

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Ward: Caversham Ward

App Ref: PL/25/1352 Full planning permission

Address: Pavement o/s 29 Church Street, Reading, RG4 8BA

Proposal: The proposed installation of 1no. BT Street Hub and removal of associated existing BT payphone(s).

Applicant: Simon Warner

Received date: 24/09/2025

Target Decision date: 19/11/2025

Case Officer: Gary Miles

Ward: Caversham Ward

App Ref: **PL/25/1357** Consent to display an advertisement

Address: Pavement o/s 29 Church Street, Reading, RG4 8BA

Proposal: The proposed installation of 1no. BT Street Hub and removal of associated existing BT payphone(s).

Applicant: Simon Warner

Received date: 24/09/2025

Target Decision date: 19/11/2025

Case Officer: Gary Miles

Two applications have been submitted; one application (PL/25/1352) seeks planning permission for the installation of a BT Street Hub, whilst a separate application (PL/25/1257) has been submitted for advertisement consent. As both applications relate to the same site, I have considered them together to avoid unnecessary duplication.

1. SITE DESCRIPTION

The application site is located in Church Street in Caversham. The BT Street Hub will replace the existing BT kiosk positioned on the public footpath near St Martins Precinct - a busy shopping centre. The footpath forms public highway owned and maintained by Reading Borough Council. This application site is positioned on a busy thoroughfare, very close to public highway, opposite a busy highway bus gate and junction with Hemdean Road, near a busy petrol station and a frequently used traffic signal-controlled pedestrian crossing. The adjacent area is primarily retail and commercial with residential properties above.



Existing streetscene with existing kiosk.



Existing streetscene with proposed location on the right.

2. PROPOSAL AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

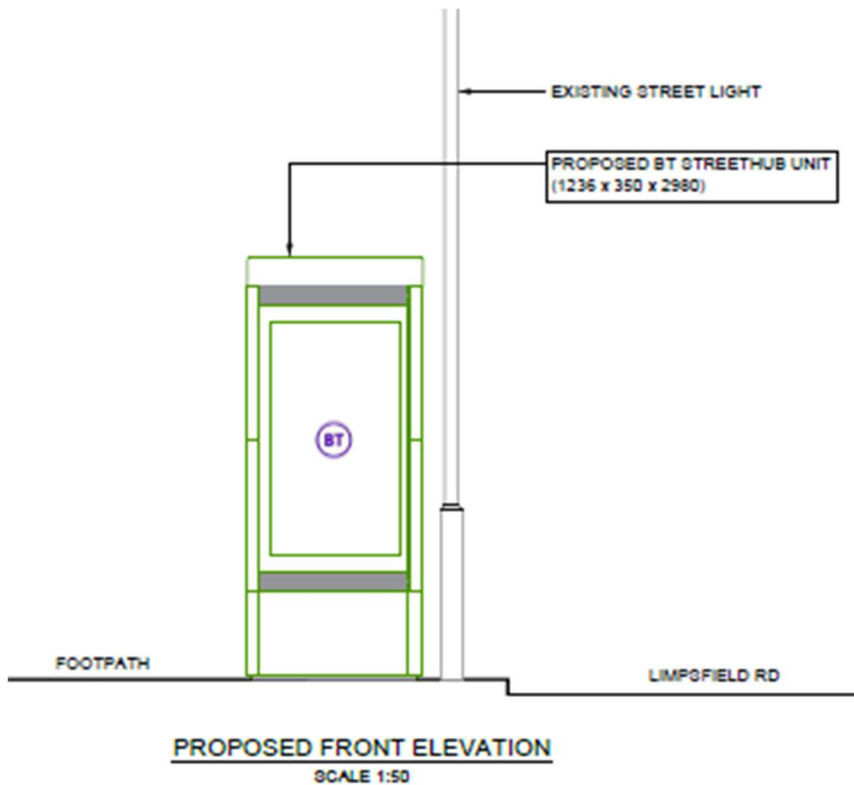
Proposed installation of 1no. black, freestanding BT Street Hub measuring 3m in height, 1.3m in width and 0.35m in depth. The BT Hub will offer Wi-Fi, free UK calls, USB charging and an emergency services button. The units include 2no. digital 75" HD LCD advert screens which provide a range of other digital services as well as advertising to help pay for the unit, the screens will display content at 10-second intervals. The LCD screens automatically dim at nighttime to 600candella. A video camera is built into the unit, those these are not currently connected or used in the UK. The associated existing BT Phone Kiosk is to be removed.

