Planning

Growth & Development

Delegated officer report for planning application

Application no.	144118/FO/2025
Date registered valid:	30 September 2025
Proposal:	Installation of digital LED totem.
Address:	Outside No. 8-10 Exchange Street, Manchester, M2 7EF
Ward(s):	Deansgate Ward
Applicant:	BT Telecommunications PLC
Agent (if any):	Tom Hayes
Case officer:	Michael Pearson Tel: 0161 219 2735 Email: michael.pearson@manchester.gov.uk
Recommendation:	Refuse

Date of recommendation: 25/11/2025

Application details

Type of application: Full Application Consent

Development type: Minor Other

Date of site visit:

Standard consultations:
Printed: 7 October 2025 Expired: 28 October 2025

Neighbour notifications
Printed: 7 October 2025 Expired: 28 October 2025

Site notice
Posted: 8 October 2025 Expired: 29 October 2025

Press advert
Published: 14 October 2025 Expired: 4 November 2025

Departure from Development Plan: No

Environmental Statement: Not required

Description of site/building

The application relates to a section of public footway to the front of no8-10 Exchange Street. As existing, the application site is paved in York Stone paving and features a double sided LED totem. Said totem is coloured grey, with both digital displays making up roughly half of the height of the total unit. The site is then flanked by an outdoor seating area and street trees.

Listed building: Not applicable

Conservation area: St Anns Square Conservation Area

Tree Preservation Order: Not applicable

Description of area

The site sits within the St Ann's Square Conservation Area, and St Anns Square itself, a large pedestrianised public space within Manchester City Centre's Primary Shopping Area. Neighbouring built development is largely characterised by a mix of Victorian and Edwardian properties, including the Grade II listed Royal Exchange, Boer War Memorial and no16 St Ann's Square. Local uses are largely comprised of commercial class E restaurant and café uses that benefit from outside seating areas.

Description of development

The application seeks consent for the installation of a digital LED totem following the removal of the existing totem on site.

The proposed totem would have a width of 1236mm, a depth of 350mm and a height of 2986mm. This is compared with the existing totem with a width of 889mm, a depth of 280mm and a height of 2896mm.

The totem would have the ability for users to place free phone calls, and has the capability to have air monitoring equipment be installed.

Planning History

144201/AOH/2025 - Installation of 2no internally illuminated digital display screens – Application under consideration.

118434/AOH/2017 - Installation of 2 no. digital LED display screens to associated InLink - (related planning application ref: 118433/FO/2017) – Approved November 2018.

118433/FO/2017 - Full planning permission for installation of 1 no. 2.9m high InLink following removal of 4 no. KX100 telephone kiosk – Approved November 2018.

Relevant Neighbouring Applications

137115/AOH/2023 - Replacement of an existing interactive totem with a 2.42m x 1.27m totem including full motion LED display of digital advertising – Approved August 2023.

137114/AOH/2023 - Replacement of an existing interactive totem with a 2.42m x 1.27m totem including full motion LED display of digital advertising – Approved August 2023.

130164/AOH/2021 - The replacement of 11 freestanding advertising units comprising five columns and six x 6 sheet advertising panels with 11 "Forum" Smart City CIP advertising units within the Core City Centre (Group 1) – Approved August 2021.

103223/AO/2013/C1 - The installation of an interactive totem including display of digital advertising – Approved October 2013.

103206/AO/2013/C1 - The installation of an interactive totem including display of digital advertising – Approved October 2013.

Consultations & Notification Responses

Publicity – A site notice and press notice were published. Neighbouring properties were notified of the proposals by letter. No representations were received.

Ward Members - Councillor Marcus Johns objected stating that the proposals are located in an area where the City Council is actively trying to reduce street clutter. The proposal would reduce available pavement space and contribute to criminal and anti-social behaviour by reducing sightlines.

Counter Terrorism Policing North West – No objection.

Environmental Health – No objection subject to conditions relating to light from digital display screens, prohibition of external speakers/noise and a maintenance and management plan.

Greater Manchester Police – No objection.

Highways – The proposals would impede pedestrian movement and inclusive accessibility, and go against the City Council's strategy of decluttering its pavements. Should the proposals be approved, conditions requiring the control of the content of the advertisement and a construction management plan should be attached.

