

DELEGATED DECISION CHECKLIST AND REPORT

APPLICATION NO.	CASE OFFICER	DATE
25/00064/FUL	Hamish Rigg	19/03/2025

Address: Footpath Outside 147 Yorkshire Street, Rochdale, OL12 0DR

Proposal: Integrated advertisement display within Communication Hub unit comprising of an LCD portrait screen presenting illuminated content

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

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: 19/03/2025

SITE

The application site falls within Rochdale Town Centre, as per UDP Policy G/S/1, on the pavement 20m to the west of 147 Yorkshire Street. The surrounding area has a mixed appearance but is typically urban in character and accommodates a high volume of vehicles and pedestrians.

To the east and south, the site is set against a backdrop of shops and small businesses on Yorkshire Street. The array of shopfronts, signage and street furniture create a busy and commercial character. To the north are several warehouse units and builders' yards forming an industrial appearance, and to the west the landscape is more open, offering views towards the town centre and of the Ukrainian Catholic Church of Saint Mary.

The site falls approximately 10m east of Town Head Conservation Area, and within the vicinity of three Grade II listed sites: 188a, 190 and 190a Yorkshire Street, 25m to the south; Ukrainian Catholic Church of Saint Mary, 100m to the west; and 170, 172 and 174 Yorkshire Street, 100m to the south-west.

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 east towards 147 Yorkshire Street. 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 westwards.

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
JP-P2: Heritage

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
P2	Protecting and enhancing character, landscape and heritage
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 junction. The purpose of this advertisement is to grab the attention of passers-by. This includes drivers and pedestrians at a location where they should be concentrating on navigating the junction. 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.

Conservation

Significant concern regarding the impact on the setting of the Town Head Conservation Area and the setting of several Grade II listed buildings, along with more general street scene impacts.

REPRESENTATIONS

Letters of notification were sent to surrounding neighbours and a site notice was displayed in the vicinity of the site. No representations have been received.

ANALYSIS

Principle for Development – Digital Connectivity

Adopted Rochdale Core Strategy policy E2 sets out general support for the delivery of infrastructure such as 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.

The proposed hub would provide free public internet and other communication services in a busy central part of Rochdale Town Centre. On this basis, the principle of development is considered to be acceptable in accordance with adopted Places for Everyone joint development plan policy JP-C2, policy E1 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Visual amenity and impact on heritage

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.

Paragraph 212 of the NPPF states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset, including grade II listed buildings, should require clear and convincing justification (paragraph 213), and where the harm is less than substantial, this should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal (paragraph 215). Furthermore, Places for Everyone policy JP-P2 and Core Strategy policy P2 collectively aim to conserve and enhance key heritage assets within the borough to protect local character.

To the east and south, the site is set against a backdrop of shops and small businesses on Yorkshire Street. The array of shopfronts, signage and street furniture create a busy and commercial character. To the north are several warehouse units and builders' yards forming an industrial appearance, and to the west the landscape is more open, offering views towards the town centre and of the Ukrainian Catholic Church of Saint

Mary. Generally speaking, the immediate vicinity doesn't offer much in terms of visual amenity and is generally cluttered.

Notwithstanding, the excessive scale of the proposed hub (3m in height) and the illuminated digital displays, would result in an imposing and garish feature within the street scene. Whilst the surrounding area is not of inherently high quality, the existing poor quality should not be used as justification for its further degradation. Given there is no other signage of this scale or nature within the vicinity, the proposed unit would further detract from an area which is already lacking in visual amenity.

The proposed hub would be particularly detrimental to views looking westwards towards the grade II listed Ukrainian Catholic Church. The landscape to the west is relatively open, and therefore the Church appears as a prominent and attractive landmark on the approach to Rochdale town centre. Whilst the Church is located approximately 100m from the proposed hub, such a large and vivid structure would dominate and detract from views of the Church and the western landscape.

The impact of the hub on views of the Church would in turn cause harm to its heritage significance. The former Anglican Church of St James was built in 1821 in the style of a Commissioners' Church, and is recognised for its architectural and historical merit. Views of the Church from the east along Yorkshire Street are considered to be amongst the most significant, contributing to the Church's designation as a key heritage asset within Town Head Conservation Area. To detract from primary views of the Church would constitute harm to its heritage value. However, given the distance between the proposed hub and the Church, the harm towards its heritage significance would be considered less than substantial.

Whilst it's noted that the Town Head Conservation Area is named and appraised separately to the Rochdale Town Centre Conservation Area, Action 5 of the recently adopted Rochdale Town Centre Management Plan requires Rochdale Council to develop a strategy and vision for all peripheral town centre areas. This strategy aims to look to drive development and promote a range of suitable uses for these areas, including improvements to the public realm to assist in creating a thriving and diverse town centre.

As per the NPPF, any harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset requires clear and convincing justification, and where the harm is less than substantial, it should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. The Planning Supporting Statement (ROC-104) refers to digital connectivity as the public benefit offered by this scheme, however such benefits are clearly minor in nature and do not represent the clear and convincing justification to demonstrate that such relatively minor benefits would outweigh the serious harm identified above.

Overall, the proposed hub, by virtue of its siting, scale and brightness, would harm the visual amenity of the street scene and townscape, as well as the heritage significance of the grade II listed Ukrainian Catholic Church. The potential public benefit afforded by the proposal would not outweigh this harm, and therefore the development would fail to comply with policies JP-P1 and JP-P2 of the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan, policies DM1, P2 and P3 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy, and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Highways and transport

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.

Yorkshire Street is a key route into the town centre for vehicles and pedestrians and accommodates a high volume of traffic and footfall. Furthermore, the site is located approximately 140m east of a busy junction between St Mary's Gate, John Street and Whitworth Street. It is essential that vehicles and pedestrians alike are able to navigate this area safely, without significant distraction from new development.

The Council's Highways Officer has objected to the proposed development on account of the digital displays being a distracting feature directly adjacent to a busy highway junction. 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 relative to other signage along Yorkshire Street. 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.

Designing out Crime

Located within a busy town centre that suffers disproportionately from antisocial behaviour, the proposed hub unit has the potential to become a target for misuse or anti-social activities. However, this matter has been satisfactorily addressed in the submitted Unit Management Plan. On this basis, it is considered that the potential impacts of crime and anti-social behaviour that may be associated with the unit are not considered to be so severe as to warrant a refusal of planning permission. The proposed development would therefore accord with adopted Places for Everyone joint development plan policy JP-P1, adopted Rochdale Core Strategy policies DM1 & P3 and the National Planning Policy Framework.

RECOMMENDATION

Refuse:

1. The proposed digital display, by virtue of its siting, scale and illumination, would represent an unattractive and imposing feature on the street scene and landscape. Such visual harm would in turn negatively impact on the heritage significance of the grade II listed Ukrainian Catholic Church of St Mary, by detracting from primary views of this impressive landmark. The identified harm to the character and appearance of the area and the heritage significance of the listed Church, 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 and JP-P2 of the Places for Everyone joint development plan, policies DM1, P2 & 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 in Rochdale town centre 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-104
 - Proposed site elevation: ROC-104
 - Planning Supporting Statement (ROC-104: 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-104: Telent Technology Services Ltd)