Plans and documents considered for both applications:

Drawing no: 001-rev A-Site Location Maps, dated June 25
 Drawing no: 002-rev A-Proposed Site Plan, dated June 25
 Drawing no: 003-rev A-Existing and Proposed Elevations, dated June 25
 Drawing No: 003-rev A-Proposed BT Street Hub (All Round Elevations) dated April 25
 BT Street Hubs Product Statement V2.0, dated September 2024
 BT Street Hub Planning Statement REA-103 (Mitie Telecoms) dated June 25
 Over Exposure and Glare Evaluation, dated Mar 25
 International Commission on Non-ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) Certificate REA-103, dated June 25
 BT Street Hub Developers Notice REA-103 (Mitie Telecoms) dated June 25
 The Brightness of Illuminated Advertisements Including Digital Displays-Professional Lighting Guide 05/23
 BT Street Hub Anti-Social Behaviour Management Plan-Version 3
 Received by the LPA on 24th September 2025



Site Location Plan



Proposed elevation

Example of a BT Street Hub



Proposed Photomontage

Proposed Side Elevation

Note: officers note that the existing BT kiosk KX100 which is to be removed, stands at 2.16m in height and the pedestrian safety railing shown in the photomontage and side elevation drawing stands at 1m in height. The drawing titled Drawing no: 003-rev A-Existing and Proposed Elevations, dated June 25- shows the proposed BT Street Hub in proximity to the pedestrian safety railing and the shopfront of St Martins Precinct. It should be noted that this drawing appears to be incorrectly drawn, the proposed BT Street Hub appears smaller than in real life. The proposed plans and montage are therefore misleading.

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

None.

4. CONSULTATIONS

Internal consultation:

- Access Officer - **Object**

The access officer has concerns that the additional development will create a hazard for persons with disabilities, wheelchair users and the visually impaired. The access officer noted there is already an oversaturation of street furniture at this location, including the steel upright poles which hold up the St Martins Precinct canopy. As a pedestrian with accessible needs the additional BT Hub is not welcomed.

- Transport Development Control – **No Objection**

Church Street is a busy public highway within Caversham District Centre. The application site is located on an established payphone site on a public footway. The total existing pavement width at the application site is approx. 5.5m. The Street Hub will be located at a distance of 0.5m from the kerb, this will ensure a remaining footway of 3.7m is left to the rear of the unit to allow for the safe passing of pedestrians.

It is considered that the position of the Street Hub would not affect public safety or interrupt any visibility splays or impede pedestrian flow in this location.

- Environmental Health Officer - **Object**

I have concerns about streethubs being outside residential properties, because they offer free video/voice calls so are likely to cause noise from people talking/laughing loudly with raised voices due to the background noise. It is not the same as a phone booth which is enclosed. This is of particular concern at night.

The agent did respond to our concerns surrounding noise and disturbance to residential properties:

The advertisements on the unit do not generate noise and do not display videos in that sense, rather they will play advertisements (with moving effects if on pedestrianised pavements) which are not generated with sounds.

With regards to the calling facility, it is of note that there are different volume capabilities so that users can have quieter calls when late at night. There is also an option to disable the speaker so that this cannot be used at late times. However, it is anticipated that most calls will be made using the headphone jack so that, generally speaking, only the user of the unit can be heard by those in the vicinity.

Officers acknowledge the response from the agent, though whilst the volume can be controlled officers believe the harm to residential amenity is too great.

- Thames valley Police - **Object**

Street Clutter / Pinch Points

The proposed units are nearly 3m in height and over 1m in width. This introduces a significant obstruction within the streetscene, both for CCTV monitoring (as noted above) but also in terms of movement of pedestrians. In many of the locations proposed, the positioning of the Street Hub will create a significant additional pinch point, where the width of the footpath is reduced, creating spaces where an offender such as a pick pocket is provided a legitimate excuse to be within very close proximity of their target. The height and width of the units also create ideal hiding places, which reduce forward visibility for pedestrians. In addition, it would be impossible for someone walking towards a unit to know if an offender is hiding on the other side of it until they are directly alongside them. The issue of a physical restriction of the width of the footpath is considered to be a particular issue for 29 Church Street, Reading (PL/25/1352)

In addition, where located near to the highway, they create an obstruction which may result in people potentially stepping into the road. This is a particular concern for 29 Church Street, Reading (PL/25/1352),

- **CCTV & Townsafe Radio – No Objection**

Due to the size and location of the BT hubs and the large LCD display the CCTV team were consulted as glare from the screen can affect the brightness on the CCTV iris, as the camera zooms in and out some LCD advertisements can cause the camera to lose sight of the target subject.