Policy

The Places for Everyone Plan – Joint Development Plan Document, for nine of the 10 boroughs which make up Greater Manchester adopted on 21st of March 2024:

- Policy JP-P1 – Sustainable Places
- Policy JP-P2 – Heritage
- Policy JP-C5 – Streets for All
- Policy JP-C6 – Walking and Cycling

The Manchester Core Strategy – Development Plan Document 2012 – 2027 ("the Core Strategy") was adopted by the City Council on the 11th of July 2012:

- Policy SP1 – Spatial Principles
- Policy CC9 – Design and Heritage
- Policy CC10 – Places for Everyone
- Policy EN1 – Design Principles and Strategic Character Areas
- Policy EN3 – Heritage
- Policy DM1 – Development Management

The Unitary Development Plan for Manchester – For the reasons outlined below the following saved UDP Policies are of relevance to this application:

- Policy DC15 – Advertisements, Hoarding and Posters
- Policy DC17 - Telecommunications
- Policy DC18 – Conservation Areas
- Policy DC19 – Listed Buildings
- Policy DC22 – Footpath Protection

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- Chapter 9 – Promoting Sustainable Transport
- Chapter 12 – Achieving well-designed and Beautiful Places
- Chapter 16 – Conserving the Historic Environment

Other Legislative Requirements
Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
Design for Access 2
Streets for All Design Guide

Issues

<u>Principle of the Development</u>

The application would see the installation of a replacement digital totem on the public footway within the City Centre. Due to the nature of the proposal, as a piece of telecommunications infrastructure, it is considered that its installation is considered to be acceptable in principal and

accords in principle with Core Strategy Policy DC17.1 subject to the matters discussed below. However, should the proposals be no more than a conduit for an advertisement, which is discussed below, it would not be considered to be acceptable in principle, being contrary to the aforementioned policies.

Visual Amenity and Heritage

The application site is a section of public footway within Manchester City Centre, specifically that along Exchange Street, located within the St Anns Square Conservation Area. The Conservation Area features of some of Manchester's most impressive historical buildings, including the Grade II listed Royal Exchange and Grade I listed St Anns Church. From the application site, the Grade II listed Royal Exchange and Boer War Memorial are visible, with St Anns Church lying further to the south.

St Anns Square has been subject to significant public realm works dating from the 1990s that saw it take its current pedestrianised form. In more recent years there have been concerted efforts to remove redundant street furniture, which largely concerns older telephone boxes, to further improve this area of public realm (This is shown in the pictures below).

Application site as of May 2017.

Application site as of October 2025

The approval of the existing LED totem on site, approved under planning permission 118433/FO/2017 formed part of a wider strategy to declutter the City Centre's footways of redundant telephone boxes. Said proposal saw the removal of 2no telephone boxes along Exchange Street, and a further 2no along Brazennose Street. As shown by the photographs above, the initial development approved saw the rationalisation of street furniture, with a significant reduction in the amount of visual clutter left on site.

The proposed development would see the existing LED totem on site replaced with a new model that is 1236mm wide, 350mm deep and 2986mm high. A comparison of the existing unit to that of the proposed is shown below:

Existing totem (left) and proposed totem (right)

The proposed totem in comparison to that of the existing, is a larger, bulkier and darker structure, representing an intensification of development on the application site, by virtue of which would have a greater impact on the setting of the St Anns Square Conservation Area and neighbouring listed buildings, causing a low level of less than substantial harm to the setting of said heritage assets, as well as further impacting the local street scene, thereby undermining regeneration efforts. The previous approval on site, permission 118433/FO/2017, secured a significant reduction in street clutter on site and within the neighbouring area, the proposed development however would be the inverse of this, with the proposed totem being larger than that of the existing, thereby increasing clutter on site and eroding the strides taken in improving the locality under the aforementioned permission.

Further to the above, it is noted that when developments incur a low level of less than substantial harm to the significance of a heritage asset that the development should be allowed should it be demonstrated that the public benefits of the proposal outweigh the identified harm. This is discussed later within the report.

While in a different context within the City, it is noted that in an appeal decision for application 142695/FO/2025 (Appeal ref: APP/B4215/W/25/3369446), the Inspector described a similar Street Hub 2 totem model as such:

Due to a combination of its height, width and freestanding position close to the edge of the carriageway, the proposed hub, with its large digital advertisement panels on both sides, would represent a dominant and obtrusive feature on the pavement.

Further to the above, the proposed replacement digital totem does not contribute to the rationalisation of on street infrastructure, rather, it exacerbates existing issued with street clutter, distracting from the area's historical features of note and undermining its overall appearance, making the local area a less attractive place to be in or pass through. The proposal is therefore

inconsistent with MCC's decluttering strategy and fails to meet broader design standards and policies.

The proposed development, by virtue of its imposing appearance and its contribution to street clutter, is therefore considered to be contrary to Places for Everyone Plan Policy JP-Strat2, which seeks to improve areas of public realm, walking and cycling facilities, by virtue of its increased footprint and overly dominant appearance. Similarly, it is contrary to Places for Everyone Plan Policy JP-C5 which seeks to ensure streets are welcoming for all.

