

Jason Humphreys
Pastor, Chiltern Church
83 Chiltern Rd, Sutton SM2 5QY
Monday, 4 September 2023

Ms. Polly Davidson
Planning Officer
Development Management Planning Department
Civic Offices, St Nicholas Way
Sutton SM1 1EA

Case Ref: DM2023/01319

Dear Ms. Davidson,

Objection to Proposed Erection of 5G Aerial Mast near entrance of Chiltern Church

I am writing to formally express our strong objection to the proposed plan to erect a 15m high monopole aerial mast, with accompanying cabinets, near the entrance of Chiltern Church, as outlined in Case Ref: DM2023/01319. This objection is on behalf of Chiltern Church and its community, which are deeply concerned about the potential implications of this development for the church and the many groups of people that use the church building all through the week. The church is not only used for worship services on a Sunday but is a focal point for local community activities (parent and toddler groups that meet 3 times a week, weekly meetings of a seniors' group, a community choir originally connected with the Royal Marsden Hospital, children and youth groups, as well as other community activities such as Pilates) and serves as a venue for events such as weddings and other special occasions. In a normal week, over 350 adults and children from the church and local community use the building.

We consider the application is fundamentally flawed as the aerial mast and associated cabinets would have a hugely adverse impact on the visual quality and character of the immediate locality, may also undermine significantly the community activities of the church and may create adverse impacts on highway safety and pedestrians.

Please see below the reasons for our objections in more detail.

1) Visual Harm and Intrusiveness:

Chiltern Church is not just a place of worship; it is an integral part of our local community's heritage and activities. It holds architectural interest and as a 'locally listed building', along with other buildings nearby, is considered a fine example of particular construction techniques, materials and design.

The proposed aerial mast, with its large, unsightly cabinets, would dominate views of the church and the surrounding locality. It is visually harmful and intrusive in an area designated by the London Borough of Sutton (LBS) as an 'Area of Special Local Character' and would jeopardise the architectural and community value of the church, contravening LBS's expectation to conserve and enhance elements of the Area of Special Local Character's particular character or appearance as expressed in its Local Plan.

Furthermore, we would like to draw attention to the National Planning Policy Framework, which stipulates that where new mobile infrastructure sites are required, the equipment should be sympathetically designed and camouflaged where appropriate. It is evident that the current application is not at all sympathetic to the local environment, and we firmly believe that no amount of camouflage would significantly reduce its adverse impact on the local area.

We note that the elevation drawing in the proposal is inaccurate and understates the visual impact as it omits the locally listed building adjacent to the church. In addition, the direction of the elevation indicated in the plan should show the mast directly in front of the church rather than in front of adjoining areas.

2) Proximity to residential properties

The mast and cabinets are not only close to Chiltern Church but also unacceptably close to the residential properties of 75, 77 & 90 the Gallop and 81 Chiltern Road. All of these properties are also locally listed in the LBS Local Plan.

3) Impact on highway safety

The junction of Chiltern Road and The Gallop is busy at peak times. The mast and cabinets will provide a particular visual obstruction for vehicles seeking to turn right out of the church site as it will impede the sighting of cars turning left out of Chiltern Road. The mast and cabinets will also visually obstruct sight lines for cars seeking to turn out of The Gallop onto Chiltern Road.

4) Impact on pedestrian safety

The mast and cabinets will congest the pavement outside the church. This pavement can become busy after school departure times (eg groups of schoolchildren from the Harris academy walking past) and the congested pavement may result in pedestrians walking on the road. The congestion may also affect seniors using mobility scooters attending our seniors' group. We note that the representation of the pavement in the proposal plan is misleading. The submitted plan shows the pavement to be nearly a meter wider than it actually is at its widest point.

5) Impact of health perceptions

We note the submission paper from Mobile UK endorsing the safety of 5G technology. However, concerns regarding the safety of radiation from mobile phone masts remain within the population at large and this is likely to undermine community activities within the church. We note, in particular, that over 100 children under the age of 4 attend our parent and toddler groups each week in term time. Parents may adopt a precautionary approach and not attend our groups if the proposal went ahead.

6) Inadequate consideration of alternative sites

Section 6 of the submission (Site Selection Process) outlines 4 alternative sites rejected for the current purpose and the factors taken into account. The site outside Chiltern Church shares the factors cited for the rejected sites (eg close proximity to residential housing, visibility concerns from nearby junctions) and in addition it has the major factors of being part of a locality that is both locally listed and part of an Area of Special Local Character. We note that the Chiltern Church site is quite distant from the yellow outlined search area shown on figure 4 of the submission which would seem to imply that, in fact, a relatively wide area is available for alternative locations.

As a point of reference, it is worth noting that some years ago, there was a similar planning application to erect an aerial mast near our church. This application was met with objections from the community and ultimately failed to gain planning permission.

In light of all the above, we urge the Planning and Building Control authorities and Planning Committee to carefully consider our objections. Chiltern Church has been a source of solace, celebration, and community spirit for more than 80 years in the community, and we believe it is essential to protect and preserve the cultural, architectural, and community significance of this neighbourhood.

Yours faithfully,

Jason Humphreys

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