



Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 10 February 2026

by John Felgate BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 24th February 2026

Appeal A Ref: APP/G3110/W/24/3356189

Appeal B Ref: APP/G3110/H/24/3356190

Footway opposite Oxford Railway Station, off Park End Street, Oxford OX1 1HS

- Appeal A is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - Appeal B 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 advertisement consent.
 - Both appeals are made by the Urban Innovation Company Ltd against the decisions of Oxford City Council.
 - The application reference numbers are 24/01887/FUL (Appeal A), and 24/01888/ADV (Appeal B).
 - The proposal in both appeals is for the installation of a Pulse Smart Hub with integrated digital screens.
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Decisions

1. Appeal A is allowed, and planning permission is granted for the installation of a Pulse Smart Hub with integrated digital screens, on the footway opposite Oxford Station, Oxford OX1 1HS, in accordance with the terms of application No 24/01887/FUL, subject to the conditions in the attached Schedule A.
2. Appeal B is allowed, and express advertisement consent is granted for the installation of a Pulse Smart Hub with integrated digital screens, in the same location as stated above, in accordance with application No 24/01888/ADV. The consent is for 5 years from the date of this decision and is subject to the five standard conditions set out in Schedule 2 of the Regulations, and subject to the additional conditions in the attached Schedule B.

Main issues

3. The following are main issues in both Appeals A and B:
 - the effects of the development on the character, appearance and visual amenity of the street scene;
 - the effects on existing digital safety technology;
 - and the effects on crime and antisocial behaviour.
4. In addition, the following is a main issue in Appeal A only:
 - whether the development would be acceptable having regard to any risk of flooding.

Reasons for decision

Effects on character and appearance of the street scene

5. I saw on my visit that the section of public footway where the proposed Pulse Smart Hub would be located forms part of the surrounds to Oxford Railway Station. To the west, the station itself is a modern building of no particular distinction. Between this and the proposed site is the station forecourt area, with bus stops, taxi ranks, drop-off parking for cars, and a large cycle park. To the east is the Said Business School and Sainsbury Library, and to the north the Thatcher Business Education Centre, all contained in large, modern buildings. To the south is Frideswide Square, a newly-created public space with seating and landscaping. On its south side, the square is fronted by 3-storey shops and businesses, with residential uses above. Park End Street, which runs through the square, is one of the main roads serving the city centre.
6. The proposed hub would comprise an upright box structure, 2.54m high, with display screens on both sides. The screens would show commercial advertising, which would change at frequent intervals, as well as providing public information and other services. The hub's appearance would be uncompromisingly modern. Its isolated siting, at the kerb edge, would give it a high degree of prominence. I appreciate that these are all aspects of the proposal that the Council sees as causes for objection.
7. However, the Station forecourt and Frideswide Square are clearly both very busy areas, used by large numbers of pedestrians and vehicles throughout the day. The scale of the surrounding buildings is large, and modern architectural styles predominate. The Said building in particular, with its long, blank frontages, gives the area an impersonal and somewhat sterile appearance. This impression is further exacerbated by the wide areas of unrelieved, featureless paving and low-level planting around Frideswide Square. Whilst the station building, and the shops to the south, have a more human scale, these are separated from the appeal site by the vehicular routes in between. Consequently, to my mind, the immediate environment is one in which, a suitably designed advertising structure could be accommodated without harm, could add a welcome element of visual diversity.
8. In the present appeal scheme, the proposed hub would be of an appropriate size for its function, and not dissimilar in this regard from the nearby street map and traffic signs. The hub would have a slim profile, a simple, streamlined shape, and a sleek, appearance. The exterior shell would be predominantly a muted grey and black, which would echo the colours and finishes used on parts of the Said building. The red trim that would be applied in addition would be a minor element; this would reflect the hub's role as a successor to the well-known red telephone boxes of earlier years, and as such, would help users to readily identify its service function. I appreciate that opinions as to the aesthetic aspects of any design are necessarily subjective, and that others' views may differ. However, for the reasons stated, my own view is that the proposed design is reasonably attractive, as well as being functional. In the context of the surroundings that I have described, I find the design to be unobjectionable.
9. I note the Council's concern that the new hub would introduce commercial advertising to an area where it is currently absent. But that does not seem to me a strong argument, because a significant amount of advertising is already present, for

much of the time, on the many double-decker buses that wait in the station forecourt, and likewise on the taxis and commercial vehicles that also use that area. Although none of these are permanent fixtures, they are evidently present for a good deal of the day, and as such are a visually dominant feature. The advertising on the new hub would be illuminated, but the forecourt is evidently well-lit, and in such an environment, the illumination of the adverts would not significantly affect the area's ambience. In any event, the level of such illumination can be controlled by condition.

