

DELEGATED APPLICATION REPORT

Ward: Caversham Ward

App Ref: **a)** PL/25/1388 Full planning permission & **b)** PL/25/1397 Consent to display an advertisement

Address: ROAD NEAR 36A CHURCH STREET, CAVERSHAM, READING, RG4 8AU

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/25/1388) seeks planning permission for the installation of a BT Street Hub, whilst a separate application (PL/25/1397) 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 situated to the south of Church Street, a busy public highway within the Caversham District Centre. High pedestrian footfall and vehicular traffic are therefore commonplace. Superdrug and Waitrose are located to the west and east, respectively, while the application site lies directly adjacent to the pedestrian walkway positioned between these two retail units. The surrounding area comprises a mix of commercial and residential uses. There is no existing BT kiosk in the vicinity of the proposal site.



Figures 1 & 2: Image of the application site captured from Google Street View, dated 28/11/25; Extract of Location Plan submitted.

It is noted that another planning application has been submitted for a new BT Street Hub outside 29 Church Street, approximately 70m west of the proposed site is being considered under application no. PL/25/1352.

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.

Plans/documents considered for both applications:

- REA-102 – 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-102 - 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-102-001 Rev. A – Site Local Plan, dated 16/09/2025
- Drawing No. REA-102-002 Rev. A – Proposed Site Plan, dated 16/09/2025
- Drawing No. REA-102-003 Rev. A – Existing and Proposed Elevations, dated 16/09/2025
- Drawing No. REA-102-003 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 drawing no. REA-102-003 Rev. A – Existing and Proposed Elevations, dated 16/09/2025, the officers note that the overall heights of the background properties and structures are shown incorrectly.

3. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORIES

Pavement o/s 29 Church Street

- PL/25/1352 - The proposed installation of 1no. BT Street Hub and removal of associated existing BT payphone(s). Refused 19/11/2025.
- PL/25/1357 - The proposed installation of 1no. BT Street Hub and removal of associated existing BT payphone(s). Refused 19/11/2025.

4. CONSULTATIONS

1) Thames Valley Police – **Object**

- Public Safety Risks
 - Bright screens interfere with CCTV during live tracking, allowing offenders to escape.
 - Increased risk during Night Time Economy; could undermine efforts to prevent sexual violence.
 - If approved, illuminated adverts should be switched off between 22:00–06:00.
- 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.
 - Integrated CCTV cameras must be operational and managed.
- 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 – **No objection.**

The Caversham one, there is a CCTV camera at that location, but it hasn't worked for years and is for traffic, so that will be ok, I believe.

3) RBC Transport Development Control – **Object**

It is the Highway Authority's view that proposed location of the BT Street Hub would be detrimental to the safety of users of the transport network, including pedestrians and visually impaired people. As such, the proposed advertisement, would be a conflict with Reading Borough Local Plan Policies and paragraphs of the NPPG.

4) RBC Environment Protection team – **Concerns Raised.**

I have concerns about street hubs 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 responded to the concerns regarding surrounding noise and disturbance to residential properties as follows:

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.

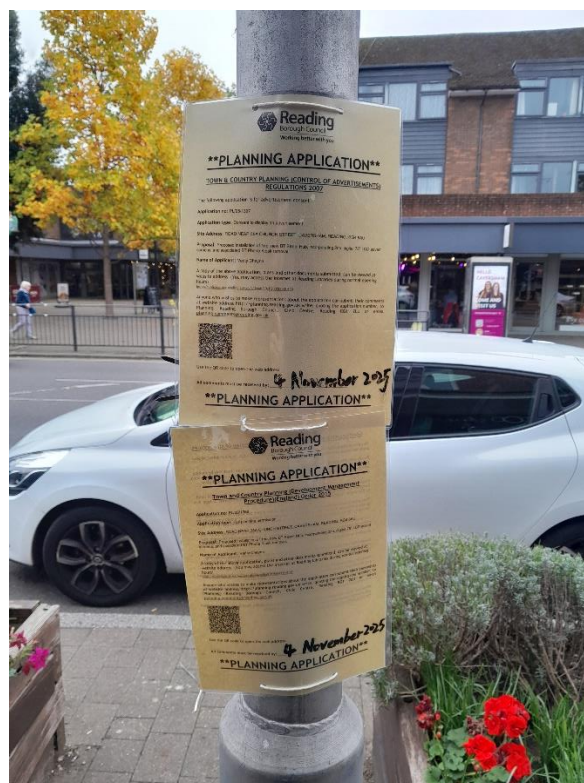
With regards to the calling facility, it is of note that there are different volume capabilities so that users can have quieter calls when late at night. There is also an option to disable the speaker so that this cannot be used at late times. However, it is anticipated that most calls will be made using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

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

5) Access Officer Consultation – **Object**

The access officer has concerns that the additional development will create a hazard for persons with disabilities, wheelchair users and the visually impaired.

- 6) Site notice: A site notice was posted on 14 October 2025 adjacent to the application site. The statutory 21-day consultation period expired on 4 November 2025. Two letters of representation have been received.



