
Appeal Decisions

Site visit made on 20 January 2026

by **K Williams MTCP (Hons) MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 09 March 2026

Appeal A Ref: APP/Q0505/W/25/3372765

Pavement o/s 18-19 The Broadway, Cambridge CB1 3AH

- 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 Telecommunications Plc against the decision of Cambridge City Council.
 - The application Ref is 25/02498/FUL.
 - The development proposed is for the installation of 1no. BT Street Hub and removal of associated BT payphones.
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Appeal B Ref: APP/Q0505/H/25/3372766

Pavement o/s 18-19 The Broadway, Cambridge CB1 3AH

- 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 Telecommunications Plc against the decision of the Cambridge City Council.
 - The application Ref is 25/02499/ADV
 - The advertisement proposed is described as "The installation of 1no. BT Street Hub and removal of associated BT payphones."
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Decision

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

Preliminary Matters

3. There are two appeals relating to the site, one against the refusal of planning permission and the other against the refusal of advertisement consent. They are intrinsically linked and raise similar issues. While considering each on its own merits, I have dealt with both in a single decision letter.
4. For Appeal B, I have used the description of development given on the submitted application form. Although this is different from the description of the development on the decision notice, there is no evidence a change was agreed. However Appeal B relates to the advertisement provided on the 2no. digital 75" LCD display screens each side of the Street Hub.
5. I am also the Inspector appointed to determine other appeals¹ within the same district, for the same appellant and proposals. Although I have also determined each appeal on their own merits, the similarity in the reasons for refusal results in some duplication in how I have addressed common matters.

¹ Linked Appeal References: 3372767 and 3372768; 3372838 and 3372839; and 3372896 and 3372897.

6. In respect of appeal B, the Advert Regulations and National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) both make it clear that advertisements should be subject to control only in the interests of amenity and public safety. When dealing with an appeal for an advertisement in a Conservation Area, the test from Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the 1990 Act) is that special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a Conservation Area. This statutory duty applies to the planning application and in advertisement appeals insofar as it relates to the consideration of amenity.

Main Issues

7. For Appeal A, the main issues are: (i) the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, including whether it would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Mill Road CA; (ii) the effect of the proposal on the living conditions of nearby occupiers, with particular regard to light intrusion; (iii) whether the proposal takes opportunities to integrate sustainable design and construction principles; and (iv) the effect of the proposal on the safe and efficient operation of the highway.
8. For Appeal B, the main issues are the effect of the proposed advertisements on: (i) amenity; and (ii) public safety.

Reasons

Character, appearance, amenity and Mill Road Conservation Area

9. The site comprises a paved area in front of 18 to 19 The Broadway, on the north side of Mill Road. It is currently occupied by a red telephone kiosk and lies immediately east of a bus shelter with digital screens, positioned between two attractive street trees. The surrounding frontage is predominantly commercial, with ground-floor shops and cafés topped by residential units. The combination of mature street trees and generally traditional shopfronts gives this mixed-use area a genteel character that contributes positively to the streetscape.
10. The site also lies within the Mill Road Conservation Area (CA), whose significance derives from its architectural quality and the historic development of this suburban commercial area. The nearby Mill Road Baptist Chapel is locally listed. The appeal site makes a modest positive contribution to the CA through its position between two notable trees, and it would also be visible from the Chapel. However, the site does not appear to fall within the Hills Road Corridor to the City Centre Opportunity Area. It has not been clearly explained how Local Plan Policy 25 is of specific relevance to the proposal.
11. The proposals are for a tall, modern Street Hub containing a portrait format digital screen and integrated Wi-Fi and 5G technology. It would replace the existing red kiosk on the site but would be considerably taller and wider. This new freestanding unit forms part of BT's wider citywide upgrade programme, replacing outdated kiosks with multi-functional digital infrastructure that provides free ultrafast Wi-Fi, public calls, device charging, wayfinding, emergency contact features and capacity to support 5G and other modern communications technologies.