10. The suggestion that the development would make the area cluttered seems to me without foundation. Apart from two single-pole traffic signs, there is no other street furniture within several metres of the appeal site. This section of the pavement is in the region of 9m wide, and otherwise unobstructed.
11. For these reasons, I find that the proposed development would have no adverse impact on either the character or appearance of the street scene, or the visual amenity of the local area. In this respect the scheme would be sympathetically designed, and would contribute positively to its surroundings, as required by the relevant provisions of Policies DH6 and V9 of the Oxford Local Plan (the OLP), adopted in June 2020¹, which relate to signage and electronic communications infrastructure. It would also involve no conflict with the OLP's more general design policies, DH1 and DH2.

Effects on existing digital technology

12. The criteria in OLP Policy V9 also require that new electronic communications infrastructure should avoid any significant or irreversible interference with other electrical equipment, including air traffic services or instrumentation operated in the national interest.
13. In the present case, the Council alleges that the new hub would leave existing digital safety technology vulnerable to interference. This suggestion appears to be based on comments made by the Thames Valley Police in relation to a number of earlier applications, where concern was expressed that illuminated displays had caused difficulties in obtaining satisfactory CCTV images. However, none of the applications referred to appears to have related to the same site as the present appeal proposal, and indeed the Council itself acknowledges that the Police service has not commented on this application or appeal. No further evidence has been brought forward on the matter. The objection is therefore unsubstantiated.
14. I appreciate that the policing of the city centre is a matter of considerable local importance. But in the absence of any information relating specifically to the effects of the present appeal proposal, there is no clear evidence that these earlier concerns are relevant to this appeal. In these circumstances, the Council's stance appears to amount to no more than a generalised objection to any form of digital advertising throughout the city centre area; to my mind, a refusal on that basis would clearly be disproportionate and unjustified.
15. On the information before me, there is no evidence that the appeal scheme would interfere with the operation of police CCTV or any other existing digital technology. I therefore find no conflict in this regard with any relevant planning policy, including Policy V9.

¹ The Oxford Local Plan, adopted in June 2020

Crime and antisocial behaviour

16. The Council's further concerns about crime and antisocial behaviour relate to the potential for the proposed hub itself, or its users, to become a target for such activities. Amongst other things, these are said to include abuse of the free phone and wi-fi facilities, use in connection with selling drugs, misuse of the emergency call button, pickpocketing and phone theft, and graffiti.
17. However, these seem to me to be primarily management issues, for the provider of the facility, or the providers of the services that it has the capability to enable; or indeed for the police or other law enforcement authorities. The submitted information indicates that the promoters of the development have systems in place for monitoring the hub and the behaviour of its users, and for maintaining and managing the equipment both remotely and physically. Such systems would also allow for any of the facilities to be overridden or disabled if this should become necessary or desirable. A management plan covering these issues can be secured by condition.
18. I appreciate that crime, and the fear of crime, can sometimes be relevant planning considerations, but in this case, there is no clear evidence of any reason why the proposed development should give rise to either. In this regard, I find no apparent conflict with any of the planning policies that have been referred to, including OLP Policies DH1 or V9.

Flood risk

19. The Council suggests that the appeal site lies within a Zone 2 flood risk area. However the basis for that assertion is not stated. None of the bodies with responsibility for flooding or drainage appears to have commented on the application or appeal. The appellants have subsequently submitted technical evidence showing that the site is clearly within a Zone 1 area. This evidence has not been challenged by the Council.
20. On the information before me, I can see no reason to disagree that the appeal site falls within Zone 1. On this basis, there seems no reason why any further information regarding flood risk should be required.
21. It does not appear to be suggested that the development would impede any floodwater flows, or materially affect any risk of flooding in the area. Nor does there appear to be any evidence to support such an allegation. The appellants state that, in the event of a flood incident, the equipment is programmed to shut down, thereby ensuring its safety and that of other persons in the vicinity. This seems to me a matter that could be covered in any management plan.
22. On the evidence available, I see no reason why the development should be likely to be at risk from flooding, nor why it should be likely to contribute to any flood risks or consequent safety issues. In these respects, no conflict would arise with OLP Policy RE3, which seeks to direct development to areas where the risk of flooding is at its lowest.

Other matters

23. The Council's appeal statement belatedly raises issues of highway safety, which are outside the reasons stated in the refusal notice. I note the comments originally made by the Highway Authority, relating to the potential for distraction and

obstruction to visibility. However, these comments have since been withdrawn. On my visit I saw that traffic speeds in the vicinity are generally quite slow. This is due to this short section of road being nothing more than the approach into the station forecourt, with a wide crossing facility used by large numbers of pedestrians. To my mind the proposed hub would be far enough from this crossing to allow pedestrians a reasonably clear view of approaching traffic, and vice-versa.

