



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Statement by Wokingham Borough Council Local Planning Authority

Appellant:	BT Telecommunications Plc
Site:	Land outside 25 Peach Street, Wokingham, RG40 1XJ
Appeal A	
Local Planning Authority Reference: (Planning Application)	252518
Planning Inspectorate Reference: (Planning Application)	6003550
Appeal B	
Local Planning Authority Reference: (Advertisement Consent Application)	252519
Planning Inspectorate Reference:	6003550

Dated: 25th February 2026

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Full planning permission was refused on 27th of November 2025 under application reference 252518. The development was for the proposed installation of 1 no. BT Street Hub and removal of existing telephone booth. The digital advertising display element of the proposal was the subject of a separate advertisement consent application which is recorded under Wokingham Borough Council reference 252519 and was refused consent on 27th November 2025.

1.2 The full application was refused for the following reasons:

1. Owing to its location, siting and scale, the proposed development would result in an incongruent, oppressive and visually imposing addition to street scene. It would also fail to conserve or enhance the Wokingham Town Centre Conservation Area and the setting of several Grade II Listed Buildings. The proposed development is therefore contrary to policy CP3 of the Core Strategy (2010) and TB24 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014), Section 66 and Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the NPPF.

1.3 The advertisement consent application was refused for the following reason:

1. The proposed digital advertising screen would introduce an advertisement that, due to its size, illumination and changing display, would be visually dominant and unduly prominent to the detriment of the streetscape and would fail to conserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Wokingham Town Centre Conservation Area and the setting of Grade II Listed Buildings. The proposal is therefore contrary to policies TB19 and TB24 of the MDD (2014).

Left: The site location in wider context. Right: Detailed location of proposed BT Street Hub with existing Street Furniture demonstrated

applications (December 2024). It is not considered that the draft version of the NPPF fundamentally or significantly impacts the assessment of these proposals. The Council is of the view that the proposals remain contrary to principles outlined in the NPPF in relation to principles of design and heritage assets, with particular reference, but not limited to paragraphs 139 and 215.

5.0 Response to Appellant's Grounds of Appeal and Planning Considerations in relation to refused full planning application (252518)

- 5.1 The following comments are made in response to specific parts of the grounds for appeal and related documents submitted by the Appellant to date and should be read in conjunction with the officer report. The reason for refusal will be discussed in turn with a response to the Appellant's comments.

Reason for refusal

- 5.2 This reason for refusal centers around the inappropriate location, siting and scale of the proposed development in the street scene and the development failing to conserve or enhance heritage assets, namely the Wokingham Town Centre Conservation Area and the setting of several listed buildings along Peach Street (as demonstrated upon the above map) which are all Grade II Listed Buildings.
- 5.3 The Appellant states within their planning statement that the proposal *"when seen in perspective within the street scene, it is considered that the proposed siting and orientation of the BT Street Hub, will not appear incongruous or have a significant material impact on the setting or views of the Conservation Area or various Listed Buildings. It is ultimately considered that any minor harm upon the aforementioned heritage assets would be outweighed by the significant public benefits of the Street Hub in what is a vibrant part of the town of Wokingham and which is already dominated by retail shop frontages and an array of street furniture."*
- 5.4 As noted in the Officer delegated report, the Council respectfully disagree with the Appellant and do not consider the proposed BT Street Hub would 'conserve'

or 'enhance' the conservation area or setting of referred to Listed Buildings. Consequently, the proposal would be a clear breach of policy TB24 as neither benchmark has been satisfied. Therefore, the proposal would not have a 'neutral' effect on these heritage assets.

- 5.5 Part of the Conservation Area's significance is drawn from the extant townscape which is a direct evolution of the historic street plan and development of the town. Peach Street is part of heart of the town – the historic core. As this area is towards the centre of the Conservation Area, almost by definition, it is one of the more sensitive areas. Especially as the site is on the approach to Market Place which is the centre of the Town and Conservation Area. As such, any proposed change should respond to and respect the historic characteristics of the vicinity.
- 5.6 The proposed design of the BT Street Hub lacks the refinement of the original red phone box with the large digital screen over-dominating the suggested primary purpose of the structure. The result is that the structure is seen as a platform for advertising, rather than a telephone kiosk. The provision of the digital screen necessitates an overly large structure, much larger than would be required to house the telephony, Wi-Fi and wayfinding equipment proposed. At circa 2.98 metres in height, it would be an oppressive structure which is visually imposing, exacerbated by its sheer solidity due to the advertisement panel. It would add significantly to the street clutter in the vicinity and detract from the high street streetscape environment. The NPPF, at paragraph 117, states that proposals should *"avoid unnecessary street clutter and respond to local character and design standards"*. This proposal would fall foul of both. Street furniture in the vicinity is proportionate and functional, such as columns for road signage, litter bins and benches. This would see an excessive and out of keeping piece of street furniture.
- 5.7 Wokingham – whilst altered and expanded – remains a classic example of a Berkshire market town. This market town character is a key component of the Conservation Area's significance and thus value is designation. Whilst elements of the core have been altered/lost/remodelled, it is still read and understood as a market town. This is characterised by the irregular historic

street pattern, the mixture of vernacular building types and materials, which have developed over time. The proposed BT Street Hub belongs to busier metropolitan cityscape, as opposed to the relatively simple market townscape. Given this relatively simple, uncluttered character, by introducing the kiosk which has a divergent character, this would seek to erode part of the identified significance of the conservation area and setting of listed buildings.