The CCTV and Townsafe Radio team have no objections to this proposal at this location.

External consultation:

- A planning notice for each application was attached to nearby street furniture on 7th October and left in place for a minimum of 21 days for the statutory consultation period.

Four letters of representation have been received as follows:

11 Shepherds Lane, Caversham, Reading RG4 7JJ - Caversham and District Residents' Association (CADRA) - Object

The Government's Wireless Infrastructure Strategy (2023) sets the ambition for nationwide coverage of standalone 5G in all populated areas by 2030. CADRA recognises the importance of Standalone 5G to deliver faster, low-latency and more reliable connectivity, providing significant long-term benefits which enable advanced technologies such as smart transport, healthcare innovation, and more efficient public services — all of which will benefit Caversham residents and businesses.

An essential part of this national rollout is the installation of 5G Street Hubs such as the one proposed. However, CADRA is concerned that the architecture and position of this proposal would have a negative impact on the street scene, the public realm, and public safety.

Pedestrian Safety and Accessibility

The proposed location is Church Street's busiest pavement, where it meets the passage leading to the Waitrose and Precinct car parks. Pedestrian flow will then be even worse, by narrowing what is already not a very wide pavement. This will prove especially challenging for people with mobility issues, those in wheelchairs, those with child buggies and those with visibility impairments.

Traffic Safety Concerns

The proximity of the hub to both the road, a pedestrian crossing, a busy junction and the turning in/out of the petrol station is a significant concern. The location of an illuminated sign would create both a clear distraction to drivers and the potential to confuse traffic signals at a point when safety should be paramount.

Current DfT guidance (Traffic Signs Manual Chapter 6, para. 10.2.9–10.2.11) requires that traffic and pedestrian signal heads remain “clearly visible to approaching road users and not confused with or obscured by other lighting or illuminated advertising displays.”

As such, it is obvious that increasing the background light and signs should be avoided in the proximity of a pedestrian crossing. The illuminated digital display at this location poses a real risk to road safety at a critical junction point.

Visual Impact and Character

The inclusion of a large illuminated digital display is unwelcome and out of keeping with this part of Caversham, which has seen significant street scene improvements in recent years. There are no comparable illuminated displays in the centre of Caversham. The precinct's owners have permission for

a new apartment block nearby, which will increase footfall and strengthen the case for keeping pavements uncluttered and safe.

Elsewhere in Reading, planned and existing Street Hubs are in wider, more open traffic free places or commercial areas, where other illuminated signs are already common.

In contrast, busy, narrow Church Street runs from the heart of the historic village centre into the Caversham Conservation Area. The proposed hub, while outside it, is in its setting. This hub does not align with the traditional character of the village, which should be maintained to support the interests of both the local community and traders.

Density of Infrastructure

CADRA notes with concern that BT has proposed two Street Hubs within approximately 70 metres of each other on Church Street (this application and PL/25/1388 & PL/25/1397). If both hubs are technically necessary for adequate 5G coverage and capacity, this suggests the technology requires significant infrastructure density. However, this makes it all the more important that the design minimises visual and physical impact. If both are not technically necessary, then the cumulative effect of two large, illuminated structures with four advertising screens in such proximity would have an unacceptable impact on the street scene and represents a prioritisation of advertising revenue over the quality of the public realm.

Maintenance Concerns

While the application talks of an anti-social behaviour management plan to ensure the upkeep of the hub, CADRA has little confidence that this will be done. The current phone box is in a terrible state and volunteer groups have been removing graffiti from the box for many years. The glass is now so heavily stained it has become opaque. This track record raises serious doubts about whether the proposed hub will be properly maintained, potentially becoming another eyesore and focus for anti-social behaviour.

Recommendations

CADRA asks that BT and the Council planners consider alternative designs or orientation options. A smaller cabinet design, without the large advertising screen, could provide the necessary technical function while reducing visual and physical impact. Alternatively, rotating the hub by 90 degrees, with no advertising facing the traffic side, would be a significant improvement, giving better sightlines, reducing obstruction and no risk to public safety. While we appreciate that advertising revenue supports the 5G rollout, the quality of the local street environment and public safety should take priority.

Conclusion

In summary, CADRA supports the Government's policy to expand 5G infrastructure but objects to the current siting and design in this proposal. We urge BT and the Council planners to explore adjustments that would better balance technological progress with the need to maintain a safe, uncluttered, and attractive street scene in Caversham.