12. The removal of red kiosks² would reduce some street furniture at the site and the wider area. The adjacent trees and bus stop would provide some screening in longer views; however, the proposed development would introduce a visually dominant and imposing modern structure into a section of Mill Road characterised by its traditional appearance at close quarters within the street and from the opposing side of the relatively narrow road.
13. Notwithstanding that there is an existing digital display, the introduction of another digital screen aligned with existing digital advertising in the vicinity would create a cumulative concentration of high-intensity, modern visual elements within a confined stretch of streetscape. Even acknowledging that the imagery would remain static, the effect would be exacerbated by the modern appearance and rotating advertising screen. The resulting visual clutter would detract from both the character and appearance of the area and from the special qualities of this part of the CA, there would be a very small level of associated harm to the setting of the Baptist Chapel.
14. However, for Appeal A, the proposal would harm the character, of the area. It would fail to preserve the significance of the Mill Road CA. It therefore follows that Appeal B would result in harm to amenity. Appeal A conflicts with policies 1, 55, 56, 61, 65 and 84 of the Cambridge Local Plan, adopted October 2018 (the Local Plan). Together and insofar as they are relevant to the appeal, these see, amongst other matters, to support sustainable development which responds to surrounding context, improves the public realm and preserves or enhances heritage assets and their setting, that advertising and street furniture does not have an adverse impact on the character and appearance of the area and is sympathetically designed.
15. The proposal would also be in conflict with paragraph's 215 of the Framework and paragraph 141 of the Framework which advises the quality and character of places can suffer when advertisements are poorly sited and designed. The proposals would also be contrary to paragraph's 135 and 141 of the Framework, where it relates to advertisements and seeks to ensure that development adds to the overall quality of the area, and is sympathetic to local character. For the same reasons, Appeal B would result in harm to amenity.
16. The harm to the CA attracts considerable importance and weight. Although it would be less than substantial, and at the lower end of the spectrum, this is required to be balanced against the public benefits of the proposal as set out in paragraph 215 of the Framework. I return to this heritage balance later in my decision.

Living conditions

17. Nuisance from illuminated displays can arise through excessive brightness, ground-level illuminance or light observed through nearby windows, which can distract or disturb sleep when images are displayed during the day or night. However, the site lies within a busy area, characterised by a trafficked road, numerous shops, commercial frontages and, a bus stop with a digital advertising panel. In this context, ambient lighting levels would be higher than in purely residential streets.

² Pavement o/s 18-19 The Broadway, Cambridge, CB1 3AH; Pavement at Mills Road, near jcn w/ Ross Street, Cambridge, CB1 3BE; and Pavement at Rock Road, near jcn w/ Cherry Hinton Road, Cambridge, CB1 7AG.

18. The proposals would have static, non-moving displays and automatic night-time dimming, reducing brightness in accordance with the product's built-in lighting controls. Although the Council highlights a lower Institute of Lighting Professionals' guidance threshold, the appellant confirms that the unit's illumination is fully controllable and could be set to any required limit by condition. The appellant also notes that the nearby approved digital bus-shelter display operates at significantly higher brightness levels. There is no evidence that this has caused undue disturbance or harm.
19. The screens are also positioned perpendicular to first-floor residential windows, meaning they do not directly face any homes. Users of nearby cafés may experience minor, short-term disturbance. Brightness levels, hours of operation, and automatic switch-off after an agreed curfew can also be secured by condition, ensuring any light impact remains minimal and appropriate for the area. Such an approach is advanced within the supporting text to Local Plan Policy 34, which identifies that conditions will be used, where appropriate, to control lighting, including limiting the hours of illumination.
20. For all these reasons, and subject to suitably worded conditions, I conclude that for Appeal A the proposal would not be harmful to the living conditions of nearby residents in terms of light intrusion. Appeal B would not be harmful to amenity in these respects. The proposal would comply with Policy 34 of the Local Plan, which seeks to minimise impact to local residential amenity. The proposal would also align with Framework paragraph 's 135 and 141 where they relate to amenity and advertisements.

Sustainability

21. Although the proposals are not major development, Local Plan Policy 28 requires all proposals to take available opportunities to integrate the principles of sustainable design and construction. The Council also states that reducing the energy demand of the hub is important in areas where grid capacity is constrained and must meet the hierarchy advanced in the Policy.
22. The proposal seeks to reduce energy demand through a screen that uses around 60% less power than former lighting technologies and components designed to operate at higher temperatures, lowering reliance on active cooling. Second, it uses energy efficiently via an aluminium casing that improves thermal dissipation, high-efficiency power supplies achieving 80% or greater efficiency, and a modular design that enables future upgrades without further construction works. Finally, having reduced and optimised its energy use, the unit operates on 100% renewable, carbon-free energy, as confirmed in the Product Statement.
23. The Council has not set out the energy demand reduction it considers acceptable, what standard or benchmark the appellant failed to meet, what exact measures it expected the appellant to deliver, or any reference to the Sustainable Design and Construction SPD (2020) explaining the alleged conflict. It has also not disputed that the energy specifications of the proposal outlined above would be effective. There is also no substantive evidence before me that the appeal site lies within a constrained capacity area.
24. On the basis of the evidence before me, these elements could be secured through a suitably worded planning condition, with the proposal addressing all stages of

the hierarchy. I therefore conclude the proposal takes appropriate opportunities to integrate sustainable design and construction principles. Appeal A accords with Policy 28, which seeks to ensure the need for energy is reduced, used efficiently, and from renewable sources.

25. As the Council has not provided or identified specific conflict with the Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document (January 2020), I am unable to reach a view on this guidance. However, this omission is not determinative.

