

Global fast-food giant targets Surrey village

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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 railed 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.