

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Ward: Thames Ward

App Ref: **a)** PL/25/1389 Full planning permission & **b)** PL/25/1398 Consent to display an advertisement

Address: FLAT C, 31 VASTERN ROAD, READING, RG1 8DJ

Proposal: Proposed installation of 1no. new BT Street Hub, incorporating 2no. digital 75" LCD advert screens, and associated BT Phone Kiosk removal.

Applicant: Verity Cheyne

Received date: 30/09/2025

Target Decision date: 28/11/2025

Case Officer: Huimin Chen

Two applications have been submitted; one application (PL/25/1389) seeks planning permission for the installation of a BT Street Hub, whilst a separate application (PL/25/1398) 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 relates to the land adjacent to The Station Retail Park and the A329 Vastern Road, which is currently a paved pedestrian pathway. To the south of the site, there is an existing signboard approximately 4 m in height, and a narrow pedestrian route provides access to retail units, including The Range and ALDI. To the northwest, there is a vehicular exit connecting to Vastern Road.



Fig 1: Image of the application site captured from Google Street View, dated 27/11/25



Fig 2: Extract of Location Plan submitted.

It should be noted that there is an outline application (PL/20/0328) for the redevelopment of The Station Retail Park, which was allowed in March 2024. This application includes landscaping and pedestrian/cyclist improvements along the Vastern Road footway, as well as provision for residential use.

2. PROPOSAL AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The application seeks permission for the installation of one new BT Street Hub, incorporating two digital 75-inch LCD advertising screens, along with the removal of the existing BT phone kiosk.

The proposed Street Hub would measure approximately 1.2 m in width, 0.35 m in depth, and 3.0 m in height. It would comprise a galvanised mild steel structure with powder-coated external-grade stainless steel or a complete aluminium design, finished with painted powder-coated cladding. The display screens would be glazed with anti-glare glass. The screens are intended to display content at 10-second intervals, featuring advertising content. The LCD screens automatically dim at nighttime to 600candela. In addition to advertising, the Street Hub would provide public and encrypted Wi-Fi, free phone calls, USB charging and an emergency services button.

However, the proposed block plan does not currently show the position of the existing BT phone kiosk or indicate its removal, and no existing phone kiosk was identified in the vicinity of the proposed site during the site visit on 25 October 2025.

Plans/documents considered for both applications:

- REA-107 – Planning Statement, dated 24/09/2025
- BT Street Hub Overexposure and Glare Evaluation, dated 03/2025
- BT Street Hub Product Statement V2, dated 09/2024
- REA-107 - BT Street Hub ICNIRP Certificate, dated 26/06/2025
- The Brightness of Illuminated Advertisements Including Digital Displays-Professional Lighting Guide 05/23
- BT Street Hubs Anti-Social Behaviour Management Plan, V3.
- Drawing No. REA-107-001 Rev. A – Site Local Plan, dated 16/09/2025
- Drawing No. REA-107-002 Rev. A – Proposed Site Plan, dated 16/09/2025
- Drawing No. REA-107-003 Rev. A – Existing and Proposed Elevations, dated 16/09/2025
- Drawing No. REA-107-003 Rev. A – BT Street Hub Unit All Round Elevations, dated 02/04/2025.

Received 30th September 2025.

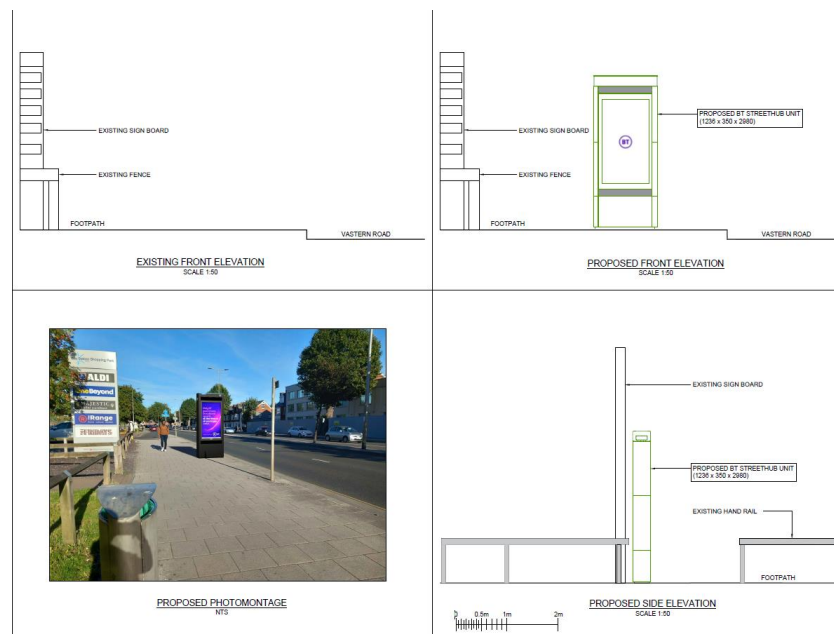


Fig 3: Existing and Proposed Plans

Planning Officer Notes: With regard to the drawing no. REA-107-003 Rev. A – Existing and Proposed Elevations, dated 16/09/2025, officers note that the overall height of the existing signboard next to the proposed site is inconsistent in the existing/proposed front elevations and proposed side elevation.

