

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	252518
Site Address:	Pavement outside, 25 Peach Street, Wokingham
Expiry Date:	11 December 2025
Site Visit Date:	27 October 2025
Proposal: Full application for the proposed installation of 1 no. BT Street Hub and removal of existing telephone booth.	

PLANNING POLICY

National Policy	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG)
Core Strategy (CS)	CP1 – Sustainable Development CP2 – Inclusive Communities CP3 – General Principles for Development CP6 – Managing Travel Demand CP8 – Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals CP13 – Town Centres and Shopping CP14 – Growth and Renaissance of Wokingham Town Centre
MDD Local Plan (MDD)	CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development CC02 – Development Limits CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping TB21 – Landscape Character TB24 – Designated Heritage Assets TB25 – Archaeology
Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update (LPU)	SS1 – Sustainable development principles ER6 – Town, district and local centres and shopping parades ER8 – Wokingham town centre NE5 – Landscape and design DH1 – Place making and quality design DH2 – Safeguarding amenity DH3 – Shopfronts DH4 – Advertisements and signage DH5 – The Historic Environment HC5 – Environmental protection HC7 – Light pollution HC8 – Noise pollution
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document Wokingham Town Centre & Langborough Road Conservation Areas Study

PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
252519	Application for advertisement consent for 1 no. digital advertisement display within proposed new communications kiosk.	Under consideration

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Environmental Health
WBC Highways – Further information required
WBC Built Heritage Officer - Objection

External

Crime Prevention Design Advisor – Amendments to the proposal required

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	Objection: <i>Objections from the committee: this development is in The Town Centre conservation / heritage area and is not in keeping. It will set an unwelcome precedent for similar developments in the town centre conservation area. Similar applications were rejected in the last two years, and this does not appear to differ substantially from those ones. The committee welcomes the plan to remove the existing phone box as it will enhance the Town Centre Conservation Area. Also restricts visibility of pedestrians from a driver's perspective so is unsafe (contrary to CP6(f)).</i> Officer comment: The above is noted and will be discussed within the report.
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	No comments received

APPRAISAL

Site Description: The application site is sited on Council highway land. It is located on the southern side of Peach Street. In the vicinity there are commercial/ retail units at street level. The site is located within the Wokingham Town Centre Conservation Area.

Proposal:

Planning permission is sought for the installation of a BT 'hub'. The proposed 'hub' would measure approximately 1.24m wide by 0.35m deep and 2.98m high, and would replace an existing telephone kiosk, measuring approximately 0.9m wide by 0.75m deep and 2.5m high. The 'hub' would be approximately 0.5m back from the highway edge, no closer than the existing kiosk.

On one side of the structure, the hub will incorporate a telephone (which will enable free calls mobiles, landlines, emergency services and various charities; the only paid

service is to international calls, which will be made by card payment), interactive wayfinding information USB charging points and Wi-Fi. On the reverse will be a digital advertising screen. The screen will be able to be used to display Council public information, public health information and emergency incident messaging. However, primarily it would be used for private advertising.

It should be noted that two separate applications have been submitted for this scheme; this FUL application for the BT Hub structure and an associated advertisement consent application for the digital advertisement screen (WBC ref. 252519). This report will only assess the hub and physical structure; the advertisement consent application will discuss the acceptability of the digital screen.

Principle of Development: The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has an underlying presumption in favour of sustainable development which is carried through to the local Development Plan.

Chapter 10 of the NPPF 'Supporting High Quality Communications' requires planning decisions to support digital infrastructure. Proposals should minimise the number of installations by using existing structures where feasible and ensure that new equipment is sympathetically designed and sited to reduce visual impact. Importantly, Local Planning Authorities should determine such applications on planning grounds only and should not question the need for the system.

