conflict with the development plan, and the material considerations do not indicate that the appeal should be determined other than in accordance with it. Therefore, for the reasons given above, I conclude that Appeal A should be dismissed.
25. For the reasons given above, I conclude that Appeal B should be dismissed.

G Sibley

INSPECTOR