

DELEGATED DECISION CHECKLIST AND REPORT

APPLICATION NO.	CASE OFFICER	DATE
24/01246/FUL	Hamish Rigg	13/02/2025

Address: Pavement behind Tram Stop, Smith Street, Rochdale, OL16 1BE

Proposal: The installation of communications hub including defibrillator and advertisement display

PUBLICITY	Weekly list expired?	Y	Site notice expired?	Y
	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: 20/02/2025

SITE

The application relates to the pavement at the eastern end of the Metrolink tram stop on Smith Street, Rochdale. The site falls within Rochdale Town Centre, as per UDP Policy G/S/1, located in a pedestrianised and paved public space. The site is surrounded by Rochdale Interchange to the south, Rochdale Riverside Shopping Centre to the north, Number One Riverside to the east, and the Lviv Bridge and River Roch to the south.

PROPOSAL

Planning permission is sought for the installation of a 'communication hub' branded as the 'Digital 86" Smart City Unit', comprising an 86" LCD screen on one side, and a telephone and defibrillator on the other. The screen would display a rotation of static advertisements and public information messages. The hub also offers free public WiFi, free phone calls, and device charging.

The proposed unit would measure 2.6m (height) X 1.3m (width) X 0.9m (depth).

This application sits along an associated application for Advertisement Consent ref. 24/01247/ADV which is to be determined concurrently with this application.

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
E1	Establishing thriving town, district and local centres
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:

No objections

Transport for Greater Manchester:

No objections

REPRESENTATIONS

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

ANALYSIS

Principle of Development – Digital Connectivity

Adopted Rochdale Core Strategy policy E1 sets out general support for development which will promote the viability and vitality of the borough's town centres and identifies Rochdale town centre as the borough's principle town centre.

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 communication 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

Paragraph 135 of the NPPF relates to design functionality, aesthetics, place making and sympathy to local character & history, including the surrounding buildings and wider townscape setting. Similarly, 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.

The Riverside development which surrounds the site- including Riverside Shopping Centre, the Bus Interchange, and Number One Riverside- has been at the forefront of the town centre's redevelopment in recent years, and together with the paved area along Smith Street and Lviv bridge, create an attractive setting. The street scene is open and neat, and looking westwards, set against the backdrop of the historic town centre and Grade I Listed Town Hall.

Given the intention of a digital display is to draw attention, their impact on the street scene can be harmful. In a setting such as this, where there isn't a strong presence of advertising hoardings and street clutter, a digital display would appear incongruous and garish. The proposed display would therefore be considered detrimental to the setting's visual amenity, and would detract from a popular pedestrianised area, which offers open views along the River Roch corridor and of landmark buildings within the town centre. To set a precedent for digital advertising displays in this area would undermine recent efforts to regenerate Rochdale Town Centre and would lower the standard of the built environment.

Of note, in respect of this application, is that in 2022 six BT 'communication hubs', primarily comprising advertising displays on two sides, were approved by the LPA within Rochdale Town Centre. In the immediate vicinity of the proposed hub there are two extant planning permissions for BT communication hub units, one proposed on the pavement opposite Number 4 Smith Street (22/00445/FUL) and one proposed on the north east side of Number One Riverside (22/00489/FUL). Whilst neither of these units has been installed to date, the planning permissions remain extant until 14th July 2025 and 19th August 2025 respectively. Were the application proposal to be approved and installed alongside either or both of those permissions, they would cumulatively result in a clear over proliferation of digital display boards in a very small area of the town centre which would be particularly harmful to the street scene and the character and appearance of the area.

In respect of the proposed communications equipment, the benefit of publically accessible high quality communications infrastructure is not disputed, but the public benefits of this is limited weight in the context of the extant permissions. This public benefit would not outweigh the potential harm to the street scene by virtue of its siting and the cumulative impact of such an over concentration.

In relation to the public benefit of the defibrillator, there are already multiple defibrillators in Rochdale Town Centre, including in the Interchange and outside the Regal Moon public house, both of which are within 150m of the site. Given the existing availability of such facilities, the public benefit of a defibrillator does not provide sufficient justification for the harmful form of development proposed for the reasons outlined above.

Overall, it is considered that the potential public benefits afforded by the proposal do not outweigh the visual harm to the street scene and townscape that would arise as a

result of the proposed hub in this location. On this basis, the proposed development would fail to comply with adopted Places for Everyone joint development plan policy JP-P1, policies DM1 and P3 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy, the National Planning Policy Framework.

Designing out Crime

Located within a busy town centre location that suffers disproportionately from antisocial behaviour by virtue of being located by the main transport interchange, 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.

Highways and transport

The proposed digital display is adjacent to the Metrolink tram stop and as such Transport for Greater Manchester have been consulted. Whilst raising no objection to the development, they noted that the site is close to an existing Metrolink OLE pole, and that the display could interfere with the foundations keeping the pole in place. In the event that planning permission is obtained, TFGM advised that the applicant speaks with the Metrolink Operator and Maintainer to ensure that the development does not interfere with the running of the tram.

The proposed display would be in pedestrianised area which is not regularly accessible for vehicles. As such, it would not have a detrimental impact on highway safety and capacity such that it would warrant a reason for refusal and the application therefore accords with policies DM1 & T2 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy and the National Planning Policy framework.

RECOMMENDATION

REFUSE PLANNING PERMISSION for the following reason:

1. The proposed digital display, by virtue of its siting, design and illumination, would be harmful to the character and appearance of Smith Street by occupying a key vantage point of a highly trafficked pedestrian walkway that offers clear uninterrupted views of the Number One Riverside building and the Riverside commercial development which have been specifically designed to provide a strong architectural prominence within this area of Rochdale Town Centre. The communication hub would also represent an incongruous feature in an area otherwise left open to ensure a sense of space within vistas outside of the Number One Riverside building and to provide visual relief and a sense of openness against the attractive backdrop of the River Roch as it enters the main town centre. The identified harm to the character and appearance of the area as a result of the proposed development, either on its own or cumulatively, is not justified, mitigated, or outweighed by public benefit or other material considerations. On this basis, the proposed development would fail to comply with adopted Places for Everyone joint development plan policy JP-P1, policies

DM1, & P3 of the adopted Rochdale Core Strategy and the National Planning Policy Framework.

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:
 - Hub Detail – New Sites
 - Site Plan and Images
 - Power of the Public Screen supporting report
 - Planning Statement (JCDecaux, 18 December 2024)
 - Hub Unit Appendix D
 - Unit Management Plan
 - Community Channel – Examples of Campaigns
 - NHS England / OHCA Charities Advisory Committee / Letter of Community Heartbeat Trust Charity Letter of Support
 - Defibrillator Product Specification

Report Author Hamish Rigg