

DELEGATED DECISION CHECKLIST AND REPORT

APPLICATION NO.	CASE OFFICER	DATE
25/00066/FUL	Hamish Rigg	12/03/2025

Address: Footpath outside 239 Albert Royds Street, Rochdale, OL16 2TS

Proposal: Integrated advertisement display within Communication Hub unit comprising of an LCD portrait screen presenting illuminated content together with removal of existing phone box.

PUBLICITY	Weekly list expired?	Y	Site notice expired?	n/a
	Neighbour letters expired?	Y	Press Notice expired?	n/a

DELEGATION	Significant departure from local plan?	N	Contrary to national policy?	N
	Applicant a Council Member or officer?	N	Contrary to previous decision?	N
	Major with 10 or more objections and recommending approval?	N	Called in or Planning Panel objection?	N

COMMENTS	Planning Panel comments received?	N
	Neighbour comments received?	N

EIA	Screening opinion completed and saved to Onbase?	n/a
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CONDITIONS	Pre-commencement conditions proposed?	n/a
	Pre-commencement conditions agreed (or notification period expired)?	n/a

RECOMMENDATION	Refuse
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CHECKED AND SIGNED OFF BY: RK

DATE: 13/03/2025

SITE

The application relates to an area of pavement outside 239 Albert Royds Street; a small detached supermarket in a residential area of Belfield, Rochdale. Albert Royds Street is a main transport route forming part of the ring road around Rochdale town centre. However, the character of the area surrounding the site is residential, comprising medium density housing, grass verges and mature trees.

The application site is a small paved area at the junction between Albert Royds Street and Bellshill Crescent. No. 239 lies to the east, whilst Albert Royds Street lies west, running north and south.

PROPOSAL

Permission is sought for the installation of a BT 'street hub' and 2no. digital illuminated screens, one on each side. The hub is a free standing black metal structure, measuring 3m (height) X 1.2m (width) X 0.35m (depth). The screens would display digital advertisements and the occasional public information message. The hub would also provide free public WiFi, free UK calls, USB charging, and an emergency service button.

The proposed elevations and views only show the perspective looking southwards. For the avoidance of doubt, the submitted Planning Supporting Statement (ROC-104: Telent Technology Services Ltd) confirms that the hub will have a digital display on both sides, and therefore it is assumed that hub will have the same appearance looking northwards.

RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY

National Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

Sub-Regional Policy

Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan (PfE)

The Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan was adopted and became part of the statutory development plan for each of the 9 authorities covered by the plan on 21st March 2024. The following policies are relevant to the determination of this application:

Places for People

JP-P1: Sustainable Places

Connected Places

JP-C1: An Integrated Network
JP-C2: Digital Connectivity

Adopted Rochdale Core Strategy (CS):

SO1 To delivery a more prosperous economy

E2 Increasing jobs and prosperity

SO3 To improve design, image and quality of place

P1 Improving Image

P3 Improving design of new development

SO5 Improving accessibility and delivering sustainable transport

T2 Improving accessibility

DM1 General development requirements

Unitary Development Plan (UDP):

G/D/1 Defined Urban Area

G/S/1 Hierarchy and Role of Centres

RELEVANT SITE HISTORY

None

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Highways:

The applicant proposes the introduction of an advertisement directly adjacent to a busy highway. This would constitute a distraction to drivers and as such compromise road safety and as such we object to this proposal.

The main generator of income this hub will have is an advertising revenue. This land is not in the ownership of the applicant. There is no detail of how the applicant intends to compensate the Highways Authority for use of the Highway to generate income. We do not consent to the introduction of this advertisement on the highway.

REPRESENTATIONS

Letters of notification were sent to surrounding neighbours 07/02/2025; no objections were received.

ANALYSIS

Principle for Development – Digital Connectivity

The Planning Supporting Statement (ROC-103, Telent Technology Service Ltd) identifies 'digital connectivity' as the principle for development, by way of free public WiFi and UK calls offered by the proposed communication hub.

Adopted Rochdale Core Strategy policy E2 sets out general support for the delivery of infrastructure such a communications technology with a focus on supporting economic development.

Paragraph 114 of the NPPF states that *“Advanced, high quality and reliable communications infrastructure is essential for economic growth and social-wellbeing. Planning policies and decisions should support the expansion of electronic communication networks, including next generation mobile technology and full fibre broadband connections.”*

Policy JP-C2 of the adopted Places for Everyone joint development plan seeks to facilitate the provision of free, secure, high speed public Wi-Fi connections, particularly in the most frequented areas to ensure that everyone in the city region has access to high quality digital infrastructure so they can fully participate in society and the economy.

