



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/25/3372767

Pavement o/s 90 Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 1LQ

- 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 25/02496/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/25/3372768

Pavement o/s 90 Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 1LQ

- 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 25/02497/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

¹ Linked Appeal References: 3372765 and 3372766; 3372838 and 3372839; and 3372896 and 3372897.

each appeal on their own merits, the similarity in the reasons for refusal results in some duplication in how I have addressed common matters.

6. I have had regard to the duties set out in Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. This requires, when determining proposals in conservation areas, that special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.
7. I have also had regard to the duties set out in Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. This requires, with respect to a listed building or its setting, special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.
8. In respect of Appeal B, Regulation 17 of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 (the Regulations) and the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) make it clear that advertisements are subject to control only in the interests of amenity and public safety. Factors relevant to amenity include the general characteristics of the locality, including the presence of any feature of historic, architectural, cultural, or similar interest. Whilst not decisive, I have taken relevant development plan policies into account as a material consideration.

Main Issue(s)

9. 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 Newtown and Glisson Road Conservation Area (the CA) and the Grade II Listed War Memorial²; (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.
10. For Appeal B, the main issues are the effect of the proposed advertisements on: (i) amenity; and (ii) public safety.

Reasons

Character and appearance, the CA, setting of a listed building and amenity

11. The appeal site is located on an area of pavement in front of No. 90 Hills Road, a modern office building. The surrounding area lies close to a convergence of the wide and busy Hills Road and Station Road junctions, an area busy with vehicles and pedestrians. The site sits towards the footway edge and is in close proximity to the entrance to the Grade II* listed Botanic Garden³ and the Grade II listed war memorial to the south. Contemporary development sits alongside traditional attractive curved brick buildings opposite the site, occupied by shops and cafés and identified as a Buildings of Local Interest (BLI). The site lies within the Newtown and Glisson Road Conservation Area (CA), whose significance derives from its architectural quality and the historic and communal focus and development of this area.

² List Entry Number: 1268368

³ List Entry Number: 1000612

12. The Botanic Garden forms part of the University and derives its significance from its extensive living plant collection and long-standing association with botanical research and education. It also functions as an important public attraction. The nearby Grade II listed War Memorial, positioned in front of the Garden, comprises a full-size bronze figure of a British soldier in military dress, striding forward with his rifle slung and facing towards Station Road. The memorial's significance lies both in its commemoration of those who did not return and in its celebration of victory. Together, the War Memorial and its surrounding streetscene possess considerable historical, aesthetic and communal value, and therefore hold notable heritage significance.
13. The wider pavement area around the war memorial contains standard items of street furniture, including lamp posts, seating, cycle racks and road infrastructure, together with established street trees. However, the immediate environs of the war memorial are notably uncluttered, and the deliberate restraint in the placement of trees and street furniture clearly serves to protect and highlight the memorial's prominence within the streetscene. The appeal site itself contributes positively through its open and uncluttered character.
14. The proposals are for a tall, modern Street Hub containing a portrait format digital screen and integrated Wi-Fi and 5G technology. 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. The proposal also includes the removal of existing BT payphones⁴.
15. The existing nearby kiosk proposed for removal occupies a comparatively discreet position on the inner side of the footway, set further back from the war memorial and the road junctions, and is therefore less conspicuous within the streetscene. In contrast, the proposals would be sited squarely within the memorial's setting. The substantial height, width and overall massing would intrude unacceptably into key views and materially disrupt the ability to appreciate the memorial in its intended context, which has been altered over the years. The conspicuous and contemporary nature of the digital advertisements would further compound this harm by drawing attention away from the memorial and diminishing its visual authority within the public realm.
16. In addition to those concerns outlined above the proposed siting on the very edge of the footway would result in a discordant and harmfully intrusive addition in the streetscene. This would be compounded by the various viewpoints that would be available of the structure along Hills Road and Station Road. As a consequence the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area and result in associated harm to the CA.
17. For Appeal A, I conclude that the proposal would harm the character and appearance of the area. It would fail to preserve the significance of the Grade II listed building and would not preserve or enhance the character of the CA. It therefore follows that Appeal B would result in harm to amenity. Appeal A conflicts with policies 1, 25, 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

⁴ Pavement o/s 82-88 Hills Road, Cambridge CB2 8PE and Pavement o/s Linda Sinclair House, Mills Road, Cambridge CB1 3BE.

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, and that advertising and street furniture does not have an adverse impact on the character and appearance of the area and is sympathetically 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.

18. The harm to the listed building and CA attracts considerable importance and weight. Although in both respects it would be less than substantial, and towards the middle 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

19. 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 and commercial frontages. In this context, ambient lighting levels would be higher than in purely residential streets.
20. 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.
21. The Council has not drawn my attention to any particular residential properties. However, the screens are also positioned perpendicular to first-floor windows on the opposing terraced building, meaning they do not directly face into any buildings. 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 Policy 34, which identifies that where appropriate conditions will be used to control lighting, including limiting the hours of illumination.
22. For all these reasons, and subject to suitably worded conditions, I conclude that the proposal would not be harmful to the living conditions of nearby residents in terms of light intrusion and 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

23. 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.