Member of the Public - 59 Tredegar Road, RG4 8PF - Object

I strongly object to this proposal.

It goes against the council's aims to reduce visual and physical clutter in our public spaces. The advertisement screen will diminish the visual appeal of the precinct. The screens are obstacles to blind pedestrians. We should be getting rid of obstacles, not replacing them!

The screen is located next to a busy junction (Church St & Hemdean Rd) with a lot of interaction between crossing pedestrians and turning drivers. We do not need further distractions for drivers here.

Finally, the council has declared a climate crisis. In light of that, we should not encourage wasting energy and resources on these displays that will only stimulate further unnecessary and harmful consumerism.

Member of the Public – 28 Morecambe Avenue, Caversham – Object

I object to this proposal due to its negative impact on the appearance and safety of this busy junction.

The proposed 5G Street Hub, with its large illuminated advertising screen, would look completely out of place in the centre of Caversham, where there are no other illuminated displays. It would harm the character of the area, which has recently benefitted from public realm improvements to create a more attractive village centre.

The chosen site is one of the busiest pedestrian areas, near a crossing, petrol station and car park entrances. The structure would narrow the pavement and obstruct movement, especially for people with mobility issues, buggies or wheelchairs.

The bright digital screen would also distract drivers and risk confusion with nearby traffic signals, contrary to Department for Transport guidance (Traffic Signs Manual, Chapter 6).

With other Street Hubs already proposed nearby, this would lead to unnecessary visual clutter and over-commercialisation.

I fully support improved 5G coverage, but this design and location are inappropriate.

Member of the Public – 12 Bellingham Walk, Emmer Green, RG4 8LS - Object

I object to this installation on a number of grounds. Firstly, I believe that there is already far too much advertising around the area and often the adverts are for fast food which is responsible for a huge increase in ill health across society. Secondly, I think the position of this installation will be awkward for pedestrians as it will reduce the available width of the pavement in an area that has heavy footfall. Thirdly it would cause light pollution for residents who live in the area as it would be lit up all night and the kind of light emitted by these screens has been shown to be detrimental to sleep. Fourthly I think that Reading Council should consider how the sign will be powered, will the energy used come from renewable sources? will the installation increase the carbon footprint of our town?

5. EQUALITY ACT 2010

In determining this application, the Council is required to have regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. However, there is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that the protected groups identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application. Therefore, in terms of the key equalities protected characteristics it is considered there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

6. LEGAL AND PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

PL/25/1352/FUL

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations include relevant policies in the National Planning Policy framework (NPPF) - among them the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. The following local and national planning policy and guidance is relevant to this application:

The 'National Planning Policy Framework' ("NPPF") 2021 states clearly that its content is to be a material consideration in the determination of applications. The 'NPPF' states that due weight should be given to the adopted policies of the Local Plan according to their degree of consistency with the 'NPPF' (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the 'NPPF', the greater the weight that may be given).

PL/25/1357/ADV

Regulation 3 of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 requires the Local Planning Authority to exercise its powers under these regulations in the interests of amenity and public safety taking into account the provisions of the development plan, so far as they are material; and any other relevant factors. Regulation 3 states that factors relevant to amenity include the general characteristics of the locality, including the presence of any feature of historic, architectural, cultural, or similar interest. Factors relevant to public safety include highway safety and whether the advert would hinder security or surveillance devices, including speed cameras.

National Policy and Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework
National Planning Practice Guidance

Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)

CC7: (Design and the Public Realm)
CC8: (Safeguarding Amenity)
OU3: (Telecommunications Development)
OU4: (Advertisements)
TR3 (Access, Traffic & Highway-Related Matters)

7. APPRAISAL

Visual Amenity

It is considered that the size and prominent location of the proposed BT Street Hub measuring 3m in height by 1m in width along with the double sided 75inch LCD advert screens which will exhibit advertisement content for 10 seconds on rotation, positioned on the public footpath near St Martins Precinct - a busy shopping centre and thoroughfare, very close to public highway, opposite a busy highway bus gate and junction with Hemdean Road, near a busy petrol station and a frequently used traffic signal-controlled pedestrian crossing. The proposal would exacerbate an undesirable proliferation of visual clutter at this location. The Street Hub would look out of place and incongruent in appearance in the setting.

The proposal is contrary to Policy OU3, Policy OU4 and Policy CC8 of the Reading Local Plan 2019.

