**PL/25/1388 & PL/25/1397 - BT Street Hub Waitrose 36A Church Street, Caversham**

The **Government's Wireless Infrastructure Strategy** (2023) sets the ambition for nationwide coverage of standalone 5G in all populated areas by 2030. CADRA recognises the importance of Standalone 5G to deliver faster, low-latency and more reliable connectivity, providing significant long-term benefits which enable advanced technologies such as smart transport, healthcare innovation, and more efficient public services — all of which will benefit Caversham residents and businesses.

An essential part of this national rollout is the installation of **5G Street Hubs** such as the one proposed. However, CADRA is concerned that the architecture and position of this proposal would have a negative impact on the street scene, the public realm, and public safety.

**Pedestrian Safety and Accessibility**
The proposed location is **Church Street's busiest pavement**, where it meets the passage leading to the Waitrose and Precinct car parks. Pedestrian flow will then be even worse, by narrowing what is already not a very wide pavement. This will prove especially challenging for people with mobility issues, those in wheelchairs, those with child buggies and those with visibility impairments.

**Traffic Safety Concerns**
The proximity of the hub to both the road, a pedestrian crossing, a busy junction and the turning in/out of the petrol station is a significant concern. The location of an illuminated sign would create both a clear distraction to drivers and the potential to confuse traffic signals at a point when safety should be paramount.

Current DfT guidance (Traffic Signs Manual Chapter 6, para. 10.2.9–10.2.11) requires that traffic and pedestrian signal heads remain *"clearly visible to approaching road users and not confused with or obscured by other lighting or illuminated advertising displays."*

As such, it is obvious that increasing the background light and signs should be avoided in the proximity of a pedestrian crossing. The illuminated digital display at this location poses a real risk to road safety at a critical junction point.

**Visual Impact and Character**
The inclusion of a **large illuminated digital display** is unwelcome and out of keeping with this part of Caversham, which has seen significant street scene improvements in recent years. There are no comparable illuminated displays in the centre of Caversham. The precinct's owners have permission for a new apartment block nearby, which will increase footfall and strengthen the case for keeping pavements uncluttered and safe.

**Elsewhere in Reading**, planned and existing Street Hubs are in wider, more open traffic free places or commercial areas, where other illuminated signs are already common.

In contrast, busy, narrow Church Street runs from the heart of the **historic village centre** into the **Caversham Conservation Area**. The proposed hub, while outside it, is in its setting.
This hub does not align with the traditional character of the village, which should be maintained to support the interests of both the local community and traders.

**Density of Infrastructure**
CADRA notes with concern that **BT has proposed two Street Hubs** within approximately 70 metres of each other on Church Street (this application and PL/25/1352 & PL/25/1357). If both hubs are technically necessary for adequate 5G coverage and capacity, this suggests the technology requires significant infrastructure density. However, this makes it all the more important that the design minimises visual and physical impact. If both are not technically necessary, then the cumulative effect of two large, illuminated structures with four advertising screens in such proximity would have an unacceptable impact on the street scene and represents a prioritisation of advertising revenue over the quality of the public realm.

**Maintenance Concerns**
While the application talks of an anti-social behaviour management plan to ensure the upkeep of the hub, CADRA has little confidence that this will be done. The current phone box is in a terrible state and volunteer groups have been removing graffiti from the box for many years. The glass is now so heavily stained it has become opaque. This track record raises serious doubts about whether the proposed hub will be properly maintained, potentially becoming another eyesore and focus for anti-social behaviour.

**Recommendations**
CADRA asks that BT and the Council planners consider **alternative designs or orientation options**. A smaller cabinet design, without the large advertising screen, could provide the necessary technical function while reducing visual and physical impact. Alternatively, rotating the hub by 90 degrees, with no advertising facing the traffic side, would be a significant improvement, giving better sightlines, reducing obstruction and no risk to public safety. While we appreciate that advertising revenue supports the 5G rollout, the quality of the local street environment and public safety should take priority.

**Conclusion**
In summary, CADRA supports the Government's policy to expand 5G infrastructure but **objects** to the current siting and design in this proposal. We urge BT and the Council planners to explore adjustments that would better balance technological progress with the need to maintain a safe, uncluttered, and attractive street scene in Caversham.