Figures 4 & 5: Site notice photos

Letters of representation have been received as follows:

- | | | |
|---|---|--------|
| • Caversham and District Residents' Association (CADRA) | 11 Shepherds Lane, Caversham, Reading RG4 7JJ | Object |
| • Member of the Public | 12 Bellingham Walk, Emmer Green, RG4 8LS | Object |

A summary of CADRA's objection comments: CADRA supports the Government's ambition for nationwide 5G coverage, but objects to the current siting and design of the proposed Street Hub. Their concerns include:

- **Pedestrian Safety:** The hub would narrow Church Street's busiest pavement, creating accessibility issues for wheelchair users, parents with buggies, and visually impaired pedestrians.
- **Traffic Safety:** The illuminated display near a pedestrian crossing and busy junction risks distracting drivers and conflicting with traffic signals, contrary to DfT guidance.
- **Visual Impact:** The large digital screen is out of keeping with the character of Caversham and its Conservation Area setting, where no similar illuminated signage exists.
- **Infrastructure Density:** Two hubs within 70m would create cumulative visual clutter and prioritise advertising over public realm quality.
- **Maintenance:** Past neglect of the existing phone box raises doubts about upkeep, risking vandalism and anti-social behaviour.
- **Recommendations:** CADRA urges consideration of alternative designs or orientations, such as smaller cabinets without advertising screens or rotating the hub to reduce obstruction and safety risks.

In summary, CADRA supports 5G rollout but seeks adjustments to minimise visual, physical, and safety impacts on Caversham's street scene.

A summary of 12 Bellingham Walk's objection comments: I strongly object to this installation for a number of reasons.

- **Pedestrian Safety:** The hub would obstruct a busy walkway, making access harder for people with mobility issues, wheelchair users, and those with pushchairs or visual impairments. It could also reduce visibility for pedestrians crossing Prospect Street.
- **Visual Character:** Digital advertising is currently absent in Caversham; introducing it would be out of character for the area.
- **Light Pollution & Driver Distraction:** Bright screens could distract drivers at night and negatively affect nearby residents' sleep.
- **Advertising Content Concerns:** Lack of clarity on what products or services would be promoted, raising ethical and health-related concerns.
- **Environmental Impact:** Questions about energy source, renewable use, and the hub's contribution to the town's carbon footprint.

In summary, the objection cites safety, visual impact, light pollution, advertising ethics, and environmental concerns.

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/25/1388/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/25/1397/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 mixed commercial and residential 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 proposed BT Street Hub would be located on the footway adjacent to a busy pedestrian route between Superdrug and Waitrose within the Caversham District Centre. This area experiences high footfall and serves as a key link to nearby retail units and car parks.

The submitted site plan indicates a total footway width of approximately 4.8m; however, only around 2.7m is adopted highway, with the remainder in private ownership. Installation of the Street Hub would reduce the adopted footway to approximately 1.45m. This narrowing is considered unacceptable given the level of pedestrian activity and the need to maintain inclusive access.



Fig 6: Image of adopted highway, extracted from Reading Council's GIS system dated 28/11/25

The reduction in width creates a pinch point at a location already constrained by the junction with a covered walkway. Such pinch points can impede movement for wheelchair users, those with pushchairs, and individuals with visual impairments, particularly if adjacent land cannot be accessed. The obstruction also reduces forward visibility, which may increase the risk of collisions between pedestrians and create opportunities for anti-social behaviour.

Given the size of the proposed unit (nearly 3m high and over 1m wide), its presence would introduce significant street clutter in a sensitive location. This is contrary to best practice for maintaining safe, accessible, and uncluttered public spaces in busy district centres. Therefore, the proposal is considered detrimental to public safety.

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. The site already contains street furniture, including lighting columns, bins, cabinets, a huge shopfront canopy from Superdrug, and a section of long handrail. The addition of the proposed street hub would introduce further visual clutter within the streetscape. Cumulatively, the proposal fails to respect its surroundings in terms of size and location and is therefore considered harmful to visual amenity.

Furthermore, the hub's open design and provision of free Wi-Fi and call facilities are likely to encourage people to congregate, leading to raised voices, particularly during evening hours. Unlike traditional enclosed phone booths, conversations would occur in the street environment, increasing the potential for noise disturbance. This is of particular concern given the presence of residential properties above the ground-floor commercial units along Church Street. While mitigation could be considered, this report recommends refusal, and noise impact forms part of the reasons for refusal.

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

While national and local planning policy supports the delivery of high-quality communications infrastructure, this must be balanced against the need to protect public safety, visual amenity, and residential living conditions. The proposed BT Street Hub at 36A Church Street would significantly narrow the adopted footway in a high-footfall location, creating an unacceptable pinch point that compromises accessibility for wheelchair users, those with pushchairs, and visually impaired pedestrians. Its substantial scale and illuminated advertising screens would introduce visual clutter, detracting from the character of the streetscene. Furthermore, the open design and associated facilities risk increased noise and anti-social behaviour, adversely affecting nearby residential properties.

For these reasons, the proposal is considered contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework and relevant policies of the Reading Borough Local Plan, including CC7, CC8, TR1, TR3, OU3, and OU4. The harm identified cannot be mitigated through conditions without fundamentally altering the nature of the development. Therefore, planning permission and advertisement consent should be refused.

9. RECOMMENDATION

REFUSED

1. The proposed BT Street Hub would have an unacceptable impact on public safety as it would significantly reduce the width of the adopted footway in a location of high pedestrian footfall within the Caversham District Centre. This narrowing would create a pinch point that compromises inclusive access for wheelchair users, those with pushchairs, and visually impaired pedestrians. It may also encourage antisocial behaviour. As such, the proposal is contrary to Policies CC7, CC8, TR1, TR3, OU3 and OU4 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and National Planning Policy Framework.
2. By reason of its substantial scale, height, and design, the proposed hub would introduce additional visual clutter into an already congested streetscene, failing to respect its surroundings in terms of size and location. This cumulative impact would harm the character and appearance of the area, contrary to Reading Borough Local Plan Policies CC7, CC8, OU3 and OU4, which require development and advertisements to respect their setting and avoid detrimental effects on visual amenity.
3. The proposed BT Street Hub by reason of its user interface and calling facilities would cause unnecessary noise nuisance to 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.