Residential Amenity

Due to the function of making and receiving calls and video calls the proposed development is considered detrimental to the amenity of nearby residents in terms of noise and disturbance. Whilst BT confirm the volume can be controlled, there remains an element of nuisance associated with having a two-way conversation outside in the middle of a street (rather than inside an enclosed kiosk) at times when the streets are quieter. The nearest residential property is sited less than 3m from the Street Hub. BT confirm the advertisement screen will dim to 600candella at nighttime, though this is far brighter than other advertisements, retail lighting and shopfront advertisements.

The proposed BT Street Hub is considered detrimental to residential amenity and conflict with Policy CC8 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

Public Safety

The siting of the proposed BT Hub measuring 3m in height by 1m in width along with the double sided 75inch LCD advert screens which will exhibit advertisement content for 10 seconds on rotation, positioned on the public footpath near St Martins Precinct - a busy shopping centre and thoroughfare, very close to public highway, opposite a busy highway bus gate and junction with Hemdean Road, near a busy petrol station and a frequently used traffic signal-controlled pedestrian crossing would distract drivers in a location where there is conflicting vehicle movement and high flows of traffic. This could result in sudden and unpredictable vehicle movements, increasing the risk of collisions with other vehicles or pedestrians.

The siting of the proposed BT Street Hub measuring 3m in height by 1m in width at this location adjacent to other street furniture and signage is considered unacceptable as it would add to the proliferation of clutter and additional obstacles that would be detrimental to the safety of footpath users including pedestrians with accessible needs such as wheelchair users, partially sighted and blind pedestrians.

The proposal conflict with policy TR3 of the Reading Local Plan 2019 and Policies DM12 (Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters) and DM22 (Advertisements) of the Sites and Detailed Policies Document 2012 (altered 2015) and Paragraphs 067 and 068 of the National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG).

8. CONCLUSION

Having considered the proposals, and taking all of the information from consultees, officers consider that the proposed siting of the 3m high by 1.3m wide BT Street Hub with double sided 75inch LCD advert screens positioned on the public footpath near St Martins Precinct - a busy shopping centre and thoroughfare, very close to public highway, opposite a busy highway bus gate and junction with Hemdean Road, near a busy petrol station and a frequently used traffic signal-controlled pedestrian crossing would be harmful in terms of Highway safety for all users from motor vehicles to able bodied pedestrians, wheelchair users to partially sighted or blind pedestrians. In addition, the proposals would result in harm to visual amenity.

In addition, the proposals would result in harm to visual amenity due to an unnecessary proliferation of clutter.

The proposed BT hub by virtue of its proximity to residential properties is considered harmful to residential amenity in terms of nuisance noise and illuminated digital advertisement.

Overall, it is considered that the proposal at this site would harm the interests of visual amenity, residential amenity and be harmful to public safety and road users.

9. RECOMMENDATION

REFUSE

1. The proposed BT Street Hub advertisement display screens by reason of their excessive size, garish appearance and prominent siting would appear as an unattractive and obtrusive feature which would have a visual dominance in the street scene, harmful to the visual amenity of the area. The proposal would exacerbate an undesirable proliferation of visual clutter at this location. The proposal is contrary to Policy OU3, Policy OU4, Policy CC7 and Policy CC8 of the Reading Local Plan 2019.

2. The proposed BT Street Hub advertisement display screens sited on the footpath adjacent to a busy classified A road, adjacent to St Martins Precinct - a busy shopping centre and thoroughfare, opposite a bus gate and junction with Hemdean Road and near a busy traffic signal-controlled pedestrian crossing would distract drivers in a location where there is conflicting vehicle movement and high flows of traffic. This could result in sudden and unpredictable vehicle movements, increasing the risk of collisions with other vehicles or pedestrians. By virtue of its illumination, orientation, and positioning, would create additional obstacles that would be detrimental to the safety of footpath users including pedestrians with accessible needs such as wheelchair users, partially sighted and blind pedestrians. As such the proposal is contrary to Policy TR3, Policy OU3 and Policy OU4 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and Policies DM12 (Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters) and DM22 (Advertisements) of the Sites and Detailed Policies Document 2012 (altered 2015) and Paragraphs 067 and 068 of the National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG).
3. The proposed BT Street Hubs by reason of their user interface and calling facilities would cause unnecessary noise nuisance to residential properties in proximity. The proposal would therefore result in harm to residential amenity, contrary to Policy OU3 Policy OU4 and Policy CC8 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.