Public Benefits

The proposal would result in less than substantial harm to the setting of heritage assets. As required by paragraph 215 of the NPPF, it is necessary to consider whether any public benefits exist to outweigh this harm.

The Applicant has stated that there are public benefits associated with the installation of the totems. The Applicant's planning statement submitted with the application highlights the national policy context encouraging investment in mobile infrastructure and 5G provision. The Council has also published the Manchester Digital Strategy 2021 – 2026, outlining its goal to invest in digital infrastructure.

The applicant has stated that the phone service provided in the totem would provide access to public services, multiple accessibility options, secure power-only USB ports for rapid device charging, free phone calls, a direct emergency call button, community and emergency awareness messaging. All of which are currently provided by the existing structure.

The applicant has submitted some BT usage data, which covers the entire BT InLink and Street Hub estate, from the period of 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025, detailing the number of calls made to various charities and services.

The data submitted covers all BT units across the country. There is no data provided as to the specific existing InLink Unit to demonstrate how many calls have been made from this unit that could demonstrate the public benefit it has, nor is there an average provided to show how many calls are made yearly per totem unit.

The City Council's does not dispute that free public Wi-Fi can have benefits for visitors and residents who wish to connect to the internet for free, however, the quality of the service depends on range to the Wi-Fi source. The range quoted for the updated Smart Hub is not stated, it is not clear what range a user has access to for Wi-Fi, and therefore the public benefit cannot be accurately determined.

The success of public Wi-Fi delivered in this way depends on density and frequency of similar Wi-Fi devices on streets – this could quickly become problematic for street furniture clutter. As such, the hubs do not offer comprehensive coverage, and the benefits offered are limited.

There are concerns with public Wi-Fi when it comes to cyber security and the security of the network, the smart solution requires an email to access the service and has several measures in place to control what potentially harmful material is viewed online. However, as the nature of public Wi-Fi is to be open, it is more susceptible to cybersecurity concerns for users than home or business Wi-Fi connections.

Digital connectivity in city centre locations is notably hard to achieve well at scale, quality and cost for users. Whilst free public Wi-Fi is one solution, it is not the only solution available on the market.

For example, 4G/5G small cells to increase mobile capacity and user experience or public mesh networks.

It is not clear whether small cell capability is included in the Smart Hub as standard, and if the technology will be activated.

Even so, small cells can also be installed on existing street furniture that is more fundament to the public highway, such as streetlights. The installation of small cells on such existing necessary street furniture would be a less visually harmful manner to provide better digital connectivity that would also have a less harmful impact upon the setting of heritage assets.

In addition, when small cells are placed at higher altitudes, such as on street lighting, they achieve better reception. It is not clear if the height of the screens is optimal for small cell network coverage.

It is also not clear if any proposed small cell solution in the Smart Hubs would be a neutral host and provide connectivity across more than one operator or if they are exclusively for the use of EE. A neutral host small cell would be preferable for the city's needs.

The applicant states that there is potential for IoT environmental sensors within the Smart Hubs, however, it is not clear how Local Authorities would access this data or any associated costs or considerations.

There is no evidence to suggest that data from previous BT Smart Hub – and other like solutions has been shared with MCC. It has not been made clear in the application that BT would share this data moving forwards. Without confirmation of this, the public benefits are again limited.

The planning statement notes that the digital screens can be used by the Council as there is 5% free screen time allocated on each BT Street Hub unit. There is no detail as to how this would be provided in practice.

In order for people to use the Smart Hubs a degree of technical knowledge of how they work and what their functions are is needed. It is not clear what resource BT will put into letting the public know the full functionality of the Smart Hub and how they can easily replace phone booths.

To conclude, given the above, it is considered that while there maybe be some public benefits, they are limited. It is also noted that the existing totem has similar capabilities, and the limited public benefits of this application are therefore a marginal improvement of the existing circumstance.

The totem does not provide the public benefits that many other items of street furniture do, such as the introduction of cycle hubs, which supports the active travel objectives of the City Council.

In addition, many of potential public benefits mentioned by the applicant in their submission cannot be currently accurately determined, due to a lack of substantial and concrete information provided in the submission as to what coverage precisely would be provided, how data collected would be provided to the Local Authority, and definitive strategies confirming how many of these public benefits would be actually be delivered.

On this basis, the City Council cannot accurately determine that the extend of many of the public benefits, it can only be determined that limited marginal public benefits will be provided.