3. PLANNING HISTORIES

Vastern Court Caversham Road Reading

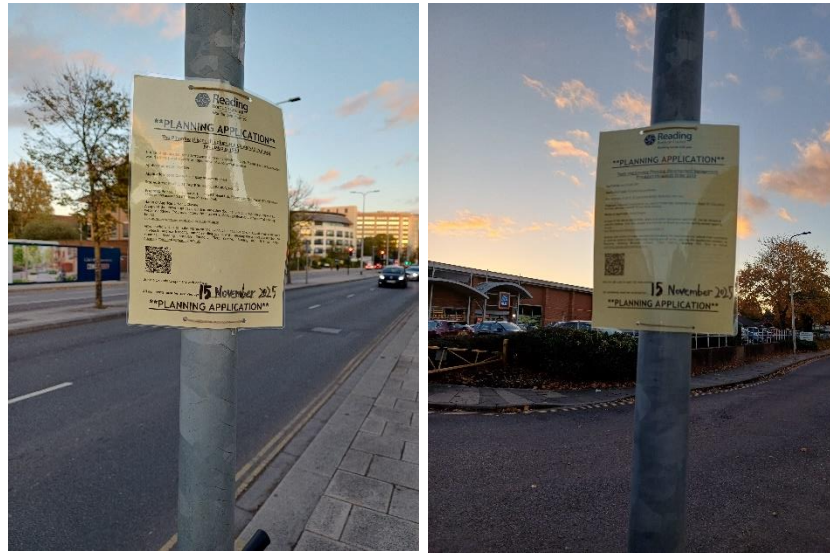
- PL/06/0974 - Erection of non-illuminated freestanding signs and a fascia signs for Vastern Court Retail Park. Approved 16/10/2006.
- PL/07/1370 - 1 x non-illuminated single sided directory sign and 1 x non-illuminated double sided monolith sign. Approved 31/10/2007.
- PL/20/0328 - Outline planning permission with the details of access, appearance, landscaping, layout and scale reserved for later determination. A demolition phase and phased redevelopment (each phase being an independent act of development) comprising a flexible mix of the following uses, Residential(Class C3 and including PRS), Offices (Use Class B1(a), development in Use Classes A1, A2, A3(retail), A4(public house), A5(take away), D1 and D2(communitiy and leisure), car parking, provision of new plant and renewable energy equipment, creation of servicing areas and provision of associated services, including waste, refuse, cycle storage, and lighting, and for the laying out of the. Allowed 21/03/2024.

4. CONSULTATIONS

1) Thames Valley Police – **Object**

- Public Safety Risks
 - Proposed hubs at Vastern Road, Broad Street, Station Approach, and Friar Street will create blind spots and glare from illuminated advertising screens.
 - Brightness and colour casting reduce image quality, hindering crime detection and evidence gathering.
 - Risk of compromised public safety, especially during the Night Time Economy.
- Street Clutter & Pinch Points
 - Units (approx. 3m high, 1m wide) create obstructions, narrowing pavements and reducing visibility.

- Potential hiding spots for offenders and risk of pedestrians stepping into roads.
 - Specific concern at Church Street, Caversham, London Road, Vastern Road, Oxford Road, and The Triangle.
 - Crime & Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)
 - Evidence shows hubs are misused for drug dealing and attract ASB.
 - Free Wi-Fi and calls encourage loitering; textured paving is recommended to deter sitting.
 - 999 Call Button & Charging Facilities
 - Previous misuse of 999 buttons caused unnecessary emergency calls.
 - Charging points create theft risks and a “honeypot” effect for criminals.
 - Requested Conditions if Approved
 - Manage hubs per Anti-Social Behaviour Management Plan (Version 3).
 - Switch off illuminated adverts between 22:00–06:00.
 - Submit a CCTV management plan detailing use and data handling.
- 2) CCTV Consultations – **Object**
The issue we have is the testing that has been done for the glare from the lights. I take it it's from a static camera, so no impact; however, the issue will be with the iris of the camera if you go to move the CCTV camera to follow somebody, this is when it becomes an issue with the camera. If the exact position can be given, we might be able to say how about moving it across the other side of the road or something like that.
- 3) RBC Transport Development Control – **Object**
The siting of the proposed BT Street Hub would also reduce the footway/cycleway width below an acceptable level, which would be detrimental to the safety of users of the transport network, including pedestrians and cyclists. This would be in conflict with Local Transport Note 1/20, Local Plan Policy TR3 and Paragraphs 026, 028, 067 and 068 of the National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG). Conditions would be required if it is to be recommended for approval.
- 4) RBC Environment Protection Team – **No objection**
No residential units around.
- 5) Access Officer Consultation – **Object**
Pavements being narrowed by clutter make it difficult for wheelchair users and those who have sight impairments to get around.
- 6) Site notice: A site notice was posted on 25 October 2025 adjacent to the application site. The statutory 21-day consultation period expired on 15 November 2025. No letters of representation have been received.