The Managing Development Delivery Local Plan Policy CC01 states that planning applications that accord with the policies in the Development Plan for Wokingham Borough will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The site is located within settlement limits and as such the development should be acceptable providing that it complies with the principles stated in the Core Strategy. Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development must be appropriate in terms of its scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area in which it is located and must be of high quality design without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land uses and occupiers.

Design, Impact on Heritage Assets and Character of the Area:

Local Authorities are required by Section 66 and Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of Conservation Areas and effects a listed building or its setting when considering development proposals that affect the setting or views into it.

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development must be appropriate in terms of its scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area in which it is located and must be of high-quality design.

Policy TB24 of the MDD states that the Council will conserve and seek the enhancement of designated heritage assets in the Borough and their settings by: "Requiring works to or affecting heritage assets or their setting to demonstrate that the

proposals would at least conserve and, where possible enhance the important character and special architectural or historic interest of the building, Conservation Area, monument or park and garden including its setting and views.”

The application proposes the erection of a digital media advertisement screen formed of BT Hub with associated telephone on Peach Street, opposite Peach Place, outside of Poundstretcher within the Wokingham Town Centre Conservation Area – a designated heritage asset. In addition to the impact upon the Conservation Area, the proposals impact upon the wider setting of nos. 45, 48-50, 52 and The Overhangs (53, 55, 55A, 57 and 59) Peach Street – all Grade II listed buildings.

The unit is proposed to be sited on the pavement on the south side of Peach Street, in front of a stretch of inter-war and post war buildings, including the former Woolworths building, which, by virtue of their traditional architectural appearance, positively contribute the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. The pavement along this stretch is already heavily visually cluttered by street furniture, notwithstanding the proposed removal of the existing BT kiosk, along approx. 50m distance there are numerous telecoms and highways cabinets, a litter bin, traffic lights, a large road sign, a lamp post, bollards and a pedestrian bench. All of which result in a heavy concentration of street furniture and pedestrian obstacles.

At nearly 3m metres in height, the proposed unit would be a visually imposing structure. Through the monolithic form and scale, it would negatively contribute to existing street furniture. Furthermore, at over 1.2 in width, oriented perpendicularly to the highway, the unit would represent a substantive physical obstacle for users of the pavement. As such, the unit would add significantly to the street clutter in the vicinity, compounding the pre-existing situation, and further erode the appearance and visual amenity of the immediate area.

The proposed structure is presented as public telephone hub which would replace the existing BT telephone box. However, the proposed design lacks refinement of the original with the large digital screen over-dominating the suggested primary purpose of the structure. The result is that the structure performs primarily as a platform for advertising, rather than a telephone hub. The provision of the digital screen informs the necessity for an overly large structure, much larger than would be required to house the telephony, Wi-Fi and wayfinding equipment proposed. At circa 2.5 metres in height, it would be a large structure which is visually imposing, exacerbated by its sheer solidity due to the advertisement panel. Street furniture that does exist in the vicinity is proportionate and representative of its function, such as columns for road signage, litter bins and benches. This development would result in an excessive and out of keeping piece of street furniture.

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 kiosk is more typical of a 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.

It is acknowledged that the kiosk would be located outside of the 1960s parade which in itself does not positively contribute to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area (although arguably it does represent 'honest' developmental history), this should not be an argument to permit further harmful aspects within the Conservation Area. Where negative aspects occur, the argument should be on improvement not adding to the negative. The location is still a historic part of the Conservation Area, and this is demonstrated through the number of listed buildings in the setting.

Through the identified erosion of character and appearance of the character 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.

Notwithstanding the identified harm above, Paragraph 208 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."

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. The harm needs to be weighed against public benefits. It is acknowledged that the kiosk will provide a public facility (with the range of functions outlined earlier in this report). There is an existing public phone box in the immediate vicinity which is proposed to be replaced. It is noted that the proposal will provide some extra functions such as an interactive map and Wi-Fi which are benefits. However, it is the view of Officers that these benefits do not equal, override and outweigh the level of harm that has been identified to the heritage assets. This view is also agreed by the WBC Built Heritage Officer.