- 5.8 Through the identified erosion of character and appearance of the area and conservation area, the proposals would also fail to preserve the setting of the aforementioned listed buildings, thus causing harm to their special interest. The requirement of policy TB24, for developments to as a minimum, 'at least conserve' the conservation area, is not being achieved.
- 5.9 Notwithstanding the identified harm above, Paragraph 215 of the NPPF states that *"where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use."*
- 5.10 In this case, the proposal, as discussed, will result harm to the conservation area and setting of the aforementioned listed buildings. The level of harm is considered to be less than substantial; this level appears to be disagreed by the Appellant. This harm needs to be weighed against public benefits. The appellant considers: *"that there will be limited harm to the area, in which any such harm is outweighed by the public benefits of the proposal, most notably the array of features it offers as well as securing the appeal site's optimum viable use by replacing existing public call boxes."*
- 5.11 It is acknowledged that the BT Street Hub will provide a public facility with the range of functions above and beyond a traditional telephone box. These benefits have been quantified by the Appellant and the 'need' aimed to be justified. It is noted in Paragraph 123 of the NPPF states that Local Planning Authorities should not question the need for electronic communications systems. This proposal is an enhanced communication system, with some elements (and presented benefits of the scheme) not relating to the electronic

communication element of the proposal, such as free WiFi. Not all benefits are encompassed or relate by the benefits of electronic communication apparatus outlined in the NPPF. As such, the weight of these benefits should be reduced in the heritage, and overall planning, balance. The Council considers that these benefits do not equal, override and outweigh the level of harm that has been identified to the Heritage Assets.

- 5.12 The appellant has submitted several appeal decisions to support the proposal. One of these, the Oxford decision, is not located within a Conservation Area. However, the Dursley Appeal decision is more similar in that the site is within a Conservation Areas and in proximity to Listed Buildings.
- 5.13 Notwithstanding this, the areas raised within the appeals differ from the appeal site and each case needs to be determined on its own merits. As outlined above, Wokingham has a market town character which is a key component of the Conservation Area's significance. Whilst elements of the core have been altered/lost/remodelled, it is still read and understood as a market town. A more relevant appeal decision in the view of the LPA is attached at Appendix 2 (Appeal Decisions APP/X0360/W/24/3356330 & APP/X0360/H/24/3356331) which is within proximity of the site and within Wokingham Town Centre itself.
- 5.14 The Inspector at paragraph 14 of the aforementioned appeal decisions states: *"I do not agree with the Appellant that it would at least conserve (or preserve) the character and appearance of the CA. It would have a divergent character, particularly the large illuminated digital advertisement display screen, and it would erode the historic curated significance of the CA."*
- 5.15 The Inspector goes on to state: *"I considered the harm to both the CA and to the listed buildings assessed above and consider that on an individual or cumulative basis the harm would be "less than substantial" in NPPF terms. There are public benefits to weigh against that heritage harm (and against the planning harm) including the defibrillator, the provision of WiFi and of a payphone for members of the public (without a mobile or a working mobile), being able to make emergency calls, the interactive wayfinding service and the use of screens for public and community information. In respect of the provision of a defibrillator there is currently one a few metres away in a red kiosk next to*

12A to 14 Broad Street and two in separate buildings off Rose Street (Waitrose and Methodist Church) and consequently this element can only carry limited weight on this occasion. Having considered the benefits as a whole, I do not consider that they are outweighed by harms I have identified above.” As is the case with this appeal, less than substantial harm has been identified and the public benefits of the BT Street Hub are not considered to outweigh these harms.

- 5.16 Both of the appeals were dismissed and were situated within 180 meters of the current application site. Given this, it is considered these appeals are more relevant than the appeals submitted by the appellant. As was the case with the Wokingham appeals, it is considered the current appeal should similarly be dismissed.
- 5.17 Finally, concerns have been reiterated by the Highways Department regarding the height of the BT Street Hub and the obstruction of a highway directional sign. Whilst this has not formed a separate reason for refusal in this instance, the height of the structure, as discussed above, adds to the overall character harms outlined within the reason for refusal.

6.0 Response to Appellant’s Grounds of Appeal to Advertisement Consent application (252519)

- 6.1 Advertisement consent was refused for the illuminated digital display screen on the BT Street Hub due to concern that the advertisement visually dominant and unduly prominent to the detriment of the streetscape and would fail to conserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Wokingham Town Centre Conservation Area and setting of several listed buildings.
- 6.2 Owing to the structure of the Appellant’s statement of case, there is not separate grounds of appeal for the advertisement consent application. However, it is noted that the Appellant believes that *“the siting and appearance of the BT Street Hub would not create significant harm to the amenity of the area that would outweigh the public benefits and other material factors of consideration.”*
- 6.3 Respectfully, the Council do not consider this outweighs or justifies the harm to

heritage assets. To avoid repetition and to outline the Local Planning Authority's position, please refer to the Officer's delegated report for the Council's case on the harm the advertisement would pose to the historic environment which remains unaltered in light of the Appellant's submission.

7.0 Conclusion

- 7.1 After consideration of the Appeal Documents, the Council remain strongly of the view that the proposal subject of these appeals remains unacceptable, as discussed throughout this statement. The Appellant is of the opinion that the development would be acceptable in relation to the surrounding historic environment and character of the area. However, the Council respectfully disagree with this and is unable to see that the proposal would 'conserve' or 'enhance' the setting of heritage assets; the requirement of policy TB24 of the MDD, nor would the less than substantial harm be outweighed by the public benefits when taking into account paragraph 215 of the NPPF. This is having regard to the provisions of the Development Plan and other material Considerations, including the National Planning Policy Framework and associated guidance.
- 7.2 The Inspector is therefore respectfully requested to dismiss both the planning and advertisement appeals on the basis of the above assessment and other supporting documentation already submitted.
- 7.3 If the Inspector is minded to allow one or both of the appeals, the Council would be grateful if the suggested conditions outlined in Appendix 1 could be considered.