Figures 4 & 5: Site notice photos

5. EQUALITY ACT 2010:

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

6. LEGAL AND PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

PL/25/1389/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/25/1398/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

National Planning Policy Framework 2024

- Part 10: Supporting High Quality Communications
- Part 12: Achieving Well Designed Places

National Planning Practice Guidance 2014 onwards

- Advertisements

Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)

CC7: Design and the Public Realm

CC8: Safeguarding Amenity

TR1: Achieving The Transport Strategy

TR3: Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters

OU3: Telecommunications Development

OU4: Advertisements

Local Plan Update

The current version of the Local Plan (adopted in November 2019) turned five years old on Tuesday 5th November 2024. The Local Plan was reviewed in March 2023 and around half of the policies in the plan are considered still up to date. However, the rest need to be considered for updating to reflect changing circumstances and national policy. A submission draft of the Local Plan was submitted on 9th May 2025.

Although there is a five-year period for carrying out a review of a plan after it is adopted, nothing in the NPPF or elsewhere says that policies automatically become “out of date” when they are five years old. It is a matter of planning judgement rather than legal fact whether a plan or policies within it are out-of-date. This will depend on whether they have been overtaken by things that have happened since the plan was adopted, either on the ground or through changes in national policy, for example.

Officer advice in respect of the Local Plan policies pertinent to this application is that they remain in accordance with national policy and that the objectives of those policies remains very similar in the draft updated Local Plan. Therefore, they can continue to be afforded weight in the determination of this planning application and are not considered to be ‘out of date’.

7. APPRAISAL

- a) Principle of development**
- b) Impact on public safety**
- c) Impact on visual and residential amenity**
- d) Biodiversity Net Gain

a) Principle of development

The site is located within a commercial area. It is acknowledged that both the NPPF and the Reading Borough Local Plan encourage high-quality communications infrastructure. Therefore, the proposal is considered acceptable in principle, subject to there being no adverse impact on public safety or amenity.

b) Impact on public safety

The NPPG (in particular in this instance Paragraph: 067 Reference ID: 18b-067-20140306, Paragraph: 068 Reference ID: 18b-068-20140306 and Paragraph: 078 Reference ID: 18b-078-20140306), provides guidance as to the considerations affecting public safety.

Policy CC8 also requires that the development will not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties, in terms of noise, disturbance, crime and safety.

Policies TR1 and TR3 collectively require that development proposals ensure adequate accessibility and safety for all modes of transport, including walking and cycling, and that they do not compromise the safety of users of the transport network.

Policy OU4 of Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 requires that advertisements will not have a detrimental effect on public safety. The cumulative impact of adverts will be taken into account, and a proliferation of advertisements that detrimentally affects public safety will not be acceptable. All adverts shall comply with the following criteria regarding safety:

- “d) Advertisements will not reduce visibility for users of the highway or accesses onto the highway;*
- e) Illumination should not detract from the amenity of the area or pose a safety hazard to users of the highway; and*
- f) Advertisements should not obscure the sight lines of cameras installed for public safety.”*

The application site is located adjacent to the A329 Vastern Road, which forms part of the Inner Distribution Road (IDR) immediately north of Reading Railway Station. The site lies within a shared footway/cycleway route and experiences high pedestrian footfall and vehicular traffic due to its proximity to the Station Retail Park. The proposed BT Street Hub would reduce the existing footway width from approximately 4.4 m to around 2.6 m. Local Transport Note 1/20 recommends a minimum width of 3 m for low-traffic shared routes and 4.5 m for routes with higher cyclist traffic. The reduction below these standards is considered unacceptable and would likely result in conflict between pedestrians and cyclists, increasing the risk of accidents and compromising the safety of all users.

The site also lies adjacent to an approved outline application (PL/20/0328) for the redevelopment of the Station Retail Park, which includes landscaping and pedestrian/cyclist improvements along the Vastern Road footway. It is reasonable to give consideration to this future proposal; The installation of the proposed BT Street Hub is also considered detrimental to the delivery of these improvements and would undermine the objectives of the approved scheme.

