

Date: 20 March 2025

Subject: Objection to Planning Application APP/24/00698 – Proposed Café/Kiosk at Eastoke Corner

Dear Sir/Madam,

We write in relation to Planning Application APP/24/00698, which seeks approval for the establishment of a café/kiosk at Eastoke Corner. After careful consideration, we wish to formally object to the proposed development, but we respectfully request that should the application be granted, the following conditions be attached. These conditions are made in reference to the Council's Corporate Strategy (2024-2028), specifically the aim to "increase the survival rate of businesses" (p.13), and to ensure the proposal does not unduly harm the vitality of the local economy or public access.

1. Impact on Local Businesses:

The proposed location of the café/kiosk is directly in the path of pedestrians leaving the small train station, adjacent to a children's play park, and in close proximity to the disabled parking bay. This positioning would likely divert custom away from other local businesses, not just cafes or coffee shops, but potentially all surrounding retail establishments. We are concerned that, as seen in other areas such as WaterlooVille, this could lead to business closures and vacant retail units. This runs contrary to the Council's stated aspiration for the "maintenance and longevity of business" (p.7), and the promotion of a healthy, competitive business environment. We urge the Council to consider this impact on local businesses, which directly aligns with the objectives of your Corporate Strategy to "support business growth and resilience" (p.15). However, if the committee are minded to grant permission for this kiosk then you must encourage the new owner to provide a different offer to the existing ones in surrounding units or else be in contravention of your own strategy.

2. Detrimental Impact on Access and Community Facilities:

It is our belief that the proposed café/kiosk could adversely affect pedestrian flow and deter visitors from accessing the broader Eastoke Corner area. The location, which also borders an area used for the community asset Playing on the Plaza, could undermine its function as a public space and create congestion. The Council's Estates Department has previously advised that a clear pathway must be maintained around the toilet block area, specifically on the southern side, which forms part of the licensed space for Playing on the Plaza. The introduction of café tables and chairs, coupled with a service hatch on the this side of the building, would directly conflict with this requirement. We ask that the council guarantee regular inspections to ensure accessibility and the retention of our valued community asset for its original purpose.

3. Concerns Regarding Disabled Access:

The proposed location of the café/kiosk, particularly its proximity to the disabled parking bay, raises significant concerns regarding accessibility. The area is already constrained by the presence of a clothes collection bin and an electricity substation. The introduction of additional structures, including a wooden structure to house a rubbish bin, would further obstruct the path, making it difficult for disabled individuals to access the toilets or navigate the area with mobility aids. Given that the location is critical for ease of access to public facilities, we respectfully request that any outdoor seating be either limited or prohibited to ensure continued accessibility for all.

4. Hours of Operation:

The application requests permission for the café/kiosk to operate until 10:00 PM. This raises concerns about the potential for late-night noise and disturbance, particularly from groups of customers congregating around the premises. To mitigate this, we propose that the operating hours be restricted to 5:00 PM, ensuring that the site does not become a source of late-night disruption to neighbouring businesses and residents.

5. Suitability of Use Class:

The application seeks approval under Use Class E, which is typically associated with hot food takeaways where consumption primarily occurs off the premises. Given that the proposal includes a seating area that is “mainly inside”, we believe that a more appropriate Use Class would be Class sui generis, which would allow for the specific nature of the café/kiosk operation.

6. Licence for Tables and Chairs:

It is noted that no request for a licence to place tables and chairs on Council property appears to have been submitted, despite the Design and Access Statement suggesting a pathway around the building. This is particularly concerning as it has been communicated to Playing on the Plaza that the area surrounding the southern side of the toilet block must remain clear and cannot be used by any licensee. We urge the Council to clarify whether any such licence has been requested, as its absence could undermine the proposal’s compliance with relevant regulations. We ask the council to ensure an open and transparent application process for community use of the plaza to ensure that it will not be subsumed into the contract for the kiosk.

7. Request for Rolling Annual Contract:

To ensure that local businesses can adequately assess the impact of the proposed café/kiosk on their operations and the overall economic vitality of Eastoke Corner, we respectfully request that any approval be subject to a rolling annual contract. This would provide a review mechanism to ensure that the café/kiosk’s impact on surrounding businesses and public access is monitored and addressed on an ongoing basis. Again, this fits with HBC’s own strategy, as cited above.

8. Request to limit dust and noise from builders machinery

The traders are concerned that if the application is approved and work commences this could produce a large amount of dust on to the Plaza and in fact around the building and also noise from builders’ machinery. We respectfully request that no work takes place at weekends (including Bank Holidays) or in July and August.

9. Conclusion:

We feel that the conditions we have underlined are necessary, relevant to planning, and directly related to the development under consideration. They are enforceable, precise, and reasonable in all respects, aligning with the objectives of the Council’s Corporate Strategy and ensuring that any development supports the “economic opportunities for all” (p.15) while safeguarding public access and the long-term viability of local businesses.

We respectfully request that these conditions be given due consideration and attached to any approval granted for this application.

Yours faithfully,