It is accepted that the proposed communication hub would improve digital connectivity within the area, providing a localised Wi-Fi hotspot and a publicly available telephone whilst enabling the phasing out of traditional phone boxes. However, the policy text clearly distinguishes that the focus of such development should be in existing employment centres, town centres and areas which are ‘most frequented’. The site does not fall within any of these locations, nor does it form a defined centre and thus the benefits of free public WiFi and UK calls, and the weight afforded to the proposals through the NPPF, CS Policy E2 and PfE Policy JP-C2 is limited.

Visual amenity

Paragraph 135 of the NPPF requires planning decisions to ensure that new developments are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and townscape setting. Paragraph 141 states that the quality and character of places can suffer when advertisements are poorly sited and designed. Policy P2 of the Core Strategy acknowledges that enhancing and protecting the Borough’s unique character can lead to improvements in quality of life and can also help to booster the visitor economy and inward investment.

Albert Royds Street and the wider Belfield area has a residential and verdant character, comprising tree-lined roads, dwellings set back from the highway, and grass verges. Commercial uses are scarce, but where they are present, such as the adjacent supermarket to the east, they conform to the established building line and scales, and use discreet, non-illuminated signage.

The proposed communication hub would be the only feature within the vicinity which is illuminated, that is not a lighting column, and due to its excessive scale (measuring 3m in height) would subsequently comprise an incongruous addition to the street scene that would not respond well to the area’s verdant and open character.

It is noted that the application seeks the removal of the existing phone box, which detracts from the character and appearance of the street scene due to its bulky form and dilapidated appearance. Notwithstanding, the proposal is considered to comprise a more visually harmful feature due to its greater scale, illumination, and generally more conspicuous appearance.

By virtue of its siting, scale and illumination, the proposed hub would harm the visual amenity of the street scene and therefore would fail to comply with policies JP-P1 of the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan, policies DM1 and P3 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy, and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Highways safety

Paragraph 116 of the NPPF states that development should be prevented if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety. Core Strategy policy DM1 establishes that proposals should not adversely impact on highway safety.

Albert Royds Street (A664) is a key transport route forming part of the ring road around Rochdale and at peak times it accommodates high volumes of traffic. The proposed location for the communication hub is directly adjacent to the highway on Albert Royds Street, at the junction with Bellshill Crescent, and approximately 5m forward of a pedestrian crossing. Navigating this section of the highway therefore requires the utmost care and attention of drivers to ensure the safety of pedestrians and other road users.

The Council's Highways Officer has objected to the proposal on account of the digital displays being a distracting feature directly adjacent to a busy highway, at a location with a pedestrian crossing and road junctions. Given the digital displays are intended to draw attention, it would be reasonable to suggest that they would pose an unnecessary risk to road users and pedestrians. The risk is further exacerbated by the scale and brightness of the displays. The proposal would therefore have an unacceptable impact on highway safety, contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework and policy DM1 of the Rochdale Core Strategy

Planning Balance

On balance, the proposed installation would be considered a harmful development. The benefits of digital connectivity and the removal of the existing telephone box are recognised. However, these benefits are afforded limited weight, given the site is not in a town centre location or defined centre, and they do not outweigh the potential harm posed to the visual amenity of the area and highway safety.

RECOMMENDATION

Refuse:

1. The proposed digital display, by virtue of its siting, scale and illumination, would represent a garish and imposing feature on the street scene and landscape. The identified harm to the character and appearance of the area, as a result of the proposed hub, is not mitigated or outweighed by public benefit or other material considerations. On this basis, the proposed development would fail to comply with policies JP-P1 of the Places for Everyone joint development plan, DM1 & P3 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy and the National Planning Policy Framework.
2. The proposed digital displays present a distracting feature to road users and pedestrians at a critical and busy location, which requires the utmost care and attention, therefore posing an unacceptable and unnecessary risk to highways safety. As such the proposal would adversely impact on highways safety, contrary to: the National Planning Policy Framework, Policy JP-P1 of The Places for Everyone Joint Development plan; Policies P3 and T2 of the Adopted Rochdale Core Strategy.

Procedure Statement

The proposal would not improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area nor does it comply with the development plan and therefore does not comprise sustainable development. There were no amendments to the scheme, or conditions which could reasonably have been imposed, which could have made the development acceptable and it was therefore not possible to approve the application.

Notes for Applicant:

INFORMATIVES:

1. For the avoidance of doubt, this decision relates to the following plans and supporting documents:
 - Proposed site plan: ROC-103
 - Proposed site elevation: ROC-103
 - Planning Supporting Statement (ROC-103: Telent Technology Services Ltd)
 - BT Street Hub Unit and Dimensions
 - BT Street Hub Anti-Social Behaviour Management plan, Version 3
 - Street Hubs Beyond Connection Supporting Report
 - Covering Letter (ROC-103: Telent Technology Services Ltd)