24. I appreciate that most advertisements are necessarily designed to attract attention, but that does not seem to me to mean that they would do so at the expense of safety. In any urban area, road users must necessarily cope with a variety of different types of visual stimuli. There is no evidence that an advertisement in this location would have an unduly distracting effect. The appellants' stated intention is to display only static images, which would change at intervals of no less than 10 seconds; and that none would resemble traffic signs in any way. These aspects could be controlled by condition. Overall, I find no reason to expect that the proposed development would have any material impact on highway safety. In this regard, I find no conflict with OLP Policy M1, which seeks to promote safe conditions for walking and cycling.
25. In addition to the policies referred to above, the Council's refusal reasons also refer to various other OLP policies. These include Policy RE2 which promotes the efficient use of land; Policy RE7 which seeks to ensure that development impacts are assessed and mitigated; Policy M2 relating to transport assessments and travel plans; and Policy S1 which sets out the presumption in favour of sustainable development. I have paid due regard to these policies, but in the absence of any further explanation, none seems to me to have any direct relevance to the present appeal.
26. The appeal site is well outside the boundary of the Oxford Central Conservation Area, and as far as I am aware, none of the buildings in the vicinity of the site is listed. The Council accepts that the development would not be harmful to the setting of the CA or any other heritage asset, and I agree. For the avoidance of doubt, I am satisfied that the setting of the CA would be preserved and that no other heritage assets would be affected.
27. The proposed development would provide a number of services to the public. In addition to the free phone calls and wi-fi already noted, these would also include a public access defibrillator, nasal naloxone spray for life-saving use in the event of a drug overdose, a personal safety emergency button, '999' call button, free local information and public service advertising, and free phone charging. The hub would also have the capability to collect data such as traffic flows and air quality readings, for use by the relevant authorities. To my mind, these would all be significant benefits. There is no suggestion by any party that this range of benefits could be achieved, at no cost to the public purse, in any other way than through the inclusion of an element of commercial advertising, as in the present appeal proposal. These benefits add some further moderate weight in favour of the appeal.

Conditions

28. In considering the conditions suggested by both parties, I have paid regard to the advice on planning conditions in paragraph 57 of the NPPF. I have also edited those that I intend to impose, in the interests of precision and conciseness, and to avoid unnecessary prescriptiveness.

29. In relation to the planning permission sought in Appeal A, the law requires that the development be commenced within three years. In addition, a condition identifying the approved plans is necessary, to give certainty as to the content of the development. A management plan is needed, for the reasons already explained above, to ensure that the proposed hub does not give rise to any form of nuisance due to misuse or malfunction. And a requirement for the eventual removal of the structure is reasonable, for similar reasons.
30. All of the other suggested conditions relate more closely to the development's advertisement function than to the structure itself or its other functions. These are therefore more appropriately considered in relation to the advertisement consent sought in Appeal B. The NPPF makes it clear that planning conditions should not be used to duplicate controls available under other regulatory regimes.
31. In this context, a condition to limit the luminance levels is reasonable, to avoid nuisance and excessive light pollution. Control over the content of the displayed images, to prevent the use of movement or images resembling traffic signs, is necessary in the interests of highway safety. And a restriction on the use of sound is reasonable, to protect amenity.

Conclusion

32. For the reasons set out above, I have found that, with appropriate conditions, the proposed development would have no material adverse impacts, and would accord with the most relevant policies of the development plan. In addition, it would have some significant benefits in terms of the provision of services to the general public. No other relevant considerations weighing against the proposal have been substantiated.
33. It follows that planning permission and advertisement consent should be granted. Accordingly, the appeals are both allowed.

J Felgate

INSPECTOR

CONDITIONS SCHEDULE A

The planning permission which is hereby granted pursuant to Appeal A above is granted subject to the following conditions:

- A1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than three years from the date of this decision.
- A2) The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved plans numbered Oxf-PES/2024/03 and Oxf-PES/2024/04.
- A3) The proposed hub shall not be brought into use until a management and maintenance plan has been submitted to the local planning authority and approved in writing. The plan shall include details of the measures proposed to combat misuse of the equipment, antisocial behaviour, graffiti, and procedures and protocols for the management of electronic malfunctions. Thereafter, the hub shall be operated at all times in accordance with this approved management and maintenance plan.
- A4) In the event of the hub becoming redundant, or becoming substantially unused for any reason for any period exceeding 6 consecutive months, it shall be removed and the footway reinstated to its former condition. This reinstatement shall be completed within a maximum period of a further 3 months after the date of whichever is the later of these two events, using materials as far as possible similar to those of the surrounding pavement.

CONDITIONS SCHEDULE B

The advertisement consent which is hereby granted pursuant to Appeal B above is granted subject to the following conditions, in addition to the 5 standard conditions in Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007:

- B1) The intensity of the illumination in the digital display screens permitted by this consent shall not exceed the following:
 - During daylight hours, between dawn and dusk: 2,000 candelas per square metre
 - At all other times: 600 candelas per square metre
- B2) No moving images shall be displayed, nor any visual effects giving the appearance of movement. The minimum period for which any image may be displayed shall be 10 seconds, and the transition from each image to the next shall take place within no more than one second. No scrolling, swiping or other animated effects shall be used in the transition between images.
- B3) No advertisement or other image shall be displayed which resembles any traffic sign, by way of colour, shape or pictorial style.
- B4) No music or sound shall be emitted in connection with any displayed advertisement.