

MEMORANDUM

From:	Built Heritage Officer		
Service	Green Infrastructure	App No:	242145
Address:	Land outside 58 and 60 Peach Street, Wokingham, RG40 1XG		
Proposal:	Full application for the proposed installation of 1 no. new communications kiosk.		
Heritage Assets:	Wokingham Town Centre Conservation Area Listed buildings along with conservation areas are classed as designated heritage assets under the NPPF (2023) and in the Council's Local Plan policies.		
Site Visit Made:	Yes		

Summary Of Recommendations

Objection – Refusal Recommended

Comments On Proposal

The application proposes the erection of a digital media advertisement screen formed of kiosk with associated telephone on Peach Street, opposite the junction with Easthampton Road 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 proposed structure is presented as public telephone kiosk which has been designed in a manner to make a visual reference to Giles Gilbert Scott's 1924 K2 kiosk. The K2 was the precursor of the much more famous K6 'red telephone box' which was to be found in every village and town across the United Kingdom and wider world. However, the proposed design lacks the refinement of the original 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 2.5 metres in height, it would be an oppressive structure which is visually imposing, exacerbated by its sheer solidity due to the advertisement panel. Whilst the immediate area and the Peach Street parade, which dates from the 1960s, isn't the most visually attractive component of the Conservation Area, it is still within the historic core of the town, with a number of listed buildings in the immediate vicinity, as noted above. The kiosk would add significantly to the street clutter in the vicinity, compound the

prominent existing take-away signage, and further erode the appearance of this area. In conjunction with the visual detriment, the kiosk would also form a physical block on Peach Street reducing the pavement available for pedestrians.

As Historic England's Street's for All, Advice for Highway and Public Realm Works in Historic Places (2018) advises: *"It is widely accepted that a sensitive approach, such as in relation to the positioning of lights or signs within a conservation area, can significantly improve the experience of residents and visitors. This is considered an essential element of good place-making. Too much clutter, such as a multitude of road markings or large flashing screens, can create impressions which severely damage historic landscapes."*

Furthermore:

"Advertising panels tend to be incompatible with the visual sensitivity of historical and rural settings. They can also be an unwelcome source of clutter. Many authorities are invited to accept packages of new street furniture from suppliers, in exchange for footway advertising panels. These rarely meet local needs or character and can add to street clutter. As a rule, advertising panels tend to be incompatible with the visual sensitivity of historical and rural settings and the need to reduce clutter. Where advertising is allowed, it should not impede pedestrian circulation. Advertising can be incorporated into existing street furniture such as bus shelter panels, or specifically designed litterbins, but particular care is needed in the case of internally illuminated digital displays."

The document goes to specifically noting by way of an annotation for a (smaller than proposed) advertisement screen: *"Poorly sited advertising can have a degrading effect on the character of conservation areas and the setting of listed buildings, especially when digital screens and internally illuminated signs are used."*

As such, the proposal would introduce an advertisement that, due to its size and illumination, would be visually dominant and unduly prominent to the detriment of the streetscape and would fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Wokingham Town Centre Conservation Area (S72, P(LBCA)A 90). Similarly, through the identified erosion of character and appearance, the proposals would also fail to preserve the setting of the listed buildings (S66, P(LBCA)A 90), and other assets, thus causing harm to their special interest.

Given the identified harm, 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.

Conditions			
N/A			
Date:	11/09/2024	Signed:	Roderick McDonald Built Heritage Officer