

Portobello mast plans grounded as 66ft tower rejected as intrusive

Residents and businesses in Portobello celebrated an early Christ Mast present after planning officials rejected proposals for a controversial 66ft telecoms mast.

Operators Hutchison Networks wanted to place the 5G mast and four large equipment cabinets just metres away from a residential building at 275 Portobello High Street but almost 90 objections were lodged with the city council.

Residents were backed by local politicians, Portobello Amenity Society and Action Party, with the plans branded an eyesore which would blight the historic nature of the town's conservation area.

Now city planners have agreed, refusing permission for the mast and ruling that the proposal would have had an adverse and unacceptable impact on the character and appearance of the Portobello Conservation Area.

The ruling also said the proposal would have an adverse impact on the built heritage of the city and the immediate outlook of neighbouring residents and did not comply with several policies outlined in the Edinburgh Local Development Plan, the Council's non statutory guidance for communications infrastructure, or the relevant Scottish Planning Policy, as it does not protect the historic environment.

If the application had been successful, the mast would have stood 23ft higher than the former government offices at 275 Portobello High Street – converted five years ago to residential flats – and just 6.3 metres from the balconies and windows of homes.

Louise Birnie, spokesperson for the resident's association, said: "This is the Christmas present we were hoping and waiting for. The decision to refuse permission is a huge relief for residents living near to what potentially would have been an almighty eyesore and detrimental to the fabric of the High Street.



Happy New Year for residents at 275 Portobello High Street, Morag Pendreich (left) and Louise Birnie, with mast plans rejected – Pic by Stephen Rafferty

"We are delighted that planning officials have given this matter some serious thought, taken on board the genuine concerns of a large number of residents and businesses, and

come to the right conclusion that a 66ft mast was not a right fit at this location.”

Local Councillor Kate Campbell, who objected to the proposals, said: “Credit goes to the community who came together to make sure their voices were heard, but I was glad to be able to support residents.

“The reasons for the refusal are actually really obvious, and I’m glad the planners agreed that it was unacceptable because of the impact on residents and the impact on the conservation area. You can’t just plonk a huge mast right in front of people’s windows.



Councillor Kate Campbell – more thought needed on future applications

“We all accept that we need these masts so we can be digitally connected, but I hope the message has been received loud and clear that a lot more thought needs to go into where they are positioned for any future applications.”

Portobello MP Tommy Sheppard, added: "I am delighted that Edinburgh City Council have refused this application. As I said in my representations to the council, this mast would have been visually intrusive, adversely impacting residents and the built environment.

"It is reassuring that planners have listened to local people who submitted a significant number of objections, opposing this monstrous eyesore. This is a real win for community action."

John Stewart, spokesman for Portobello Amenity Society, said the decision was welcome as the plans would have caused a serious loss of amenity to the residents of these flats.

He said: "The mast would also have been a huge visual intrusion in this part of the Portobello Conservation Area and would have had a detrimental effect on the character and appearance of the conservation area. All of the properties on the north side of this part of the High Street are listed buildings and their setting would have been adversely affected had this application been granted.

"The society leafleted residents in this part of Portobello to raise awareness of the application and this, combined with the efforts of the residents of the flats at 275 Portobello High Street, resulted in 88 objections being lodged against this application, showing the strong determination of Portobello residents to protect the conservation area."