Highway and public safety

26. The Council claims the proposals would harm highway safety as the unit sits close to the carriageway and could distract drivers, and because insufficient information was provided to demonstrate that it would not pose a risk. It also relies on the Highways Operational Standards to argue that advertising within the public highway “will not be permitted.” Local Plan Policy 81 does not refer to these standards. I have also not been provided with a copy and it is not clear whether these standards form part of the development plan.
27. However, the Street Hub would sit within a well-lit, straight, slow-speed commercial section of The Broadway, where the surrounding environment already contains street furniture and illuminated features. Although the pavement is constrained in places by existing structures, such as a nearby canopy, the Street Hub would align with two mature trees and would not impede pedestrian movement any more than the kiosk it replaces. There would remain adequate pavement width both at the kerb edge and between the unit and shop frontages to ensure pedestrian flow is not significantly affected.
28. I note that no information has been provided regarding the specific content of the advertisements proposed for display. However, there is no substantive evidence before me to suggest that it would interfere with the legibility of traffic signals or signs, and the absence of complex junctions or pedestrian crossings in the immediate vicinity further reduces the likelihood of adverse impacts on highway safety. Brightness levels, as well as the speed and frequency of image changes could be controlled by condition to minimise distraction to road users or pedestrians.
29. I have also not been presented with any evidence indicating that this stretch of highway has a particular history of accidents. In this context and based on my observations, given the safeguards inherent in the wider regulatory advertisement framework I find no basis to conclude that the absence of content detail, in itself, results in an unacceptable risk to highway or public safety in this location. Furthermore, the digital advertising panel already operates on the adjacent bus stop, and the Council has not explained the basis on which that installation was considered acceptable.
30. For Appeal A, I conclude that subject to aforementioned conditions to control the display as well as luminance, there would not be harm to the safe and efficient operation of the highway. For Appeal B there would not be harm to public safety. There would be no conflict with Local Plan Policy 81, which seeks to permit development proposals where they do not have an unacceptable transport impact. Accordingly there would not be conflict with paragraph’s 116 and 141 of the Framework in this respect.

Heritage Balance

31. Paragraphs 119 and 120 of the NPPF recognise high-quality digital communications as essential to economic growth and social well-being, encouraging the expansion and upgrading of networks, including 5G. The proposals therefore align with national objectives to modernise and improve connectivity, even though no detailed 5G coverage information has been provided. Cambridge Local Plan Policies 42 and 84 similarly support modern telecommunications infrastructure and measures that reduce the need to travel by enabling better digital access. Together, these policies provide broad support for improved digital services of the type delivered by the Street Hub.
32. The public benefits would be derived from the removal of three deteriorating BT kiosks and the delivery of the above accessible digital services. Wider benefits could include lessening the need for physical travel for basic communication needs, improve public access for all, and enhance the overall experience for visitors to the area.
33. However, the appellant has not provided robust or quantifiable evidence to demonstrate the extent to which the benefits would be realised at this specific location, or examples of how often such services are used where the screens are primarily used for advertisements. It is not known whether the removal of other kiosks would occur anyway. There is no evidence that the appellant would not be able to provide a service through other means.
34. Therefore, given the great weight that must be given to the conservation of heritage assets, the public benefits of the proposals do not outweigh the moderate harm to the setting of the CA and low level of harm to the locally listed Chapel.

Other Matters

35. The appellant has drawn my attention to other appeal decision examples³, in which Inspectors have found that similar structures had an acceptable effect on amenity and the character and appearance of the area. However, there is nothing before me to demonstrate that these are comparable in context to the appeal site. As such I attribute limited weight to these examples.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

36. For Appeal A the proposals would deliver several public benefits as set out in the Heritage Balance. The proposals would also avoid harm to living conditions, incorporate sustainable design measures and would not harm highway or public safety. These aspects do not weigh for or against the proposal. By contrast, the proposal would result in harm to the character and appearance of the area and the CA owing to its prominent scale, visual intrusion and incongruity within its setting and cumulative effect with other digital signs. There would be conflict with the policies in the development plan and those within the Framework as set out above.
37. Accordingly given the interrelationship between the proposals the public benefits of in relation to Appeal A, are applicable to Appeal B. As the scale of the proposals are small, the material considerations including the public benefits outlined above do not outweigh the harm to the character, appearance and amenity of the area and the CA.

³ 3285202 and 3285203, 3308266 and 3308267, 3285202 and 3285203, 3202341 and 3201305, 3301229 and 3301229

38. For the reasons given above, the proposals would conflict with the development plan as a whole and in the absence of material considerations to indicate otherwise, Appeal A and Appeal B should therefore be dismissed.

K Williams

INSPECTOR

Appendix 1

List of those who have appealed

Reference	Case Reference	Appellant
Appeal A	APP/Q0505/W/25/3372765	BT Telecommunications Plc
Appeal B	APP/Q0505/H/25/3372766	BT Telecommunications Plc