When these limited marginal public benefits are weighed against the low level of less than substantial harm, as well as their emphasising of the prevalence of street clutter, impact upon

visual amenity and heritage, it is not considered that the harm is outweighed and therefore the requirements of paragraph 215 of the NPPF have failed to be met.

Sections 66 and 72 of the Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act 1990 require that special consideration is given to the preservation of the significant fabric and setting of listed buildings and conservation areas. For the reasons outlined above, it is not considered that the proposal preserves the setting of listed buildings or the character of the conservation area, causing a low level of less than substantial harm to their setting.

By virtue of the development's adverse visual impacts discussed above, as well as the lack of proven public benefit that would be brought about via the implementation of the proposed works, it is considered that the proposal is contrary to Places for Everyone Plan Policies JP-C5, JP-P1 and JP-P2, Manchester Core Strategy Policies SP1, CC9, EN1, EN3 and DM1, Saved Unitary Development Plan Policies DC18 and DC19, and the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, which collectively seek to preserve and enhance the visual appearance of the local environment and areas of historical significance.

Residential Amenity

The proposed development would see the installation of a replacement LED totem within a section footway that forms part of a partly pedestrianised public square. With regard to assessing the totem's impact on residential amenity, it is not considered the change in its dimensions would have any perceivable impact on amenity in regard to overshadowing or loss of light. It is acknowledged that an objection has been received by a local councillor that sites concern over the proposals impact on anti-social and criminal behaviour with it impacting local sightlines. Whilst it is appreciated that the proposed totem is wider than that of the existing, it is not considered that this impact would be so great as to enable an uptick in the anti-social or criminal behaviour within the local area. Both Greater Manchester Police and Counter Terrorism Policing North West do not object to the proposal. On this basis, the proposal would have an acceptable impact on local residential amenity, in accordance with Core Strategy Policy DM1 and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Highway Safety

The application site forms part of a well trafficked pedestrianised street. Whilst it is acknowledged that concerns have been raised by Highways regarding the proposals impact upon pedestrian mobility along the local footway, it is considered that due to large width of Exchange Street, and taking into account how the entirety of Exchange Street is pedestrianised, it is considered that any impact on pedestrian mobility would not be so great as to warrant a refusal. On this basis, the proposal would have an acceptable impact on highway safety in accordance with Places for Everyone Plan Policy JP-C6, Core Strategy Policies CC10 and DM1 and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Conclusion

In light of the above, the proposed development has been found to have an unacceptable impact on the appearance of the local street scene and setting of neighbouring listed buildings and St Anns Square Conservation Area, with it not having an identifiable public benefit to outweigh the recognised harm. The development is therefore contrary to Places for Everyone Plan Policy JP-Strat2, JP-P1 and JP-P2, policies SP1, CC9, EN1, EN3 and DM1 of the Manchester Core Strategy (2012), saved policies DC18 and DC19 of the Unitary Development Plan for the City of Manchester (1995), the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework, and the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The application is therefore recommended for refusal.

Other Legislative Requirements
Equality Act 2010
Section 149 (Public Sector Equality Duty) of the Equality Act 2010 requires due regard to the need to: Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act and; Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The Equality Duty does not impose a legal requirement to conduct an Equality Impact Assessment. Compliance with the Equality Duty involves consciously thinking about the aims of the Equality Duty as part of the process of decision-making.

Human Rights Act 1998 considerations
This application needs to be considered against the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998. Under Article 6, the applicants (and those third parties, including local residents, who have made representations) have a right to a fair hearing and to this end the local planning authority must give full consideration to their comments.

Protocol 1 Article 1, and Article 8 where appropriate, confer(s) a right of respect for a person's home, other land and business assets. In taking account of all material considerations, including Council policy as set out in the Core Strategy and saved polices of the Unitary Development Plan, the Director of Planning, Building Control & Licensing has concluded that some rights conferred by these articles on the applicant(s)/objector(s)/resident(s) and other occupiers and owners of nearby land that might be affected may be interfered with but that that interference is in accordance with the law and justified by being in the public interest and on the basis of the planning merits of the development proposal. She believes that any restriction on these rights posed by the recommendation given is proportionate to the wider benefits of and that such a decision falls within the margin of discretion afforded to the Council under the Town and Country Planning Acts.

Recommendation: Refuse

Article 35 Declaration

Officers have worked with the applicant/agent in a positive and proactive manner in determining this application by assessing the proposal against relevant planning policies and all material considerations, identifying matters of concern with the proposal and discussing those with the applicant/agent. However, the issues identified are considered to be so fundamental that it has not been possible to negotiate a satisfactory way forward and due to the harm which has been clearly identified within the reason for the refusal, approval has not been possible.

