



Global fast-food giant targets Surrey village

A global fast food giant could be coming to a Surrey village as a new McDonald's restaurant and takeaway might get the go ahead. Despite being famed for its 'Happy Meal', some residents fear the American icon will be 'detrimental to the health of Cobham'.

The popular burger and nugget chain is hoping to find a new home in the former Loch Fyne Restaurant on Portsmouth Road, Cobham. The fate of the application will be decided by Elmbridge Borough Council members at a planning meeting on April 24.

Planning officers have recommended McDonald's gets the green light to transform the disused fish restaurant. Residents have rallied against the scheme, with nearly 500 letters of objection sent to the council.

The village of Cobham was named as one of the most affluent communities in the county but the Northfield Estate, where the restaurant is proposed, is among Surrey's poorest socio-economic areas.

Significant concern has been raised about the proposed distance (or lack of) to local schools and playgrounds nearby. Opponents have claimed the new branch will "encourage children to form unhealthy habits", "exploit young people" who will eat at McDonald's and add to the country's obesity crisis.

People have said the new outlet will be "detrimental to the health of Cobham" and the impact "cannot be underestimated". Lots of residents pointed out there is already an outlet at the M25 services, so they do not need another one closer to the village.

Wyndham Avenue park and Hamilton Ave play area, both managed by PA Housing, are just a four-minute walk away (321m) from the potential McDonald's site. Felton Fleet Prep School, Cobham Free School and Cobham recreation ground are only a seven minute walk (482m) away from the fast food chain.

But planning officers said the nearest schools are not within a 400m radius walking distance to the site. The intervening A3 would be a "man-made barrier" to the fast food chain, officers reported, and the proposed restaurant is not on the main school route to Cobham Free School so children would be walking the opposite way.

Although the neighbouring petrol station has a Greggs, the proposed restaurant will not create a 'cluster' of takeaways. The nearest other takeaways are in Cobham's centre some 700m away, according to the report.

Despite recognising local public health concern, officers found there is no evidence the multi-million fast food chain will have a detrimental impact on health in the neighbouring areas. National planning guidance says local authorities should refuse plans for takeaways near schools and where young people hang out. Surrey County Council's public health team did not object to the new McDonald's in principle.

Cobham residents launched a petition in May 2024 against the plans to open a new restaurant and takeaway. The petition, which has garnered over 34,000 signatures, calls for the site to be turned into a community hub instead. Concerns raised include increased traffic, litter, and potential impacts on the area's health and well-being.

Despite the concerns, many people flagged the multi-million dollar company would bring huge financial benefits to the village, increasing visitors and supporting local business. Others said the new 'Happy Meal' site could provide up to £60k a year in business rates for the council.

Supporters of the proposed McDonald's slammed the listed building as an "eyesore" and in need of "restoration". The new fast food outlet would employ around 120 people, which the company hopes to recruit from the local area, as well as offering training and career development.

People said comments about the quality and 'wholesomeness' of the food is "irrelevant" as no one has to eat there. Those looking forward to the new branch said it would be a good place for young people to meet and socialise as well as providing more takeaway options.

According to the chain, the new restaurant would include both indoor and outdoor seating with space for 60 diners, 30 cars parking bays, two of which would be accessible and three with EV charging spaces. The American fast food branch is hoping to be open every day from 6am to 11pm.

McDonald's has been approached for further comment.



Twisting out a little more for Xmas?

Surrey children on free school meals will receive food vouchers over Christmas in what one councillor described as “an absolute lifeline” for some families.

The scheme, which will give families a £30 voucher per child, was confirmed by the council’s cabinet member for education and learning on Tuesday (November 29).

Councillor Clare Curran (Conservative, Bookham and Fetcham West) said the vouchers would be issued to children who were eligible for free school meals to be used over the holiday, and that the “wheels were already in motion” on the scheme.

She said: “I know they are an absolute lifeline for very many families.”

The vouchers can be spent in certain supermarkets, and with some conditions in place on what they can be spent on – covering food and other essential items only.

England footballer Marcus Rashford piled pressure on the government during the coronavirus pandemic, forcing a u-turn on the policy not to provide help for struggling families during the school holiday.

The authority’s cabinet meeting also heard about measures being taken to help residents with the cost of living crisis, including a directory sent out to residents to signpost support organisations and funding available.

Meeting documents said: “Whilst the majority of Surrey residents are not in crisis situations at the moment, many are beginning to make cutbacks.

“It is also important to note that there are some residents in crisis already before the full effects of inflation and the winter months are felt.”

Council statistics showed that more than 500 new clients had registered with Surrey Citizens Advice between April and June with more than 1,600 issues being raised particularly around benefits, debt, housing and foodbanks.

Particular groups in the county accounted for the increased demand, with 66 per cent of claimants identifying as having a disability or long-term health condition, and two-thirds of clients identifying as female.