Notwithstanding the above, attention now turns to policy CP1 of the Core Strategy states that proposals should provide attractive, functional, accessible, safe, secure and adaptable schemes.

A management plan has been provided by the applicant and advises that the kiosks will be subject to bi-weekly inspections. Concern over criminal damage and misuse of emergency numbers cannot be reasons to resist this application as they are speculative. The benefits of having access to free calls to a range of telephone calls at no cost is also a benefit of the scheme.

Is noted that the kiosk is not enclosed, being open sided one end and having a transparent screen the other side and so will not be enclosed spaces for offences or anti-social behaviour.

The kiosk would be located in an urban area that is subject to natural surveillance from good levels of footfall. The structure would not be located in an area of open space as opposed to being located in close proximity to another structure to create a hiding place for individuals. Whilst it is acknowledged that due to the height of the structure that it would conceal individuals located behind them, the built environment is not level or open at all times. It is not considered this would pose a substantial risk such that it would warrant refusal of the application in its own right.

As such, whilst Officers consider the proposal is, on balance, acceptable in light of Policy CP1 given the identified harm to the Conservation Area, settling of listed buildings and character of the area generally, the proposed development would conflict with Policy CP3 of the Wokingham Borough Council Core Strategy and Policy TB24 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan.

Neighbouring Amenity:

Policy CP3 states that development should not detriment the amenities of adjoining land users and occupiers.

The kiosk would not be located immediately next to residential neighbours. However, given the distance away from the shop front (by approx. 2.7m) and the depth of the structure being less than 1m, it would encompass a very small portion of the shopfront. As such, the proposal will not result in a substantial loss of light to no. 25 Peach Street. Given this, there is insufficient grounds to resist the proposal on this basis.

Impact on Highways:

Policy CP6(g) of the Core Strategy states that proposals should not cause highway problems or lead to traffic related environmental problems.

WBC Highways were consulted on the application.

Visibility:

This section of Peach Street is a one-way street, is not a crossing point and is not at a bend. The proposed location is offset from the carriageway and replaces an existing telephone box. It is unlikely to have negative impacts on sight lines and pedestrian visibility, which is acceptable. Concerns have been raised by the Highway Officer regarding the kiosk obscuring a directional sign and compounding the existing issue given the additional height and distance from the sign. The applicant has provided Transport for London guidance for such structures within the highway/public footpath and whilst this is helpful the concerns of the highway officer remain. Whilst the concerns remain, it is not considered at this time that the proposal would result in detrimental harms in of itself.

Footway Clearance:

The proposal would replace an existing telephone box and as such would not reduce effective width of the footway which is considered acceptable. Despite it is recommended that the minimum distance between a structural and the carriageway is

500mm, due to the proposal replacing an existing structure, the proposed distance of 450mm is considered acceptable for this location.

As such, the siting of the kiosk is acceptable in relation to Highways considerations.

Conclusion

The public benefits of the scheme are noted and have been considered. However, these do not outweigh the harm that the development would have on the Wokingham Town Centre conservation area, setting of Listed Buildings and the area generally.

The proposal therefore fails to comply with the requirements of Section 66 and 72 of the Town and Country (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the statutory duties of the Council in this regard have been discharged.

Other:

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL): When planning permission is granted for a development that is CIL liable, the Council will issue a liability notice as soon as practicable after the day on which the planning permission first permits development. Completing the assumption of liability notice is a statutory requirement to be completed for all CIL liable applications.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010): In determining this application the Council is required to have due regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. There is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that persons with protected characteristics as identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application and there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

RECOMMENDATION

Conditions agreed:	Not required
Recommendation:	Refuse for the following reason: 1. Owing to its location, sitting 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.
Date:	26 November 2025

Earliest date for decision:	20 November 2025
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Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	<i>BJC</i>
Date:	27.11.25