24. 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.
25. 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.
26. 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. The proposal accords with Policy 28, which seeks to ensure the need for energy is reduced, used efficiently, and from renewable sources.
27. As the Council has identified no 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 is not determinative.

Highway and public safety

28. The Council contends that the proposal has not demonstrated its effects on the highway. In doing so, it relies on its Highways Operational Standards to assert that advertising within the public highway “will not be permitted.” However, no copy of these standards has been provided, and it has not been established that they form part of the development plan or carry any substantive weight in decision-making.
29. The relevant test in the Framework is that development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if it would result in an unacceptable impact on highway safety. I have not been presented with any evidence to suggest that this section of highway has a particular history of accidents, nor has the Council disputed that the proposal would accord with the Transport for London Best Practice Guide referred to by the appellant.
30. Nonetheless, the appellant’s reliance on the guidance is based largely on broad, general statements rather than a site-specific analysis. The guidance itself acknowledges that moving images or complex advertising content can increase distraction and emphasises that any such distraction must be minimised, particularly where drivers require a high level of concentration. It advises that advertisements near traffic signals require detailed assessment to ensure no conflict occurs, and that structures should not obstruct required sight lines or interfere with access points to the highway.
31. While the proposal would maintain adequate pavement width at both the kerb edge and between the unit and the shop frontages, such that pedestrian flows

would not be significantly impeded, the Street Hub would be positioned within an extremely busy highway environment. This includes multiple pedestrian crossing points, lane-specific traffic signals, traffic islands and dedicated cycle lanes, all requiring careful navigation by users. No information has been provided regarding the specific advertising content to be displayed. On this basis, I am not satisfied that the installation would avoid interfering with the legibility of the pedestrian crossing immediately to the north of the site, nor that it would avoid competing for visual attention at the more complex signalised junction of Hills Road and Station Road.

32. Although conditions could control brightness levels and the speed and frequency of image transitions to limit distraction, the location forms a principal route to the station and a key point of entry into the city. The combination of heavy vehicular movements, multiple signal phases and high pedestrian activity increases the sensitivity of this junction. In this context, I am not persuaded that the proposal would avoid creating unacceptable distraction for road users. Nevertheless, given the safeguards inherent in the wider regulatory advertisement framework, I do not consider that the absence of detailed advertising content, in itself, results in an unacceptable risk to public safety; rather, it is the specific characteristics and complexity of this location that elevate the potential for harm.
33. For the reasons set out above, I conclude that it has not been demonstrated that the proposal would avoid giving rise to unacceptable distraction within a complex and heavily trafficked environment. It would therefore cause harm to highway and public safety. Consequently, Appeal A conflicts with paragraph 116 of the National Planning Policy Framework. In addition, the proposed advertisement would be harmful to public safety and, accordingly, Appeal B is also unacceptable in this respect.

Heritage Balance

34. 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.
35. 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.
36. However, the appellant has not provided substantive 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 or in an alternative location.

37. 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 identified heritage harm.

Other Matters

38. The appellant has drawn my attention to other appeal decisions⁵, 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

39. For Appeal A, the proposal would deliver several public benefits, including the removal of deteriorating kiosks and the provision of modern digital services such as free Wi-Fi, device charging and emergency contact facilities. These benefits have been taken into account, along with the scheme's neutral effects in respect of living conditions and sustainable design. However, these matters do not weigh positively in favour of the development.
40. Set against this, the proposal would result in harm to the character and appearance of the area, including the Newtown and Glisson Road Conservation Area, and would fail to preserve the significance of the Grade II listed War Memorial and its setting. The harm, whilst less than substantial, sits towards the mid-range of that spectrum and therefore carries considerable weight, as required by the Framework and Sections 66(1) and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
41. In addition, it has not been demonstrated that the proposal would avoid creating unacceptable distraction to road users within a complex and heavily trafficked environment. The scheme would therefore cause harm to highway and public safety and conflict with paragraph 116 of the Framework. These harms further weigh significantly against the proposal.
42. The public benefits advanced are limited in scale and lack robust evidence demonstrating their effectiveness or necessity at this particular location. They are not sufficient to outweigh the identified heritage harm, to which the Framework requires that great weight be given. Nor do they outweigh the additional harms identified in respect of character and appearance, visual intrusion, and highway and public safety.
43. Given the close relationship between the appeals, the limited public benefits associated with Appeal A are equally applicable to Appeal B. However, the scale of the proposals is small, and the material considerations do not outweigh the harm identified to amenity, the character and appearance of the area, the listed building and Conservation Area, or public safety. Accordingly, the proposals conflict with the development plan when read as a whole, and the relevant provisions of the Framework.
44. For these reasons, and in the absence of material considerations indicating otherwise, I conclude that Appeal A and Appeal B are both dismissed.

⁵ Linked Appeals 3296193 and 3296194; 3202341 and 3201305; 3301229 and 3301230; 3301224 and 3301225; 3311407 and 3311410; 3311428 and 3311430; 3311422 and 3311424; 3296193 and 3296194; 3285398 and 3285399.

K Williams

INSPECTOR

Appendix 1

List of those who have appealed

Reference	Case Reference	Appellant
Appeal A	APP/Q0505/W/25/3372767	BT Telecommunications Plc
Appeal B	APP/Q0505/H/25/3372768	BT Telecommunications Plc