Figures also showed a 300 per cent increase in demand at some foodbanks across Surrey.

Council leader Tim Oliver (Conservative, Weybridge) said the authority would continue to lobby government over energy prices and support for households after April, when the energy price guarantee ends.

Cllr Oliver said: “I hope that residents see what this council is doing, and see that we are genuinely trying to do whatever we can, in whatever way we can, to help support them through what I know will be a difficult period for many people.”

ENDS

Thought for Food in Surrey

The first Surrey Food Summit took place at the WWF Living Planet Centre in Woking last week. Surrey County Council organised the event to bring together stakeholders across the local food system, including farmers, local food businesses, food caterers and local food initiatives in Surrey to begin sharing different perspectives on challenges, including related health inequalities, in our food system and explore ideas for addressing them together.

The council is in the process of developing a food partnership and whole food system strategy to ensure it can provide nutritious, affordable, local and sustainably produced food for residents. The food summit is an opportunity to better understand the local food system, and to co-produce the whole-system food strategy. Recognising the current economic climate, the strategy aims to have an initial focus on addressing food poverty and sustainability challenges.

Those in attendance heard from a number of speakers during the event, including Emily O’Brien of Sustainable Food Places, Cllr Marisa Heath, SCC lead member for environment and CEO of Plant Food Alliance, and David Edwards, Director of Food Strategy at WWF. There was also an opportunity to engage in a food system mapping activity, to draw together our priority areas of action and build on existing work.

Carolyn McKenzie, Director of Environment and Project Sponsor for the food strategy said: “The food summit was an important event to bring together our key stakeholders and build a vision for a sustainable food system in Surrey.”

For further information please visit the Surrey Food Partnership – Healthy Surrey webpage or contact the food strategy leads at Surrey County Council – Jane Semo (Jane.Semo@surreycc.go.uk) or Negin Sarafraz-Shekary (SarafrazShekary.Negin@surreycc.gov.uk).

Surrey County Council news



Epsom curry pioneer Enam Ali MBE dies at 61

The Epsom restaurateur, who founded the internationally renowned British Curry Awards, has passed away at the age of 61. Revered in the Bangladeshi community, Ali famously lobbied home secretary Priti Patel to introduce 'vindaloo visas' to save the great British curry house. Pre-Covid, the restaurants were closing at an alarming rate of two a week across the country, largely because of a lack of skilled chefs. The change to immigration rules was designed to plug the skills gap in this and other takeaway eateries.



Le Raj restaurant Firtree Road Epsom

Ali started the British Curry Awards in 2005 and they soon became known as the 'Oscars' of the industry. The awards have been addressed by the three most recent prime ministers – David Cameron, Theresa May and Boris Johnson – as well as a host of other leading political figures, such as Sir Vince Cable, Nigel Farage and Brandon Lewis.





Celebrities including the Duchess of York, Russell Brand, Naughty Boy, David Seaman, Pat Sharp, Lizzie Cundy and Heston Blumenthal have presented awards. Queen Elizabeth II contributed forewords to the award programmes, as have the likes of London mayor Sadiq Khan.

Ali owned **Le Raj restaurant in Epsom**, which has served a plethora of famous names, including Johnny Depp and Chris Tarrant. In 2012, Le Raj was one of the official food suppliers to the London Olympics, providing athletes with Bangladeshi halal curry.

His daughter Justine and son Jeffrey Ali said:

"Our father created an astonishing legacy as a pioneer of the UK curry industry. He believed that British curry had become the best in the world, developing from a late night meal to some of the most sophisticated and subtly spiced cuisine the country had to offer. That is why he was so determined to celebrate the industry with the British Curry Awards and through his other ventures, including the Spice Business Magazine and Ion TV.

"We already miss him dearly and have been overwhelmed by the messages of condolence we have received. Our father was greatly loved and admired by his fellow restaurateurs, Bangladeshi campaigners and even the most significant of politicians. We are devastated, but could not be prouder of our wonderful dad."

Azeem Rafiq, the former professional cricketer who exposed the extent of racism in the sport to MPs last year, was a guest of honour at the 2021 awards. He said:

"Enam provided me with such wonderful support during difficult times last year, He was a charming man, who made you smile with his warmth and kindness. I feel so sorry for his family, but they must remember all he achieved. Enam left a lasting, incredibly positive mark on the world."

Ali passed away in the early hours of Sunday 17 July, after a courageous two-year battle with cancer. He is survived by his wife Shakina; children Justine, Jeffrey and Jahid; and grandchildren Sophia and Ziyana.

Ali's burial takes place in the Islamic section of Epsom Cemetery at 4pm on Friday 22 July. Non-observers are welcome to attend.

EMAN ALI 1960 - 2022