Furthermore, as highlighted by Thames Valley Police, the proposed BT Street Hub would create blind spots for CCTV cameras and introduce glare from illuminated advertising screens, reducing image quality and hindering real-time monitoring. These issues compromise the ability to identify individuals and respond effectively to incidents, particularly within the Night Time Economy. The additional light sources and physical presence of the unit could therefore pose a significant public safety risk.

Additionally, the proposed hub would introduce street clutter near the highway, creating pinch points that may force pedestrians into the carriageway, increasing the likelihood of collisions. The cumulative impact of these factors is considered harmful to the safety and security of the public realm.

Overall, the proposed BT Street Hub at Vastern Road would significantly harm public safety. It would reduce the shared footway/cycleway below recommended standards, creating conflict between pedestrians and cyclists, and introducing street clutter that increases the risk of collisions. In addition, the unit would impair CCTV coverage and hinder real-time monitoring, particularly during the Night Time Economy, thereby undermining crime prevention and emergency response. For these reasons, the proposal is considered unacceptable on public safety grounds.

c) Impact on visual and residential amenity

Policies CC7, OU3, and OU4 of the Reading Borough Local Plan collectively require that development proposals, including telecommunications infrastructure and advertisements, are of high design quality and

do not adversely impact the character or visual amenity of the surrounding area. Advertisements must respect their setting in terms of size, location, design, materials, colour, illumination, and luminance, and the cumulative impact should not result in harm to visual or aural amenity. Development will only be acceptable where it maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area and avoids detrimental effects on the streetscene.

The proposed hub is substantial in scale, measuring approximately 3 m in height and 1.2 m in width, which would reduce the footway to around 2.6 m. While the site already contains a taller signboard and some traffic signage (see Fig. 1), the addition of the hub would contribute to a proliferation of street furniture and visual clutter within the streetscene. Cumulatively, the proposal does not respect its surroundings in terms of size and location and is therefore considered harmful to visual amenity.

Given that the surrounding area is currently in commercial use, there are no immediate concerns regarding noise disturbance. However, an approved outline application (PL/20/0328) includes the provision of residential units in the vicinity. It is reasonable to take this future context into account when assessing amenity impacts. The hub's open design and provision of free Wi-Fi and call facilities could encourage people to congregate, leading to raised voices and laughter, particularly during evening hours. Unlike traditional enclosed phone booths, conversations would occur in the street environment, increasing the potential for noise. The Environmental Protection team has raised similar concerns for other locations. While mitigation could be considered if permission were granted, the likelihood of increased noise and congregation around the hub presents a potential risk of disturbance to future residents, which should be weighed in the overall assessment of the proposal.

d) Biodiversity Net Gain

The biodiversity gain planning condition does not apply in relation to planning permission for development which is subject to the de minimis exemption (Development that does not impact a priority habitat and impacts less than 25 square metres (e.g. 5m by 5m) of onsite habitat, or 5 metres of linear habitats such as hedgerows.)

8. CONCLUSION

The proposed development would have an unacceptable impact on public safety due to the reduction of the shared footway/cycleway from approximately 4.4 m to around 2.6 m, below the standards set out in Local Transport Note 1/20. This narrowing would create conflict between pedestrians and cyclists, compromising highway safety and accessibility, particularly for vulnerable users. Furthermore, the introduction of a large structure in a constrained streetscene would create pinch points and street clutter, increasing the risk of collisions and opportunities for anti-social behaviour and crime, as highlighted by Thames Valley Police. The proposal would also impair CCTV coverage and hinder real-time monitoring, particularly during the Night Time Economy, undermining crime prevention and emergency response.

In addition, the scale and siting of the Street Hub would result in visual clutter, failing to respect the character and appearance of the area. The provision of free Wi-Fi and call facilities is likely to encourage loitering and raised voices, creating a potential risk of noise disturbance for future residents, given the approved outline application for mixed residential development nearby. These impacts are considered harmful to both visual and aural amenity.

While national and local policies encourage high-quality communications infrastructure, the benefits of the proposal do not outweigh the identified harm regarding public safety and amenity. The development is therefore considered contrary to Policies CC7, CC8, TR1, TR3, OU3, OU4 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (2019) and relevant sections of the National Planning Policy Framework.

9. RECOMMENDATION

REFUSED

1. The proposed development would reduce the shared footway/cycleway to an unsafe width, creating conflict between pedestrians and cyclists and compromising accessibility, particularly for vulnerable users. The introduction of a large structure would create pinch points and street clutter, increasing collision risks and opportunities for anti-social behaviour. In addition, the hub would impair CCTV coverage and hinder crime prevention. As such, the proposal is contrary to Policies CC7, CC8, TR1, TR3, OU3, OU4 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and the National Planning Policy Framework.
2. 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 and NPPF.
3. The proposed BT Street Hub by reason of its user interface and calling facilities, would cause unnecessary noise nuisance to future residential properties close to the site. 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.