

To Whom It May Concern,

We are writing to object to the notification of prior approval (reference DC/2022/00295) to erect a 20 metre mast outside Forefield Infants School on Forefield Lane. Our objections are based on the siting and appearance of the proposed mast, and the resulting impact on local residents' amenity were it to be approved. We believe that there are sites in the immediate vicinity which are better suited to the placement of this structure, and which would deliver the same benefit to the community in terms of 5G coverage while minimising the negative effects of the development. We will now outline our objections in turn, in terms of the visual impact of the mast, the failure to justify the use of this site in particular, the accessibility and safety issues which would be caused on Forefield Lane due to narrowing of the pavements, and the concerns of local residents about the location of the mast.

Out of keeping with the surroundings

The proposed mast, standing at twenty plus metres in height, would tower over the existing structures in the area, and be out of keeping with the scale and design of the existing properties and street furniture. The size of the monopole would make it look out of context within the wider street scene. The applicant themselves have noted that this is the case, as the existing lampposts on the road stand at around eight metres. In addition to this, the proposed stark grey appearance of the mast would clash with the properties in the area, as well as impacting the amenity of residents through the visual impact on the street scene. We note that this was a major reason for Sefton MBC's refusal of the recently proposed mast on Green Lane in Thornton, a refusal which was eventually upheld on appeal to the planning inspectorate, which should give confidence in any decision to refuse this mast for similar reasons.

More suitable locations/failure of the applicant to show adequate assessment of alternatives

We do not believe that the applicant has adequately ascertained and excluded potential alternative sites, including the possibility of installing the mast on existing properties, and as such, particularly given the sites location in close proximity to sensitive sites i.e a nursery, primary school and residential properties, the application in its current form should be refused. We note that one alternative given in the site specific supplementary information, outside the shops on the corner of Forefield Lane, was not discounted for any particular reason, but rather that the current site was chosen merely as a matter of preference on the part of the applicant. We propose that if it is truly the case that the site at Forefield Lane shops is the only viable alternative, then this is preferable to siting the mast directly outside of the school, as it would alleviate some of concerns of residents about proximity, along with removing the problem outlined below about safety concerns with narrowing the pavements where large groups of children walk to and from school. However we still believe that this alternative would be less than ideal, and that further work should be required of the applicant to identify additional sites which provide maximum benefit with minimal downsides to the community.

Site unsuitable and would cause accessibility and safety issues on the highway

As we can see on the plans put forward by the applicant, the stretch of pavement for which the new mast is proposed is already narrow, and along with the new protective fencing proposed, there would be an unacceptable impact on the people using the highway in terms of accessibility and safety. This is especially the case when considering the high foot traffic in this area during the beginning and end of the school day, and when taking into account prams or wheelchair users. We note that Forefield School in the site specific supplementary information have raised an objection based on this same point, and we wholly support them in this, and believe that they are far better placed than the applicant to fully appreciate the potential impact of this development on highway safety outside their property. The erection of a mast in this location would push people, including young children, out into the road during busy times and this is a strong argument for relocation to a more suitable position.

Residents concerns about proximity to a school

As can be seen from the significant number of objections already submitted, the choice of location for this mast in close proximity to a nursery and primary school is causing significant concern for many local residents, including parents and grandparents of those who attend. While we accept the point made by the applicants that the science shows no significant health concerns from masts of the nature proposed, and that they are compliant with international guidelines, the fact remains that there is case law suggesting that concerns for health, particularly relating to sensitive locations such as schools and even if not supported by scientific evidence, are material planning considerations for a submission for prior approval. (Jodie Phillips V First Secretary of State, case reference CO/229/200, paragraph 41, attached with this objection.) As such, the assertion of the applicant in the site specific supplementary information that public perception of health concerns is not a material planning consideration is incorrect. With this being the case, and taken in conjunction with the fact that the applicant has not adequately explored alternative locations for the masts placement as noted above, the application in its current form should be refused. Please see the attached quote from the above cited case law which could support any refusal by Sefton MBC of the current application, even if it is only in favour of the site which is slightly further removed from the school, as this would allay some of the concern brought about by this application. Should another viable site at a still further distance from sensitive locations be identified, then this should of course become the preferred option.

In light of the above points we would ask that Sefton MBC refuse the application in its current form, and have the applicants come back to the table at a later date with a more suitable location, with a better balance between the impact on the local community and the need for telecommunications infrastructure.

Regards
Thornton Parish Council.