

First street hub sign given approval

A large illuminated advertising display that will also transmit free wi-fi has been approved to replace two old phone boxes outside Edinburgh's Commonwealth Pool after a successful planning appeal by BT.

The first 'Street Hub' in the capital got the go-ahead on Wednesday after councillors narrowly voted to overturn a planning decision taken by officials earlier this year.

Although there have been growing calls for the telecoms giant to rid the city's streets of disused and often vandalised payphones, BT's decision to tie applications to remove them with proposals for the new LED screens has been criticised and other applications refused.

Speaking at the council's Local Review Body (LRB), which reconsiders previously rejected plans, Cllr Lezley Marion Cameron took no issue with the designs and said the new installation would "provide information and guidance in an accessible way to our citizens".

But Cllr Neil Gardiner called on the company to "remove them and not hold the city to hostage" – and challenged the 'competency' of his fellow councillors' decision after they struggled to offer reasons for reversing the refusal.

As well as generating income from commercial advertising and boosting mobile signals locally, Street Hubs can be used for

WiFi, calls and device charging, whilst providing access to information on council services. BT says they are 100 per cent powered by renewable energy.

Over recent months planners at the city council have refused permission to install 18 throughout Edinburgh, which were proposed to replace 35 phone boxes.

All have since been appealed to The Scottish Government and are awaiting a decision.

The application which went before councillors this week – for a Street Hub by the steps to the Royal Commonwealth Pool on Dalkeith Road – was the only one also appealed directly to the council.

In a design statement submitted to the council, BT said: “The proposed BT Street Hub unit is an advanced, modern development which has been designed following significant improvements in technology and digital content over recent years.

“It can promote the image of the authority as a vibrant place, and we believe it will improve the quality of the immediate streetscape for residents, businesses and visitors.”

In giving reasons for being against the 75-inch screens popping up on streets across the capital, planning officers said they would be detrimental in terms of visual impact, impact neighbouring properties, adding digital adverts “are not supported on street furniture other than on bus shelters in appropriate locations”.

by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter

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