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Epsom High St in need of more love?

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Driving safely, parking appropriately. Romy Sustar reports:

This is the second article in my series following on from “Epsom town as a safe place to Live”. It seemed to me that for the second article it was worth looking at a specific business issue around anti-social behaviour in Epsom High St, that is currently being discussed widely. And one that currently projects an image of decline and lawlessness in our High St.

My all-time favourite McDonald’s meal has always been—and still is—the Filet-O-Fish Combo. I’m “lovin’ it” and really want to hold onto this positive feeling. However, like so many others, McDonald’s seems to have forgotten its leadership role.

Last Friday night, on my way to the cinema, I walked by McDonald’s and counted 23 drivers parked on the pavement, completely blocking the pavement between Creams and McDonald’s, extending along the High Street towards the crossing. Pedestrians had no choice but to either walk on the busy street or navigate through the maze of motorcycles. It made me feel very unsafe and angry, but I don’t blame the drivers.

Drivers for UberEats, Just Eat, and Deliveroo frequently express their frustrations on platforms like Glassdoor and Indeed, highlighting their shared challenges with residents impacted by these services. While UberEats drivers appreciate the quick onboarding process, this excitement soon fades as many struggle to earn even £10 during entire shifts, facing inadequate customer support that leaves them feeling isolated and undervalued. Deliveroo riders share similar grievances, describing their experiences as akin to “slave labour,” contending with low pay and fierce competition for orders. Issues with app reliability and poor management responsiveness only deepen their dissatisfaction. Just Eat feedback on Glassdoor clearly states that management doesn’t really understand the performance of the business. I wonder how many of the drivers are aware that the minimum hourly rate for 2024/25 in the UK is £11.44 for age group 21 and over.

Let’s consider McDonald’s in Epsom High St, it’s been a pillar of the community for more than two decades, in that time most of us have come to understand the fantastic benefits brought by Ronald McDonald House allowing parents to stay with their sick children. We have seen the support for thousands of UK and Irish farmers in very difficult times, and for the organic farmers as their industry developed. We have noticed the healthy options appearing in the menu, the sugar content reducing, and have been reassured as recycled cardboard content has increased. All of this happening, whilst most of us simply continued to enjoy the product as one of the love brands in our local economy.

Are they truly so insensitive that they fail to recognise the damage they’re inflicting? Or is it that they simply don’t care about the residents and migrants at all, revealing their brand identity to be a facade? When I mention “residents,” I mean everyone—from young children and mothers with baby pushers to the elderly and those with disabilities, the blind and those in wheelchairs.

We reached out to McDonald’s and a spokesperson: “At McDonald’s we strive to be a good neighbour in the communities we serve, and the management team at our Epsom restaurant are continuously working with local stakeholders to help find a solution to the on-going parking issues which are affecting a number of businesses in the town. The safety and wellbeing of our people, customers and local residents remains our top priority and as such we have asked our delivery partners to ensure that all couriers continue to drive safely and park appropriately.”

When the views of the local manager were sought McDonald’s asked for nothing to be added to its spokespeson’s response.

The phrase “Continue to drive safely and park appropriately” seems more like a message to maintain a facade than a reflection of daily reality in Epsom. This raises my curiosity about which local stakeholders McDonald’s claims to be “continuously working with.” It suggests a disconnect between their messaging and the actual experiences of the community.

So I contacted Russell Bailey from Swail House, a local Blind charity severely affected by the issues: “I am in touch with the Surrey Council parking enforcement team and councillors and our MP Helen Maguire regularly about the issue, but there does not seem to be any progress. It seems to be that it will take an accident before any real action is going to be taken”.

Then I contacted the Ebbisham Centre owners of the land just behind McDonalds who said: “We are as frustrated as residents and customers of Epsom Square about the prevalence of mopeds parked on our premises and at the entrance to our squares, on council pavements. The mopeds themselves are unsightly and a hazard. The congregation of moped

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drivers, usually with full face helmets still worn, creates an intimidating and threatening atmosphere in the town and at the entrance to our squares. This is not good for the economy or for the wellbeing of residents, and seems to serve only the benefit of one or two national-multiple fast food outlets on the High Street".

The Council are now vocal on the issue and are reacting to pressure from the community. **Steve McCormick** (an RA Surrey County and Borough Councillor) passed a unanimous motion at the County to deal with the problem. So who is McDonald's actually talking to and how could it possibly be, that McDonalds, our love brand, is still entirely oblivious to the oncoming storm if it is "continuously working with local stakeholders to help find a solution"?

Town Ward RA Councillor **Neil Dallen** is aware of the problem but a Council led solution is proving elusive.

Epsom and Ewell Times sent a simple survey to all Epsom and Ewell Councillors. These are the few responses received to the questions how many times in the last year have you used these services and what is your solution?

Date	**Name**	**Party and Ward**	**Orders last year**	**Do you have a solution to the problem of many delivery riders on two-wheels obstructing roads and pathways in Epsom? If so, please describe the solution briefly**
12/10	Steve Bridger	RA Stamford (Mayor)	0	Dedicated area for them to park – NOT obstructing the pavement at one of the busiest areas with a bus stop! Also to check the insurance, licences and validity of the electric scooters of the drivers
12/10	Julie Morris	LibDem College	12	Create dedicated parking areas for delivery bikes. For example, Epsom Square, taxi bay in Upper High St, convert small sections of pavement where it's wide enough and use that for delivery.bike parking, etc. eventually deliveries will come via drones and it won't be so bad. After segregated parking has been put in place, enforce illegal parking from delivery bikes
12/10	James Lawrence	LibDem College	1	There need to be dedicated parking bays for them, similar to the bays outside Dreams (near the Odeon). Enforcement then needs to be used to ensure these bays are used. This will allow them to continue their very useful activities of providing delivery services to businesses and residents, without blocking the pavement or being an obstruction for pedestrians.
12/10	Robert Geleit	Labour Court	15	Find them a place to go. Make sure that they don't have to work 12 hours a day 7 days a week.
13/10	Phil Neale	RA Cuddington	0	Have a system where the riders can be reported to the company that employs them then operate a three strikes and out policy.
16/10	Alison Kelly	LibDem Stamford	0	There needs to be a designated parking zone for the delivery drivers. It is clear that many people want home delivery. The solution is not asking the police to continually move them on.
18/10	Chris Ames	Labour Court	12	Police enforcement, including stopping riders with illegally powered bikes

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And finally we contacted the closest local residential management company whose residents are most affected by the issues on a daily basis.

"Nobody from McDonald's has ever contacted us. Our residents are almost 100% in favour of a thriving High St. We live in Town ward because we like the hustle and bustle, the bars, the businesses, and yes even a cheeky Mac and chips, along with the immediate access to all the wonderful things on offer in Epsom.

It should however never be forgotten that this is our manor, it does not belong to corporations and they do not have any right to ruin our environment, subject our families to unacceptable risk or to impede our disabled, simply because it is convenient and profitable to do so. McDonald's should be reminded that you can only kick a dog so many times and that once kicked the dog is unlikely to care, if someone else is kicking it as well."

In conclusion, my investigation indicates that McDonald's has not engaged with the local stakeholders most affected by its new business model. Merely claiming that other businesses are doing the same raises ethical concerns, and the message that "all couriers continue to drive safely and park appropriately" seems both absurd and disingenuous. This suggests that McDonald's has indeed lost touch with its core values. As a result, local stakeholders may soon be expressing their discontent by singing, "Ba Da Ba Ba Bah, Not Lovin' It."

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