

Objection by Bristol Walking Alliance to proposed installation of new BT Street Hub advertising signs in Bristol City Centre



Bristol Walking Alliance (BWA) objects to the proposed installation of three BT Street Hub advertising signs to the detriment of the amenity of Bristol City Centre.

**21/04946/F Opposite TSB 36-38 Merchant Street Bristol BS1 3EP
21/04948/F O/S Number One Bristol, Lewins Mead Bristol BS1 2NR
21/04950/F O/S Pret-A-Manger, 42 Baldwin Street Bristol BS1 1PN**

The proposed BT Street Hub units are essentially similar to, though slightly larger than, the previous InLink units which were refused permission by the Council in 2018. We believe the same reasons for refusal should apply to these applications.

We object to these installations for their obstructive siting, their visual effect on the public realm and their potential for invasion of privacy.

Because of the prevalence of mobile phones, the demand for street phones is negligible. For the phone and tablet functions of the proposed units, their use will be inconvenienced by lack of shelter and privacy for the user, and in two of the applications by adjacent road noise.

Obstruction

Their intended purpose is for the advertising revenue they could bring to the applicant. Their siting is on busy pavements in the city centre where pedestrian numbers are increasing and where walking is encouraged as a sustainable mode of travel. Bristol Walking Alliance objects to the installation of any unnecessary pavement furniture on the functional grounds that it limits the free flow of pedestrian movement. Pavement obstacles are a particular hazard to those with impaired vision.

The submitted plans are misleading in the amount of space required. The phone and tablet panel are situated on the edge of the monolith, so anyone using the phone or tablet panel will occupy additional pavement space, adding a further (say) 0.5m to the effective width of the monolith.

We have specific objections to the siting of the proposed BT Street Hub units:

- 21/04946/F: Sited right in the middle of a busy pedestrianised area, out of line with other street furniture, so obstructs pedestrian desire lines and is a hazard to those with impaired vision.
- 21/04948/F: Sited to block approximately half the width of the otherwise unobstructed pavement and also a hazard to long cane users and those with guide dogs who may use the kerb as a navigation aid.
- 21/04950/F: Sited so that the straight line of pedestrian travel is reduced to less than 2m, due to a nearby ramp for disabled access. Pedestrians should not be made to weave around unnecessary obstacles.

Visual impact

We also object to these monoliths on appearance grounds. Their excessive size is due purely to their advertising potential, since the wifi and 5G functionality could be provided on a simple pole.

Advertising, by its nature, is designed to grab the attention of those who are sighted. It can therefore distract the attention of pavement users, or road users, presenting a potential hazard to those navigating their way along, across or beside roads. This may be particularly true for modern, brightly illuminated, changing display panels.

Two of the sites (21/04948/F, 21/04950/F) are in conservation areas for which their inappropriate appearance detracts from the setting which these designations are supposed to preserve.

Given that their key visual impact is the presentation of advertising, their excessive size is detrimental to the overall streetscape and to the enjoyment of the urban scene for all.

Privacy

The BT Street Hub monoliths each include three cameras, capable of monitoring activity in the street. This introduces the potential for increased surveillance and invasion of privacy outside local authority control. Advertising companies, such as those involved with these applications, are already exploring the potential of facial recognition for measuring and adapting their messages to individuals.

Additional advertising considerations

As well as objecting to the siting, visual impact and privacy implications of these units, we believe Bristol City Council should also refuse to approve the use of advertising on these units if such advertising would not have deemed assent, for example if advertisements would be illuminated or would appear on more than one face of the unit (all three applications), or if in a conservation area (21/04948/F, 21/04950/F).

We also believe that the applicant's request for consent for 10 years is out of line with the normal practice of giving consent for a 5 year period, after which approval could be reviewed if necessary.

Bristol Walking Alliance
8 November 2021

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