Condition(s) to be attached to decision for approval OR Reasons for recommendation to refuse

1) The proposed totem, by virtue of its siting, scale, materiality, and appearance, would form an overly dominant, incongruous and visually obtrusive feature within the street scene. In addition, the totem would also add to clutter, alongside other street furniture and fixtures, within a prominent location in the City Centre. The proposal would have a negative effect upon current efforts by the City Council to de-clutter, regenerate, and improve the adopted highway within the City Centre environment in the interest of optimising the pedestrian environment and public realm. The proposal would therefore result in an unduly harmful impact on local visual amenity, the character of the street scene, and the setting of nearby listed buildings and the St Anns Square Conservation Area. The totem would be read as a dark, modern and incongruous structure in this setting, forming an unduly harmful juxtaposition and low quality addition to the setting of the listed buildings and the character of the conservation area. This would result in less than substantial

harm to the significance of the designated heritage assets and the required public benefits do not exist to out weight the harm. The totem is therefore contrary to the provisions of Places for Everyone Plan Policy JP-C5, JP-P1 and JP-P2, policies SP1, CC9, EN1, EN3 and DM1 of the Manchester Core Strategy (2012), saved policies DC18, DC19 and DC22 of the Unitary Development Plan for the City of Manchester (1995), the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework, and the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

Appendix 1 – List of consultees & neighbours notified

Highway Services
Environmental Health
Greater Manchester Police
Counter Terrorism Policing North West (CTPNW)

Fifth Floor, Acresfield, 8 Exchange Street, Manchester, M2 7HA
15 Royal Exchange Arcade, Manchester, M2 7EA
First Floor, Acresfield, 8 Exchange Street, Manchester, M2 7HA
16 - 18 Royal Exchange Arcade, Manchester, M2 7EA
Units 2 And 3, Acresfield, 8 Exchange Street, Manchester, M2 7HA
Unit 1, Acresfield, 8 Exchange Street, Manchester, M2 7HA
STARBUCKS COFFEE, Unit 4 At, 8 - 10 Exchange Street, Manchester, M2 7HA
Acresfield, 10 Exchange Street, Manchester, M2 7HA
Part Sixth Floor FRT, Acresfield, 10 Exchange Street, Manchester, M2 7HA
Unit 5, Acresfield, 8 Exchange Street, Manchester, M2 7HA
11 Royal Exchange Arcade, Manchester, M2 7EA
Ground Floor, Acresfield, 8 Exchange Street, Manchester, M2 7HA
Fourth Floor And Fifth Floor, Acresfield, 10 Exchange Street, Manchester, M2 7HA
20 Royal Exchange Arcade, Manchester, M2 7EA
9 Royal Exchange Arcade, Manchester, M2 7EA
5 Royal Exchange Arcade, Manchester, M2 7EA
7 Royal Exchange Arcade, Manchester, M2 7EA
Third Floor, Acresfield, 10 Exchange Street, Manchester, M2 7HA
First Floor, 8 - 10 Exchange Street, Manchester, M2 7HA
Second Floor, Acresfield, 8 Exchange Street, Manchester, M2 7HA
Sixth Floor, Acresfield, 8 Exchange Street, Manchester, M2 7HA
31 Royal Exchange Arcade, Manchester, M2 7EA
12 Royal Exchange Arcade, Manchester, M2 7EA
10 Royal Exchange Arcade, Manchester, M2 7EA
8 Royal Exchange Arcade, Manchester, M2 7EA
6 Royal Exchange Arcade, Manchester, M2 7EA
4 Royal Exchange Arcade, Manchester, M2 7EA
3 Royal Exchange Arcade, Manchester, M2 7EA
5 Acresfield, 8 Exchange Street, Manchester, M2 7HA
Unit 4, Acresfield, 8 Exchange Street, Manchester, M2 7HA
14 Royal Exchange Arcade, Manchester, M2 7EA
19 Royal Exchange Arcade, Manchester, M2 7EA
1 Royal Exchange Arcade, Manchester, M2 7EA

Appendix 2 – Planning constraints

Article 4 Direction - City Centre PD Restriction - Class B1(a) To C3
Article 4 Direction - Removal Of PD Rights Change Of Use From Class C3 To Class C4
Coal Authority - Development Low Risk - Name: DEVELOPMENT_LOW_RISK_AREA
Conservation Area - St Anns Square Conservation Area 1970
Susceptible to Surf Water Flood (Middle) -
Susceptible to Surf Water Flood (Middle) -
Susceptible to Surf Water Flood (More) -
Susceptible to Surf Water Flood (More) -
Area Team Boundary - Name: CENTRAL